Why Would Mankind “Unavoidably Perish” without the Atonement of Jesus Christ?

All mankind must unavoidably perish; yea, all are hardened; yea, all are fallen and are lost, and must perish except it be through the atonement which … must be an infinite and eternal sacrifice.

Alma 34:9–10

CONTENT & CONTEXT

Amulek’s teachings about the Savior’s Atonement in Alma 34 come immediately after and are meaningfully related to Alma’s memorable discourse on faith in Alma 32–33. Alma had just invited the Zoramites to “compare the word unto a seed” (Alma 32:28). Amulek then helped them understand that this seed—the word of God—is necessarily centered in the Atonement of Jesus Christ. Christ’s redeeming sacrifice was the central message or word of prophets like Zenos, Zenock, and Moses (see Alma 34:6–7). Speaking as Alma’s companion and second witness, Amulek testified, clarified, and expanded upon the nature of the seed that Alma invited his hearers to faithfully plant in their hearts (see Alma 32:28).

To the poor and humble among the Zoramites, Amulek taught that without the Atonement of Christ “all mankind must unavoidably perish” because “all are hardened; yea, all are fallen and are lost” (Alma 34:9). These words would have been especially meaningful to the Zoramites who had just been “cast out of the synagogues because of the coarseness of their apparel” (Alma 32:2). In their poverty-stricken condition, and without a formal place to worship, they surely would have felt lost, fallen, and perhaps hardened against the Lord and those who had cast them out (see Alma 34:31).

Amulek himself may have been acutely aware of mankind’s depraved condition, seeing that he had recently experienced his own powerful conversion (see Alma 10:5–6). The fact that he placed mankind’s universal fallen nature at the central part of a chiasm further supports how pivotal this point was to his message:
Amulek’s emphasis on the results of the Fall helps demonstrate why true worship is necessarily centered in Christ’s Atonement, and why “faith unto repentance”—not wealth and social status—are what yield true righteousness (Alma 34:15–16). His message also clarified that all are hardened, fallen, and lost, and thus all are in need of the Atonement of Christ. Despite their poverty, these Zoramites had just as much access to and need for Christ’s redeeming power as those who flaunted their “costly apparel” on the Rameumptom (Alma 31:28). Alma even went so far as to declare that “it is well that ye are cast out of your synagogues, that ye may be humble, and that ye may learn wisdom” (Alma 32:12). Just like Adam and Eve, who were “cast out from the Garden of Eden” (Doctrine and Covenants 29:41), the Zoramites could gain true wisdom and knowledge in recognizing their own lost and fallen state.

DOCTRINE & PRINCIPLES

When joined together, Alma’s and Amulek’s teachings masterfully demonstrate how the story of Eden is continuously playing out in lives of all of God’s children. Alma’s metaphor of the seed suggests that a tree of life, as found originally in the Garden of Eden, metaphorically resides in each human heart. Amulek’s teachings then established that the seed (the word of God) is necessarily centered in Jesus Christ’s Atonement. If patiently planted and diligently nourished, the seed or doctrine of Christ’s Atonement can grow within one’s heart until it symbolically develops into a fully-grown tree of life (see Alma 32:40–43). Like the tree of life in the Garden of Eden, the Savior’s Atonement can fully overcome the consequences of the Fall for each individual.

FURTHER READING

President Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “‘Lord Is It I?’” Ensign, November 2014, 56–59, online at lds.org.


5. For a comparison of symbolic trees in the Book of Mormon, see John W. Welch and Gregory J. Welch, Charting the Book of Mormon: Visual Aids for Personal Study (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999), chart 95. For more information on the Tree of Life, see John W. Welch and Donald W. Parry, eds., The Tree of Life: From Eden to Eternity (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2011).


8. Many people today attach negative moral or political connotations to the term expedient. However, Noah Webster, American Dictionary of the English Language (1828) defined expedient in a much more positive light: (1) Literally, hastening; urging forward. Hence, tending to promote the object proposed; fit or suitable for the purpose; proper under the circumstances. (2) Useful; profitable. In this light, Amulek’s use of expedient can be seen as urging the Zoramites to be patient and faithful, for Christ’s Atonement would be suitable for the Father’s eternal purposes, proper under the circumstances, and hastened along according to the Lord’s timetable. God cannot force people to be righteous and He cannot shelter everyone from the harsh unjust treatment by others, but He has provided a useful, proper, and profitable means of purification, reconciliation, and reunion with God.


12. President Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “‘Lord Is It I?’” Ensign, November 2014, 58, online at lds.org.


2. For according to the great plan of the Eternal God it is expedient that an atonement should be made. (2 Nephi 2:24).6 so too are the consequences of the Fall for each individual.5

3. In consequence of the Fall, Amulek used the word must four times and the word expedient three times in Alma 34:9–10 to demonstrate the absolute necessity of the Christ’s Atonement for all of God’s children.6

4. For a comparison of symbolic trees in the Book of Mormon, see John W. Welch and Gregory J. Welch, Charting the Book of Mormon: Visual Aids for Personal Study (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999), chart 95. For more information on the Tree of Life, see John W. Welch and Donald W. Parry, eds., The Tree of Life: From Eden to Eternity (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2011).

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