



Alma 31.²⁷⁻²⁹— meditation

²⁷Behold, O God, they cry unto thee,
and yet their hearts are swallowed up in their pride.
Behold, O God, they cry unto thee with their mouths,
while they are puffed up, even to greatness, with the vain things of the world.

²⁸Behold, O my God, their costly apparel,
and their ringlets, and their bracelets, and their ornaments of gold,
and all their precious things which they are ornamented with;
and behold, their hearts are set upon them,
and yet they cry unto thee and say—

We thank thee, O God, for we are a chosen people unto thee,
while others shall perish.

²⁹Yea, and they say that thou hast made it known unto them that there shall be no Christ.

As is all too common in religion, Zoramite religion was, above all else, simply a means whereby its adherents could maintain their alleged exceptionalism and superiority. They were, according to their confessional prayer, “elected.” This is repeated three times. They were “holy”—utterly different, separated, set apart, and unique. This is repeated twice. They were “chosen.”¹ The most devout used material wealth as a evidence, questionable as it is, of their natural superiority and divine election.

Alma, however, listening to the arrogant assertions of their haughty prayer, saw right through their false bravado. Accurately, he saw their “costly apparel,” with all its expensive accessories, as evidence of their having been “swallowed up” whole in human vanity, pride, and hubris. He saw that their hyper-respectability and prideful exhibitionism in dress and style was, in fact, their god. Their religion was one of idolatry.

There is always a bit of idolatry in materialism, as it is used inevitably as a sign of superiority and justification for demeaning others. Alma’s observation here is consistent with the entirety of the Book of Mormon. When people dress for success and declare their fashion to be a signifier of their goodness, they have entered the unhallowed portals of Bel, god of fertility and success. Such is a cause for the deep prayer of forgiveness rather than the puffed-up prayer of false gratitude.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

(edition: October 24, 2024)

¹ See Alma 31.¹⁵⁻¹⁸