
Alma 14 — The Lord Receiveth Them Up Unto Himself — The Martyrdom of the Innocents, the Mocking Priests, and the Collapse of the Prison Walls

Alma 14: still the tenth year of the reign of the judges (c. 82 BC), still in Ammonihah. The people are now divided after the Alma–Amulek discourse of chapters 9–13. Many believe, including the wives and children of the believing men. The civic authorities respond with the most violent persecution in the Book of Mormon — the women and children of the believers are cast into a fire along with their scriptures while Alma and Amulek are forced to watch. Amulek would use priesthood power to save them; Alma restrains him with one of the Book of Mormon's most pastorally weighted teachings — the Lord receiveth them up unto himself, and his justice is preserved by their innocence. Alma and Amulek are then bound, stripped, beaten, and imprisoned naked. After many days of mocking by lawyers, judges, and priests, they are confronted by the chief judge who taunts: 'If ye have the power of God, deliver yourselves.' At that moment Alma rises, breaks the bands, and the prison walls collapse, killing the mockers and leaving Alma and Amulek standing. The city flees in terror.

Alma 14 is the most difficult chapter in the Book of Mormon to read pastorally and one of the most doctrinally important to read carefully. It records the martyrdom of innocent women and children by fire; the restraint of the priesthood from intervening to save them; the binding, stripping, and beating of Alma and Amulek; and finally the collapse of the Ammonihah prison upon the mockers who taunted the two prophets to use the power of God to deliver themselves. Read against Alma 7:11–13, where the same Lord takes upon Himself the pains of His people, the chapter raises every hard question a believer ever asks about innocent suffering — and answers them, not with a formula, but with a doctrine of theodicy that runs through the rest of scripture and meets its climax under the altar in Revelation 6.

Hebrew Word Studies

dam-naki / shofet / atzar / gevurat-Elohim (דָּם נָקִי / שׁוֹפֵט / אֶצֶר / מִיְהוָה) — **blood of the innocent / judge, magistrate / to restrain, hold back / might of God, divine power vv. 11, 14, 28.** The chapter's four Hebrew anchors. *Dam-naki* — *blood of the innocent* — is the construct of *dam* (blood) and *naki* (clean, free from guilt). The phrase is one of the most charged in the Hebrew Bible: *that innocent blood be not shed in thy land* (Deut. 19:10); *thou shalt put away the guilt of innocent blood from Israel* (Deut. 19:13); *cursed be he that taketh reward to slay an innocent person* (Deut. 27:25); *Manasseh shed innocent blood very much* (2 Kgs. 21:16); *the violence against the children of Judah, because they have shed innocent blood* (Joel 3:19). Alma's *blood of the innocent shall stand as a witness* is precisely *dam naki l'ed* — the innocent blood as legal witness at the Lord's tribunal. *Shofet* — *judge* — is the title of the Mosaic judicial office (Deut. 16:18). The chapter's chief shofet of Ammonihah is the master corrupt judge: the very office whose Mosaic charter is to defend the *dam naki* is the office that is now shedding it. *Atzar* — *to restrain, hold back* — is the verb of Gen. 16:2 and especially of 1 Sam. 25:33, where Abigail stays David from shedding blood: *the Lord... hath kept thee back from coming to shed blood*. Alma's *the Spirit constraineth me* is *Ruach atzar oti* — the Spirit holding back the priest from an action he has the power to perform. The Abigail-stays-David precedent is exact. *Gevurat-Elohim* — *might of God, divine power* — is the construct of *gevurah* (mighty deed) and *Elohim*. Alma's *the power of God which is in us* is *gevurat-Elohim asher banu*. The priesthood is the *Gevurah* of God, the same divine attribute by which the world was made — and the same attribute that, here, must be voluntarily held back.

From the Chapter's Architecture

Finally, the chapter sets up the Alma 15 sequel. The two prophets emerge from the collapsed prison into a fleeing city. Zeezrom — last seen stoned and exiled at v. 7 — is somewhere in the country, and the next chapter will record the pursuit, the healing, and the baptism that close the most complete conversion arc in the Book of Mormon. The chapter that begins in burning ends with deliverance, and the chapter that follows begins where Zeezrom's pains-of-hell trembling left off.