
Alma 27 — We Will Give Up the Land of Jershon — The Rescue of a Defenseless People, the Voice of the People Saying Yes, and the Birth of the People of Ammon

Alma 27: c. 77 BC. The Anti-Nephi-Lehies, who buried their weapons and will not lift them even to save their own lives, are being slaughtered again by the Amalekite-stirred Lamanites. Ammon and his brethren, watching the people they love die, can no longer bear it. They propose the unthinkable — to lead this people of former enemies, guilty of many Nephite deaths, down into Nephite lands for refuge. The king fears the Nephites will destroy them; Ammon inquires of the Lord, who commands the exodus. On the journey out Ammon meets Alma after fourteen years apart, a reunion so overwhelming it fells him. The Nephites, asked by the voice of the people, give up an entire land — Jershon — and pledge their armies to defend a people who will not defend themselves. The rescued covenant people are given a new name: the people of Ammon.

Alma 27 is a rescue, and it is one of the most quietly radical chapters in the Book of Mormon — not because anything miraculous happens, but because of what a whole nation agrees to do. The Anti-Nephi-Lehies cannot defend themselves; they have covenanted never to take up the sword again, even to save their own lives, and so they are being slaughtered a second time. The question the chapter exists to answer is brutally practical: what do you do with a people whose holiness has made them helpless? The answer is the chapter's glory. You give up your own land to shelter them, and you pledge your own sons to die in their place.

Hebrew Word Studies

yarash / racham / shem (יָרַשׁ / רָחַם / שֵׁם) — **to inherit, to take possession / to have compassion, womb-love / name vv. 22, 4, 26.** Three Hebrew words frame the chapter's deepest moves. *Yarash* — to inherit, to possess — is the verb of the conquest and settlement of the promised land; it is what Israel does to Canaan, *take possession* of an inheritance given by God. The land name *Jershon*, which the Nephites give the refugees *for an inheritance* (v. 22), is built on this very root: *Jershon* means, plausibly, "place of inheritance" or "land they will inherit." Mormon, abridging a Hebrew-derived record, has preserved a place-name that is a sermon — the rescued people are not given a refugee camp but an *inheritance*, a *yerushah*, with all the covenant weight that word carries. They are not tolerated guests; they are made heirs in the land. *Racham* — to show compassion — is the verb behind *they were moved with compassion* (v. 4), and it is the same root as *rachamim*, the womb-deep mercy of God (Alma 7:12; 26:37). The compassion that moves Ammon to undertake the rescue is named with the word Hebrew reserves for the visceral, parental tenderness that cannot bear to see its child destroyed. Ammon feels toward the Anti-Nephi-Lehies what a mother feels toward the child of her womb — a *racham* that compels action. *Shem* — name — carries in Hebrew the whole identity and destiny of a person or people; to be given a *shem* is to be given a place in the world and a future. When the rescued people are *called... the people of Ammon and distinguished by that name ever after* (v. 26), they receive a new *shem* — a new identity grounded not in their Lamanite past of bloodshed but in the missionary whose compassion saved them. The new name is the seal of the new life.

From the Chapter's Architecture

```cross-references Gen. 12:1 (get thee out of thy country... unto a land that I will shew thee — the exodus-command grammar of v. 12); Gen. 19:17 (escape for thy life — the rescue-out-of-destruction of v. 12); Gen. 32:28; 35:10 (Jacob renamed Israel — the new-name pattern of v. 26); Gen. 45:1–15 (Joseph's overwhelming, weeping reunion with his brothers — parallel to Ammon's collapse at v. 17); Ex. 12:31–38 (Israel gathering flocks and herds and departing the land — direct exodus parallel to v. 14); Lev. 25:23 (the land shall not be sold for ever... ye are strangers and sojourners with me — the inheritance-as-gift theology behind yarash, v. 22); Num. 35:6–15 (the cities of refuge given to shelter those who would otherwise be slain — the refuge-land pattern of v. 22); Deut. 10:18–19 (love ye therefore the stranger... the Lord... loveth the stranger, in giving him food and raiment — the welcome-of-the-foreigner ethic of vv. 22–24); Ruth 1:16 (thy people shall be my people — the adoption of an outsider into the covenant nation); Ps. 16:11 (in thy presence is fulness of joy — the joy that swallows Ammon, v. 17); Isa. 25:8 (he will swallow up death in victory — directly behind v. 28's death was swallowed up... by the victory of Christ); Isa. 56:3–8 (the foreigner joined to the Lord given a place and a name... better than of sons and of daughters — the new-name inheritance of vv. 22, 26); Matt. 9:36 (Jesus moved with compassion on the multitude — the racham of v. 4); Lk. 15:20 (the father runs and falls on the prodigal's neck — the overwhelming-reunion pattern of vv. 16–17); Jn. 15:13 (greater love hath no man... than to lay down his life for his friends — the Nephite pledge of v. 23); 1 Cor. 15:54–57 (death is swallowed up in victory... thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ — the resurrection fearlessness of v. 28); Heb. 2:14–15 (Christ delivers them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage — the deathless-courage doctrine of v. 28); Mosiah 27:8–37 (the conversion of Alma and the sons of Mosiah — the shared past behind the reunion, vv. 16–19); Mosiah 28:1–9 (the sons of Mosiah depart on their mission — the fourteen-year separation that v. 16 ends); Mosiah 29:25–27 (the voice of the people established — the machinery used at vv. 21–22); Alma 19:13–14 (Ammon overcome and fallen in Lamoni's court — the prior collapse v. 17 recalls); Alma 24:6–27 (the original disarmament covenant and slaughter — the situation renewed at vv. 1–3); Alma 26 (Ammon's hymn — the companion chapter, with v. 28's bowels of mercy over all the earth matching this chapter's racham); Alma 43:11–12 (the people of Ammon and the Nephite protection covenant remembered); Alma 53:10–18; 56:3–10 (the people of Ammon's sons — the stripling warriors who will fight the war their parents covenanted not to fight); D&C 121:7–8 (peace to the soul amid persecution — the settled fearlessness of v. 28). ```