
Alma 24 — Rather Than Shed the Blood of Our Brethren — Weapons Buried Deep, 1,005 Slain Singing Praise, and the Convert Count That Exceeded the Body Count

Alma 24: the Amalekites and Amulonites stir up the unconverted Lamanites against the Anti-Nephi-Lehies. The great king has died; his son, given the name Anti-Nephi-Lehi, has become king of the converted people. He gathers his people and delivers one of the most extraordinary discourses in scripture — a confession of their past murders, a thanksgiving for the cleansing of their hearts, and a covenant to bury their weapons deep in the earth and never take them up again, even in self-defense. The army of unconverted Lamanites comes upon them; the Anti-Nephi-Lehies meet them prostrate, praying, weapons buried. One thousand and five are slain. The remaining Lamanites stop, throw down their own weapons in horror, and many believe. Mormon records the editorial observation that the number of converts that day exceeded the number of the slain. The chapter is the Book of Mormon's master text on what pacifism by covenant actually looks like in execution — and on the salvific arithmetic of martyrdom.

Alma 24 is one of the holiest chapters in the Book of Mormon, and one of the most disquieting. The Anti-Nephi-Lehies of Alma 23 — the converted Lamanites who *never did fall away* — are about to be tested. The Amalekites and Amulonites, the apostate sub-peoples Mormon has been carefully isolating since Alma 21, have stirred up an army to attack them. The new king, Anti-Nephi-Lehi (the great king of Alma 22 has died and his son carries the name), has to decide what his people will do.

Hebrew Word Studies

dam-naki / shav / kavod / qiddush-ha-shem (דָּם נָקִי / שָׁב / כָּבוֹד / קִדּוּשׁ הַשֵּׁם) — **blood of the innocent / to return, repent / glory, weight, honor / sanctification of the Name vv. 9, 17, 21, 22, 26.** Four Hebrew constructions sit beneath the Anti-Nephi-Lehi covenant and martyrdom. *Dam naki* — blood of the innocent — is the construct of *dam* (blood) and *naki* (innocent, free from guilt). It appears in Deuteronomy 19:10 (*that innocent blood be not shed in thy land*) and 2 Kings 21:16 (*Manasseh shed innocent blood very much, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another*). The slain Anti-Nephi-Lehies are *dam naki* in the Deuteronomic sense — they have not lifted a hand against the attackers, and their blood is innocent. The doctrine of *dam naki* is that the Lord requires accounting for it; the Amalekite and Amulonite armies, whose hands are now bloody, are under the same legal-theological burden as Cain. *Shav* — to return, repent — is the verb behind *teshuvah*, the standard Jewish word for repentance. It appears in Joel 2:13 (*rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God*) and Isaiah 30:15 (*in returning and rest shall ye be saved*). The new Lamanite converts in Alma 24 are *shavim* — they have turned, returned, repented. The verb is the verb of the king's whole discourse. *Kavod* — glory, weight, honor — is the noun used of the *glory of the Lord*. When the chapter says the Anti-Nephi-Lehies who died went to our God and shall be saved, the underlying theological frame is the *kavod Yahweh* coming to receive the faithful dead. *Qiddush ha-shem* — sanctification of the Name — is the rabbinic term for martyrdom in defense of God's name. The phrase developed in the post-biblical Jewish tradition (particularly in the wake of the Maccabean revolt and later Roman persecutions) as the highest form of faithful death. The Anti-Nephi-Lehi martyrdom is the Book of Mormon's clearest pre-rabbinic instance of *qiddush ha-shem* — death freely accepted for the sanctification of God's name and the keeping of His covenant.

From the Chapter's Architecture

The chapter is the textual completion of the Sons-of-Mosiah arc that began in Alma 17. It is also the textual set-up for Alma 27–28, where the Anti-Nephi-Lehies will be moved into Nephite territory by Ammon and his brethren for their own safety, and given the land of Jershon. They will become the people of Ammon, the people whose sons — the stripling warriors of Alma 56–58 — will fight as their parents could not. That story is yet to come. This chapter is its foundation. The mothers and fathers who buried their swords here are the mothers and fathers of the boys who, twenty years from now, will fight in faith because their mothers taught them they could not be slain. The covenant of Alma 24 is the seed of Helaman 56's we do not doubt our mothers knew it. The two chapters are the same story, with two generations between them.