

Alma 18 — Is It a Man? — Lamoni's Great-Spirit Question, Ammon's Pedagogical Bridge from Creation to Christ, and the King Overcome unto Falling-as-Dead

Alma 18: still the first year of the reign of the judges (c. 91 BC), the same day Ammon defended the king's flocks at the waters of Sebus. The servants have brought the severed arms to the king. Lamoni — troubled in conscience over having killed innocent servants before — receives the witness with growing astonishment. He reasons: Surely, this is more than a man. Is it not the Great Spirit? When pressed, his guilt over his own past killings rises. He fears Ammon will smite him for his bloodguilt; he sits in silence for an hour. When Ammon finally appears, the king will not speak. Ammon, perceiving the king's thoughts by the Spirit, opens the heavens for him. He teaches, beginning at creation, the whole plan of redemption: God, the fall, the holy prophets, the death and resurrection of Christ. Lamoni, overcome by the light of joy, falls to the earth as if dead. The chapter is one of the great conversion-by-pedagogy scenes in scripture — a Mars-Hill discourse before Mars Hill, delivered to a man whose conscience the Spirit has already broken open.

Alma 18 is the chapter that turns the violent miracle at Sebus into a conversation. The arms have been brought to the king. Lamoni is doing what any thoughtful pagan king would do — trying to fit what just happened into a category he already has. *Surely, this is more than a man.* The chapter is the story of how Ammon walked Lamoni out of his category and into the gospel, without ever telling him his category was wrong.

Hebrew Word Studies

***ruach-gedolah / yada / shafal / chesed* (רוּחַ גְּדוֹלָה / יָדָע / שָׁפַל / חֶסֶד) — Great Spirit / to know, perceive, discern / to be low, prostrate, humble / loving-kindness, covenant-mercy vv. 2, 24, 35, 41.** Four Hebrew words sit underneath the chapter's vocabulary of God, knowledge, humbling, and mercy. *Ruach gedolah* — Great Spirit — is the construct of *ruach* (spirit, breath, wind) and *gedolah* (great). It appears in 1 Kings 19:11 — *behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, ruach gedolah ve-chazak* — the precise text of Elijah's theophany at Horeb. The Lamanite tradition has held onto the Hebrew theophanic vocabulary even after losing the name of Yahweh. *Yada* — to know, perceive, discern — is the verb in Genesis 4:1 (*and Adam knew Eve his wife*), in Jeremiah 1:5 (*before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee*), and in Amos 3:2 (*you only have I known of all the families of the earth*). When the chapter says Ammon could *discern* the king's thoughts, the Hebrew underneath is *yada* — the same intimate, covenant-knowledge verb. *Shafal* — to be low, prostrate, humble — is the verb in Isaiah 57:15 (*I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, shfal-ruach*) and Proverbs 16:19 (*better it is to be of an humble spirit, shfal-ruach, with the lowly*). When Lamoni falls to the earth as if dead, the underlying Hebrew is *shafal* — the full prostration of the humbled soul. *Chesed* — loving-kindness, covenant-mercy, steadfast-love — is the most common covenantal word in the Hebrew Bible, appearing over 250 times. Exodus 34:6–7 places it at the heart of the Lord's self-revelation: *the Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands*. When Lamoni cries *O Lord, have mercy*, the Hebrew underneath is *chesed*, and the cry is the form of Psalm 51:1 — *have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness*.

From the Chapter's Architecture

The chapter closes by leaving the king laid as if dead and the queen mourning. The image is the pre-figuration of every Christ-burial scene in the New Testament. Alma 19, the next chapter, is the resurrection: the king rises, testifies that he has seen his Redeemer, and the entire household is converted in a single morning. The chapter that begins with severed arms ends with a man on a bed who looks like he is dead. Both are forms the Spirit will use. Both are the Lord's work.