
Alma 5 — Have Ye Received His Image in Your Countenances — Alma's Master Examination at Zarahemla, the Mighty Change of Heart, and the Song of Redeeming Love

Alma 5: in the ninth year of the reign of the judges (c. 82 BC), Alma the Younger preaches at Zarahemla in his new office as high priest, having given up the judgment-seat. He delivers the longest single sermon in the Book of Mormon. He asks the Church more than forty pointed questions about their inner spiritual state. He recalls how their fathers were delivered from the bands of death and chains of hell under his father Alma's preaching. He establishes the doctrine of the mighty change of heart and the image of God in the countenance. He closes with the call to come out from the wicked and to be received into the fold of the Good Shepherd.

Alma 5 is the Book of Mormon's master examination chapter, and the longest single sermon in the record. Alma asks the Church more than forty pointed questions about their inner spiritual state — questions that themselves function as the sermon and the call to repentance. The chapter is one of the clearest pre-Pauline articulations of the *examine yourselves* discipline (2 Cor. 13:5), but in a fuller and more systematic form than Paul's single line. Read carefully, it is the master text of the Latter-day Saint spiritual life.

Hebrew Word Studies

tselem / shuv / shir (תְּסֵלֶם / שׁוּב / שִׁיר) — **image, likeness / return, repent / song vv. 14, 19, 26.** The chapter operates on three Hebrew anchors. *Tselem* — *image* — is the noun of Gen. 1:26–27 (*in our image, b'tselemenu*) and Gen. 9:6 (*in the image of God made he man*). The image of God is the constituting doctrine of biblical anthropology: every human being bears it. Alma's question — *have ye received his image in your countenances?* — invokes the *tselem* and asks whether the original image, lost at the Fall and restored by the Atonement, is now visibly imprinted on the face. *Shuv* — *return, repent* — is the verb behind every prophetic call to repentance (Hos. 14:1 — *O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God*). The chapter is the Book of Mormon's fullest deployment of the *shuv* discipline. *Shir* — *song* — is the noun behind every Hebrew song of deliverance (Ex. 15, the song of Moses; Ps. 40:3 — *he hath put a new song in my mouth*). The chapter's *song of redeeming love* belongs to that tradition of the *shir chadash*, the new song. Image, return, and song form Alma's triad: the divine image restored by repentance, celebrated in song.

From the Chapter's Architecture

Finally, the chapter is the template for the missionary journey that occupies Alma 5–16. Alma will repeat at Gideon (Alma 7), Melek (Alma 8), Ammonihah (Alma 8–14), and Sidom (Alma 15) the same four-part pattern he establishes here: pure testimony, examination questions, call to repentance, and invitation to baptism. Zarahemla is the first stop because Zarahemla needs it first. Everything that follows takes its shape from this opening sermon.