
Alma 26 — How Many Thousands of Our Brethren Has He Loosed From the Pains of Hell — Ammon's Hymn of Rejoicing, and the Boast That Is Not a Boast

Alma 26: c. 78 BC, near the end of the fourteen-year mission of the sons of Mosiah among the Lamanites. The four brothers and their companions have done the impossible — converted thousands of the very people the Nephites had written off as beyond reach. Ammon, overflowing, breaks into a hymn of thanksgiving to his brethren. Aaron, alarmed, warns him that his joy is carrying him into boasting. Ammon answers with the most sustained meditation on holy joy and right glorying in the whole Book of Mormon: he does not boast in himself, he says, but in his God, in whose strength a man who knows he is nothing can do all things. The chapter is Ammon's psalm — part harvest song, part missionary memoir, part doctrine of how a creature may rejoice without pride.

Alma 26 is a psalm dropped into the middle of a history. After chapters of war and martyrdom and the grim fulfillment of Abinadi's prophecy, the narrative stops, and Ammon sings. The sons of Mosiah — Ammon, Aaron, Omner, and Himni — are near the close of the fourteen years they have spent among the Lamanites, the mission they undertook in Mosiah 28 because they could not bear that any soul should perish. They have seen the conversion of King Lamoni, of Lamoni's father the great king over all the land, of whole cities, of thousands who have buried their weapons and become the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi. And the weight of what they have witnessed comes out of Ammon as a hymn.

Hebrew Word Studies

halal / kavod / hithpa'el (לָלַחַ / דּוֹבֵךְ / לְעִפְתָּה) — **to praise, to boast, to shine / glory, weight, honor / the reflexive-reciprocal verb stem vv. 11–12, 16, 35–36.** The whole argument of this chapter turns on a feature of the Hebrew verb *halal* that English cannot carry in a single word. *Halal* is the root behind *hallelujah* — "praise Yah" — and it means to shine, to praise, to celebrate, to make a loud sound of acclaim. But the same root, in its reflexive *hithpa'el* stem (*hithallel*), means "to boast" or "to glory." In Hebrew, boasting and praising are the same verb pointed in different directions: to *hithallel* in yourself is the sin of boasting; to *hithallel* in the Lord is the duty of praise. Jeremiah 9:23–24 makes the whole distinction with one verb used five times: *let not the wise man glory (hithallel) in his wisdom... but let him that glorieth (hithallel) glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me.* This is exactly the ground Ammon and Aaron are standing on. Aaron fears Ammon is sliding toward the forbidden *hithallel* — glorying in self. Ammon answers by insisting his glorying is the commanded *hithallel* — glorying in the Lord. When he says *who can glory too much in the Lord?* (v. 16), he is invoking Jeremiah's rule: there is a glorying that has no upper limit because its object is God. The same root lies under *kavod* — glory, literally "weight" — the heaviness, the gravitas, that belongs to God. Ammon refuses to take any *kavod* onto himself (*I am nothing*, v. 12) and pours it all onto God (*we will glory in the Lord*, v. 16). Paul will quote Jeremiah's exact rule twice — *he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord* (1 Cor. 1:31; 2 Cor. 10:17) — and in doing so he is saying what Ammon says here, in the same grammar of the redirected boast.

From the Chapter's Architecture

```cross-references Deut. 8:17–18 (say not, my power... hath gotten me this wealth: but... the Lord thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power — the root rebuke of self-boasting behind v. 12); 1 Sam. 2:1–10 (Hannah's hymn: my heart rejoiceth in the Lord... the Lord killeth, and maketh alive: he bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up — the prototype thanksgiving psalm Ammon's echoes); Ps. 34:1–3 (I will bless the Lord at all times... my soul shall make her boast in the Lord — the halal of v. 16); Ps. 44:6–8 (I will not trust in my bow... in God we boast all the day long — direct parallel to vv. 11–12); Ps. 115:1 (not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory — the redirected glory of v. 16); Ps. 126:5–6 (they that sow in tears shall reap in joy... bringing his sheaves with him — the harvest-after-affliction of vv. 5, 27–31); Isa. 61:1 (to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison — the loosed from the pains of hell of v. 13); Jer. 9:23–24 (let not the wise man glory in his wisdom... but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he... knoweth me — the master text on holy boasting behind vv. 12, 16); Matt. 9:37–38 (the harvest truly is plenteous... the Lord of the harvest — direct parallel to vv. 5–7); Lk. 10:2 (the seventy sent to harvest — the missionary commission Ammon's labor embodies); Jn. 4:35–38 (lift up your eyes... the fields... are white already to harvest... one soweth, and another reapeth — the harvest theology of vv. 5, 30); Rom. 8:31, 37 (if God be for us... we are more than conquerors through him — the borrowed-strength logic of v. 12); 1 Cor. 1:27–31 (God hath chosen... things which are not... that no flesh should glory... he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord — Paul's direct restatement of vv. 12, 16); 2 Cor. 10:17; 12:9–10 (when I am weak, then am I strong — Paul's twin of I am nothing... in his strength I can do all things, v. 12); Phil. 4:13 (I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me — verbatim parallel to v. 12); Moses 1:10 (man is nothing, which thing I never had supposed — the creature-knowledge of v. 12); Mosiah 2:20–25 (Benjamin's unprofitable servants: even at your best you owe everything — direct doctrinal parallel to vv. 11–12); Mosiah 4:5–11 (the people's nothingness and the rescue from it — parallel to vv. 12, 17–20); Mosiah 27–28 (the conversion of the sons of Mosiah and their mission — the backstory of vv. 18, 23–24); Alma 5:26 (the song of redeeming love — directly echoed at v. 13's brought to sing redeeming love); Alma 7:11–12 (his bowels... filled with mercy — the rachamim of v. 37); Alma 17–24 (the fourteen-year mission whose harvest this hymn celebrates); Alma 29:9–10 (Alma's parallel meditation on the missionary's joy — the companion psalm to this one); Ether 12:27 (my grace is sufficient... I give unto men weakness that they may be humble... my grace is sufficient for all men that humble themselves — the I am nothing / in his strength all things doctrine in the Lord's own words); D&C 18:10–16 (the worth of souls is great... how great shall be your joy if you should bring many souls unto me — the doctrine of missionary joy that v. 13 enacts). ```