
Alma 20 — Go Not Up to the Land of Nephi — The Lord's Course Correction, the King over All the Land, and Ammon's Disarming Defense of His Friend

Alma 20: in the immediate aftermath of the conversion of Lamoni's household. Ammon is led by the Spirit not to go to the land of Nephi to find his brethren, but to go to Middoni — where Aaron and Muloki and Ammah are imprisoned. Lamoni offers to go with him. Along the way they meet Lamoni's father, the king over all the Lamanite lands, who is furious that Lamoni did not attend the great feast. The father commands Lamoni to slay Ammon. Lamoni refuses; the father raises his sword to kill Lamoni; Ammon intervenes, withstands the father in single combat, disarms him, and could kill him. Instead Ammon spares him on condition that he free Aaron and his brethren and grant Lamoni his own kingdom in peace. The father, marveling at Ammon's love for his son, agrees, and desires to know more of these things. The chapter ends with Ammon and Lamoni riding on to Middoni.

Alma 20 is the chapter where the Lamoni story turns outward. The conversion of the king's house in Alma 18–19 has been complete; now the question is what to do next. Ammon's first instinct is to go visit his brethren in the land of Nephi. The Spirit tells him no. *Go not* — they are looking to kill you there. Go instead to Middoni, where Aaron and Muloki and Ammah are in prison, and deliver them.

Hebrew Word Studies

yad / cherev / chashak / ahavah (יָד / כֶּרֶב / חֶשֶׁךְ / אָהָבָה) — **hand, arm, power / sword / to bind oneself, cling, love / love, covenant-love vv. 8, 16, 20, 26.** Four Hebrew words underlie the chapter's small but precise vocabulary of disarmament and love. *Yad* — hand, arm, power — is the noun that ties Alma 17, 19, and 20 together. The arms of the Sebus attackers were cut; the brother who raised his sword against Ammon in Alma 19 fell dead; and the great king's arm here is *smitten that he could not use it*. The Book of Mormon plays the same Hebrew word three times across the arc, and each time the *yad* of flesh is disabled in the presence of the Lord's servant. *Cherev* — sword — is the noun in Genesis 3:24 (*a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life*) and Isaiah 2:4 (*they shall beat their swords into plowshares*). The great king draws his *cherev*; Ammon withstands it. The chapter, in passing, gives us the second image of an unconverted sword falling silent before the gospel's servant. *Chashak* — to bind oneself, cling, love — is the verb in Deuteronomy 7:7 (*the Lord did not set his love upon you*) and 10:15 (*only the Lord had a delight in thy fathers to love them*). It denotes the love that binds, that chooses, that will not let go. When the king sees *the great love Ammon had for his son Lamoni*, the underlying Hebrew is *chashak* — the binding love that chose to die for the friend rather than turn the sword on the father. *Ahavah* — love, covenant-love — is the noun behind Leviticus 19:18 (*thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself*) and Song of Songs 8:6 (*love is strong as death*). The chapter's whole geometry — the disarming as the act of love, the friend defended at the cost of the father's wound — is the practical demonstration of *ahavah* as the highest law. The king is converted, in this chapter, not by argument but by witnessed *ahavah*.

From the Chapter's Architecture

Finally, the chapter is the textual hinge for Alma 21–22. Alma 21 will rewind and tell us what was happening to Aaron and his brethren in the months Ammon was at Ishmael. Alma 22 will pick the story back up at the great king's palace, where Aaron will preach the gospel to the man Ammon disarmed. The seed planted on the road in Alma 20 will sprout in Alma 22. The disarming and the conversion are not in the same chapter, but they are in the same arc, and the chapter knows it.