

Alma 22 — I Will Give Away All My Sins to Know Thee — The Great King Converted, and the Geography Insert

Alma 22: Aaron has been redirected by the Spirit to the great king's palace in the land of Nephi — the same king Ammon disarmed in Alma 20. Aaron preaches from creation forward, the same shape Ammon used at Ishmael. The king prostrates himself and prays the most striking conversion-prayer in the Book of Mormon — I will give away all my sins to know thee, that I may be raised from the dead, and be saved at the last day. He falls as if dead. The queen, fearing harm, calls the servants; Aaron stretches forth his hand and raises him; the household is converted. The king sends a proclamation throughout all his land granting Aaron and his brethren the right to preach freely in every Lamanite city. Mormon then breaks the narrative with the geography insert that has shaped a century of Book of Mormon geography scholarship — the narrow neck of land, the line between the land of Nephi and the land of Zarahemla, and the broader geographical frame of the Nephite world.

Alma 22 is the conversion that has been building since Alma 20. The great king — the king over all the Lamanite lands — has been desirous to know more ever since the road, where Ammon disarmed him and asked only for his son's kingdom and his brethren's freedom. Aaron, just out of Middoni's prison, is sent to him. The chapter is Aaron's preaching of the gospel, the king's prostration, his radical prayer, his collapse, his rising, and the proclamation that opens all the Lamanite lands to the Nephite mission.

Hebrew Word Studies

na'azov / da'at-elohim / shafal / kavod (נָאָזַב / דָּאֵת־אֱלֹהִים / שָׁפַל / כָּבוֹד) — **I will give up / I will forsake / knowledge of God / to be low, prostrate / glory, weight, honor vv. 15, 17, 18, 27.** Four Hebrew constructions sit beneath the king's prayer. Na'azov — I will give up, I will forsake — is the verb in Genesis 2:24 (*therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife*) and Proverbs 28:13 (*he that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy*). The verb is the verb of departure — leaving behind what was held. When the king says *I will give away all my sins*, the Hebrew underneath is *e'ezov et-kol-chataotai* — I will leave behind all my sins. The same verb that joined Adam to Eve by leaving father and mother is the verb the king uses for leaving sins to come to God. Da'at elohim — knowledge of God — is the construct Hosea 6:6 uses: *for I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings*. The Lord's deepest desire, Hosea says, is not ritual but *da'at elohim*. The king's *that I may know thee* is the precise petition for *da'at elohim*. The phrase will appear again in Jeremiah 31:34's new covenant promise: *they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them*. The king's prayer is one of the Book of Mormon's clearest pre-Jeremianic articulations of the new-covenant promise — the personal knowledge of God that is the substance of the new covenant. Shafal — to be low, prostrate, humble — is the verb in Isaiah 57:15 (*I dwell with him that is of a contrite and humble spirit*). When the king prostrates himself, the underlying Hebrew is *shafal* — full prostration of the humbled soul. Kavod — glory, weight, honor — is the noun behind the *kavod Yahweh*, the glory of the Lord. When the king prays to be *saved at the last day*, the eschatological frame is the *kavod-Yahweh* coming at the end of the age — the same frame Daniel 7 and Joel 3 use of the day of the Lord.

From the Chapter's Architecture

Finally, the chapter is the textual hinge into Alma 23. The proclamation of verse 27 will sweep through seven cities. The Lamanites who hear it will be converted and never did fall away. The Anti-Nephi-Lehies will emerge as a distinct people. The chapter that began with one man's prayer ends with a continent reorganized. Few chapters in scripture move so far in so few verses.