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Alma 12:7-8, Zeezrom's Response

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Source: *Who Shall Ascend into the Hill of the Lord?: The Psalms in Israel's Temple Worship in the Old Testament and in the Book of Mormon*

Published: Salt Lake City: Eborn Books, 2011

Page(s): 546-555

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When there are none willing to serve his purposes, Satan can accomplish nothing and, therefore, “Satan shall be bound, that he shall have no place in the hearts of the children of men (D&C 45:55).⁷⁹³

What Alma will tell us, in this and the following chapter, is that we cannot avoid an eternal embrace, but we can choose whom we will embrace and whose power we will assimilate into ourselves when we do.

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7 Now when Alma had spoken these words, Zeezrom began to tremble more exceedingly, for he was convinced more and more of the power of God; and he was also convinced that Alma and Amulek had a knowledge of him, for he was convinced that they knew the thoughts and intents of his heart; for power was given unto them that they might know of these things according to the spirit of prophecy.

8 And Zeezrom began to inquire of them diligently, that he might know more concerning the kingdom of God. And he said unto Alma: What does this mean which Amulek hath spoken concerning the resurrection of the dead, that all shall rise from the dead, both the just and the unjust, and are brought to stand before God to be judged according to their works? (Alma 12:7-8).

Ordinary people cannot know what another person is thinking. However, the Spirit can make a righteous person privy to another person's thoughts. Since Mormon was not present, it is very unlikely that he knew such intimate details of the story unless he had access to a fuller account of Zeezrom's testimony than he has given us. It is also possible that Mormon is reminding us of the message in an important psalm that was sung during the Feast of Tabernacles temple drama:

⁷⁹³ See Revelation 20:2; D&C 43:30-3,1 84:100, 88:110.

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11 The Lord knoweth the thoughts of man, that they are vanity.⁷⁹⁴
12 Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O Lord,
and teachest him out of thy law (Psalm 94:11-12).

That is a two-edged statement, for it not only tells us what God knows, it also tells us what God does with what he knows. As in the case of Zeezrom, God teaches, initiates experiences, and helps one to understand. He does this in accordance with covenants we and He made together before the foundation of the world.

Whenever our premortal covenants are mentioned in the scriptures, there is also the promise that the Lord will ensure that we have sufficient ability and opportunity to fulfill our part of those covenants. That promise is always given to the prophets during their *sode* experiences. For example, in the case of Jeremiah, the Lord said:

5 Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations.
6 Then said I, Ah, Lord God! behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child.
7 But the Lord said unto me, Say not, I am a child: for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak.
8 Be not afraid of their faces: for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the Lord.
9 Then the Lord put forth his hand, and touched my mouth. And the Lord said unto me, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth.
10 See I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant (Jeremiah 1:5-10).

Not only do the prophets have this promise of unfettered opportunity for success, but each of us has a similar promise. We call it the covenant of invulnerability. Isaiah wrote of

⁷⁹⁴ Paul's paraphrase of this psalm might almost be read as a commentary on Zeezrom's thinking.

18 Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise.

19 For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness.

20 And again, The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain (1 Corinthians 3:18-21).

Job also understood that principle. At the conclusion of a magnificent conversation, he said to the Lord, "I know that thou canst do every thing, and that no thought can be withholden from thee" (Job 42:2).

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that promise when he addressed, in prophecy, those of us who were to come in the last days to assist in the gathering of Israel. Speaking in the first person, representing those who were assigned to participate in the gathering of Israel, he wrote:

1b The Lord hath called me from the womb; from the bowels of my mother hath he made mention of my name [name = covenant name].

2 And he hath made my mouth like a sharp sword [the word of God is priesthood power⁷⁹⁵]; in the shadow of his hand hath he hid me [ordination], and made me a polished shaft [An arrow may be polished (anointed) with olive oil to keep it from warping]; in his quiver hath he hid me;

3 And said unto me [the assignment]: Thou art my servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified. ...

5 And now, saith the Lord—that formed me from the womb that I should be his servant, to bring Jacob again to him—though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the Lord, and my God shall be my strength.

6 And he said: It is a light thing that thou shouldst be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel. I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the ends of the earth (1 Nephi 21:1b-6).

One of the phrases that is most relevant to our purpose here is “in his quiver hath he hid me.” The prophets are not hidden. They make their pronouncements for all to hear. It is the ordinary people who go about the business of living and keeping their covenants who are hidden from the world. Isaiah may well have been referring to a similar promise in the 31st Psalm:

19 Oh how great is thy goodness, which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee;
which thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee before the sons of men!

20 Thou shalt hide them in the secret of thy presence from the pride of man:
thou shalt keep them secretly in a pavilion from the strife of tongues
(Psalm 31:19-20).

⁷⁹⁵ In Paul's description of the whole armor of God, we find “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Ephesians 6:17).

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Another Old Testament example is the blessing given to the king and queen in Psalms 45 and 82, as shown above.

It is the covenant of invulnerability.

The Apostle Paul devoted the first chapter of Ephesians to a review that covenant in terms of the covenants we made with our Father in Heaven while in the Council in Heaven. He brings the chapter to a crescendo where he focus all of those premortal experiences on the assurance that God has sufficient power to enable us to keep our covenants. Paul wrote:

1 Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus:

Paul begins by calling our attention to his own foreordination, when he was chosen by God to be an apostle of Jesus Christ. “Christ” means the Anointed One. “Jesus” is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew “Joshua,” which means “Jehovah saves.” Jesus Christ means “Jesus the Anointed One.” That anointing occurred at the Council in Heaven. So the first thing Paul does, is call our attention to his own foreordination, after which he calls our attention to the Saviour’s. The rest of the chapter is about our own.

2 Grace be to you, and peace from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

The word “grace” often suggests the power of the truth, light, love which emanate from the presence of God. “Lovingkindness” is the word used in the Old Testament. “Loving” is what God is; “kindness” is what he does. Similarly, we are expected to *be* charity, and *do* the law of consecration.

“Peace” in the Beatitudes (3 Nephi 12:9), is the quality of those who are called by the covenant name of “the children of God.” Its significance is taught at the beginning of Moroni 7.

3 Blessed be the God [Elohim] and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ:

Verse 20 of this same chapter identifies the “Heavenly places” as the throne room where God presides, and where Christ sits on the right hand of his Father. In Solomon’s Temple, the throne room is the Holy of Holies. If that is Paul’s meaning, the heavenly places are the Holy of Holies of the temple in heaven—probably Kolob. In the poetic version of Section 76, the Prophet Joseph identified the place where the Father presides over the Council in Heaven as Kolob. Joseph quoted the Savior:

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My delight is to honour the Saints with repose,
That serve me in righteousness true to the end;
Eternal's their glory and great their reward.
I'll surely reveal all my myst'ries to them --
The great hidden myst'ries in my kingdom stor'd;
From the council in Kolob, to time on the earth,
And for ages to come unto them I will show
My pleasure and will, what the kingdom will do
Eternity's wonders they truly shall know.⁷⁹⁶

If those connections are correct, then the “all spiritual blessings” we received “in heavenly places,” were the covenants and ordinances received in the temple of Kolob where the Father presided over the ceremonies.

4 *According as he [the Father] hath chosen us in him [the Savior] before the foundation of the world [That is, before the Council in Heaven described in Abraham 3:22-4:1], that we should be holy and without blame before him [the Father] in love.*

Charity is the great commandment here, and was there, even before the foundation of the world.

Here Paul is saying the same thing Moroni said at the conclusion of the Book of Mormon: “that you become holy, without spot.”

32 Yea, come unto Christ, and be perfected in him, and deny yourselves of all ungodliness; and if ye shall deny yourselves of all ungodliness, and love God with all your might, mind and strength, then is his grace sufficient for you, that by his grace ye may be perfect in Christ; and if by the grace of God ye are perfect in Christ, ye can in nowise deny the power of God.

33 And again, if ye by the grace of God are perfect in Christ, and deny not his power, then are ye sanctified in Christ by the grace of God, through the shedding of the blood of Christ, which is in the covenant of the Father unto the remission of your sins, that ye become holy, without spot (Moroni 10:32-33).

To be holy is to be perfect. This is not an arbitrary perfection, but a perfection of Self, with our personality and integrity fully intact—true to the law of our own

⁷⁹⁶ “A Vision by The Prophet Joseph Smith,” *Times and Seasons*, February 1, 1843.

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beings—sealed in that truth by the power of our own and of the Savior’s love.

5 *Having predestinated [foreordained] us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself [the Father], according to the good pleasure of his [the Father's] will.*

We are already Heavenly Father’s children, but to be birthright children who can inherit all that the Father has, we must be adopted to the Father through the atonement of the Saviour. In the ancient temple drama, Psalm 2 represented that adoption.

6 *To the praise of the glory of his [the Father's] grace [Moroni 10:32-33, just quoted, is probably the clearest description of the Father’s grace.], wherein he [the Father] hath made us accepted in the beloved [Son].*

7 *In whom [the Son] we have redemption through his [the Son's] blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his [the Father's] grace;*

8 *Wherein he [the Father] hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence;*

“Abounded” is the verb form of abundance. It means to give abundantly—but the abundance we receive will be according to his wisdom and his prudence. That is, the Father will not place on us all at once the full weight of our mission in this world, but will teach us only the things we need to know, when they are immediately relevant to that part of our mission we need to fulfill it just now..

9 [The Father,] *Having made known unto us the mystery of his [the Father's] will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself:*

The word “mystery” is translated from the Greek *mysterion*. As is explained on page 464, *mysterion* refers to the ancient temple covenants and ordinances, and may be the same as the Hebrew *sode*, which refers to our experience and the assignments we received in the Council in Heaven. Here Paul is reminding us that our assignments for this earth-life were made by the Father and understood by ourselves while we were at that Council.

10 *That in the dispensation of the fullness of times he [the Father] might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him [the Father]:*

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Paul understood that what those early Saints did 2000 years ago would ultimately effect the restoration of the gospel in our time. Similarly, even though we may not live to know how, what we do as we fulfill our assignments, will help bring about the Savior's second coming.

11 *In whom [the Father] also, we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated [foreordained] according to the purpose of him [the Father] who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will*

The words, "we have obtained an inheritance," are in past tense: they are a reference to the blessings we received "in heavenly places." before the world was.

12 [The inheritance includes:] *That we should be to the praise of his [the Father's] glory, who first trusted in Christ.*

To say that the Father "first trusted in Christ" takes us back to the very beginnings of our beginnings. The next phrases teach us that we also trusted in the Savior before the foundation of the world. It was that trust that brought us to receive "all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ."

13 *In whom [the Savior] ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth ["in the first place" Alma 13], the gospel of your salvation: in whom [the Savior] also, after that ye believed, ye were [past tense, again a reference to the experience in the Heavenly Places] sealed with that holy Spirit of promise,*

We are taught in Section 132 that no ordinance or covenant is valid in the eternities unless it is sealed by the Holy Spirit of Promise. That is an eternal principle, and those blessings and covenants we received in the "heavenly places" were sealed upon us before we came to this world—however, the sealing was conditional upon our keeping our covenants while we are here. Paul explains that in the next verse.

14 *Which [sealing] is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his [the Father's] glory.*

"Earnest" is a commercial term. It is the name of a contract that precedes the sell of property. If one were to purchase a house, he would give the seller "earnest money," in exchange for which the seller would sign a contract guaranteeing that he will not sell the home to anyone else during the next stated time, and that during that time he will sell the home to the other person who signs the contract for the agreed

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price. In that contract, the seller guarantees that he will sell the house to the buyer, but the buyer is free to not buy that house if he changes his mind. Paul uses the word “earnest” to describe the premortal covenant we made with the Father that he will bless us if we choose to be blessed. The covenant is an earnest, binding the Father to bless us if we accept the blessings, but giving us all the wiggle room we want in this world, leaving it entirely up to each of us whether we choose to claim the blessings he has covenanted to give us if we obey.

At this point in Paul’s letter, he concludes his introduction which talks about our pre-earth-life relationship with the Father and the Son. Paul now explains why our pre-mortal covenants are so important to us in this life.

15 Wherefore I [Paul] also, after I heard of your faith [pistis, object, evidence, and hope of the covenants] in the Lord Jesus, and love [charity, the same law still applies] unto all the saints,

*16 [Wherefore I] Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers;
17 That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him*

18 The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know [the following three things:]

The three principles that follow are among the most important things we can know, as we seek to fulfill our eternal covenants. They are:

[First:] *what is the hope of his [the Father’s] calling [to us]*

The Greek word that is translated “calling” is a gerund, from the verb “to call.” It implies the act of speaking, or issuing an invitation or an assignment. Thus, it is the Father’s call to us to serve. It is that assignment to which we were foreordained. “The hope of his calling” is its intended conclusion or objective.

[Second:] *and what the riches of the glory of his [the Father's] inheritance in the saints,*

“The riches of the glory” are those blessings promised to those who keep their eternal covenants. Twice the Lord admonished the Latter-day Saints, “ Seek not for riches but for wisdom; and, behold, the mysteries of God shall be unfolded unto you, and then shall you be made rich. Behold, he that hath eternal life is rich (D&C 6:7 and

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11:7).” The riches of his glory” are those blessing that were, and will be again, sealed upon us by the Holy Spirit of Promise.

[Third:] 19 *And [that you may know] what is the exceeding greatness of his power to usward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power,*

This is the crescendo of the entire chapter: it is the ultimate promise of invulnerability. Paul says that he prays that we may know that Heavenly Father will exercise the same power in our behalf, so that we may fulfill our eternal covenants, just as he did for the Savior.

20 *[according to the working of his mighty power,] Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places,*

21 *Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come:*

22 *And [the Father] hath put all things under his [the Son's] feet, and gave him [the Son] to be the head over all things to the church,*

23 *Which is his [the Son's] body, the fullness of him [the Father] that filleth all in all.*

In that chapter, the apostle reviews the covenants we made with our Father in Heaven in the premortal world. This review is an introduction to a more complete discussion of those covenants which follows in the remainder of his letter. But before proceeding to that, he tells the Saints of his prayer for them, that they may:

1. know the covenants we made at the Council in Heaven
2. know the blessings awaiting us as we keep those covenants
3. know that God has the power to remove any external obstacle that might prevent our fulfilling those covenants. In other words, God promises that we cannot fail, unless we choose to fail. He does not promise we won't have difficulties, but only that the difficulties will not preclude our keeping our covenants.

In each of those scriptural discussions of our premortal covenants and foreordinations. With each comes the covenant of invulnerability—the promise that the Lord will divert anything that would prevent us from doing what we came to this earth to do. For the enormous majority of us, that means quietly expending our resources and our energies to support the growth of the Kingdom. What God will not do is force us to obey.

In our story of Alma and Zeezrom, the two men who face each other in this debate

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are excellent examples of that principle. Alma had been told by an angel that he must either repent or suffer the pains of hell—that is, the angel gave Alma the option, but it was Alma who made the choice. Now Zeezrom was having a similar experience—but it was Alma the prophet, rather than an angel, who was delivering the ultimatum.

Both men responded the same way. They chose to suffer the pains of repentance rather than the pains of hell—but they could have chosen not to repent, gone about life as before, and refused to believe what the consequence would be. We do not have much information about Zeezrom immediately after this experience, except that the sorrow nearly killed him. Alma blessed him to recover his health, and he was baptized (Alma 15). Later he was a missionary companion to Alma and Amulek (Alma 31:6, 30).

For each of us, throughout our life’s experience, we remain free to do and believe what we will. In our egotism we tend to equate “truth” with whatever we choose to believe and “falsehood” with whatever we do not choose to believe. But truth is truth and it is independent of our belief. Whether we believe a true thing or not does not affect its validity, but our believing or not sets the course of our lives. Embracing truth brings freedom—ultimate, absolute freedom—for it authorizes us to believe.⁷⁹⁷ It unites our individual power with the blessing God has given us that we can succeed in our earthly mission, and peacefully reconciles our souls with the problems that beset us. Embracing and defending a falsehood restricts our ability to know, uses up our energy to become, and leaves our covenant responsibilities and their attendant blessings unfulfilled.

In the end, each one of us will have to say, as Alma and Zeezrom were able to testify, that the Lord gave us all the opportunities requisite for our knowing and keeping our eternal covenants.

⁷⁹⁷ “George A. Smith, while serving in the First Presidency, reported: ‘Joseph Smith taught that every man and woman should seek the Lord for wisdom, that they might get knowledge from Him who is the fountain of knowledge; and the promises of the gospel, as revealed, were such as to authorize us to believe, that by taking this course we should gain the object of our pursuit.’” (*Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith, A Course of Study for the Melchizedek Priesthood Quorums of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, [Melchizedek Priesthood manual] [Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2007], 266.