
Alma 38 — Bridle All Your Passions — Alma's Charge to Steady Shiblon

Alma 38: c. 73 BC, in Zarahemla, the second of Alma's three charges to his sons, given to Shiblon, the middle son. It is the shortest of the three and the warmest. Where Helaman received the records and the long story of his father's conversion, Shiblon receives a father's quiet joy — for Shiblon has already proven himself, bearing bonds and stoning among the Zoramites with patience. Alma commends his steadiness, retells in miniature his own conversion and the cry to Christ that brought peace, and then gives the practical counsel a faithful young man needs: be diligent and temperate, use boldness but not overbearance, bridle all your passions that ye may be filled with love, refrain from idleness, and pray not as the Zoramites do. It is the most affirming of the three charges, the portrait of a father who can simply rejoice in a son who is already walking the right road, and it stands as the bright counterpoint to the harder charge that will follow to Corianton.

Alma 38 is the middle panel of Alma's three farewell charges, and it has a tone all its own — settled, glad, almost relieved. Helaman, the eldest, received the weight of the records and the long testimony of conversion (Alma 36–37); Corianton, the youngest, will receive the longest and hardest charge, a sustained correction of serious sin (Alma 39–42). Between them stands Shiblon, and the charge to Shiblon is short precisely because Shiblon has given his father so little to worry about. This is the charge to the son who is already doing well. Alma's dominant note is not warning but joy: *I trust that I shall have great joy in you, because of your steadiness and your faithfulness unto God* (v. 2); *I have had great joy in thee already* (v. 3). Shiblon had gone on the Zoramite mission with his father and brothers, and there he had been bound and stoned for the word's sake and had *borne all these things with patience* (v. 4). He is tested and proven. And so the chapter becomes a model of something scripture does not always show us: how a righteous father speaks to a faithful child — with commendation first, gentle counsel second, and very little fear.

Hebrew Word Studies

rasan / chashak / shaqat (רָסַן / חָשַׁק / שָׁקַט) — **bridle, rein, restraint / to hold back, to spare, to restrain / to be quiet, settled, steady, at rest** v. 12, vv. 11–12, vv. 2–3. The chapter's counsel turns on the Hebrew vocabulary of restraint and steadiness. *Rasan* — bridle, rein — is the image behind *bridle all your passions* (v. 12). A *rasan* is the harness by which a rider directs a horse; the metaphor is one of governance, not destruction. The same figure appears in James 3:2–3, where the man who can *bridle* his whole body is *perfect*, and the bit in the horse's mouth turns the whole animal. Alma's counsel is exactly this: the passions are strength, like a horse's strength, and the goal is not to kill the horse but to rein it — *that ye may be filled with love*, the energy redirected toward its proper end. Behind the warnings against pride and overbearance lies the sense of *chashak* — to hold back, to spare, to restrain oneself — the self-governing that keeps boldness from becoming overbearance and confidence from becoming boasting. And under the chapter's keynote praise, *steadiness* (v. 2), lies the rich Hebrew *shaqat* — to be quiet, settled, undisturbed, at rest. *Shaqat* is the word for a land that *had rest* from war (Judg. 3:11; 5:31), for the soul that is *quieted* like a weaned child (Ps. 131:2), for the *quietness and confidence* that Isaiah says is strength (Isa. 30:15). Shiblon's *steadiness* is *shaqat* — a settled, quiet faithfulness that is not blown about, the same root-idea as the *rest* Alma blesses him to enter at the last day (*sit down in peace*, v. 15). The chapter is, at its Hebrew root, a meditation on the quiet virtues: the bridled passion, the restrained tongue, the steady, settled heart that endures to the end and enters into rest.

From the Chapter's Architecture

``cross-references Judg. 3:11; 5:31 (the land had rest, shaqat — the steadiness behind v. 2); Ps. 131:1–2 (neither do I exercise myself in great matters... my soul is even as a weaned child — the quiet, settled heart, vv. 2, 11); Ps. 32:9 (be ye not as the horse... whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle — the bridle image of v. 12); Prov. 16:32 (he that ruleth his spirit [is better] than he that taketh a city — the governed passion of v. 12); Prov. 25:28 (he that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city... broken down — the unbridled soul, v. 12); Eccl. 9:10 (whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might — against idleness, v. 12); Isa. 30:15 (in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength — the shaqat steadiness of v. 2); Matt. 5:37; 2 Cor. 1:18 (let your word be sober and sure — be sober, v. 15); Lk. 18:9–14 (the Pharisee God, I thank thee that I am not as other men and the publican God be merciful to me a sinner — the two prayers of vv. 13–14); Jn. 8:12 (I am the light of the world — the title of v. 9); Jn. 14:6 (I am the way... no man cometh unto the Father, but by me — the exclusive salvation of v. 9); Acts 4:12 (neither is there salvation in any other — verbatim doctrine of v. 9); Acts 14:19 (Paul stoned for the word — Shiblon stoned for the word's sake, v. 4); 1 Cor. 9:25 (every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things — vv. 10, 12); Gal. 5:22–23 (the fruit of the Spirit: love... temperance — the bridled-passion-filled-with-love of v. 12); 1 Tim. 3:2 (a bishop must be sober... temperate — vv. 10, 15); James 1:26; 3:2–8 (he that bridleth not his tongue... this man's religion is vain; the bridled body — the master parallel to v. 12); James 3:13–18 (the wisdom from above is pure... peaceable... full of mercy, against bitter envying and strife — vv. 11–14); Mosiah 4:14–15 (Benjamin: teach your children to love one another, and to serve one another — the parental-counsel context); Alma 31:16–23 (the Rameumptom prayer Shiblon witnessed — the foil to vv. 13–14); Alma 36:6–20 (the full conversion Alma compresses for Shiblon in vv. 7–8); Alma 37:35 (learn wisdom in thy youth — the same counsel given Helaman, echoed at v. 9); Alma 39:1–4 (the contrast charge to Corianton that immediately follows — Shiblon's steadiness set against Corianton's straying); Alma 63:1–2, 11–13 (Shiblon proves the steadiness here praised, keeping the records faithfully and conferring them — the fruit of this charge); D&C 11:12 (to do good... to do justly, to walk humbly, to judge righteously... is of God — the temperate, humble walk of vv. 10–12); D&C 121:41–42 (persuasion, gentleness, love unfeigned, without hypocrisy — boldness not overbearance, v. 12). ``