
Alma 58 — He Did Speak Peace to Our Souls — Prayer, Long Waiting, and the Taking of Manti

Alma 58: the close of Helaman's epistle, recounting the latter end of the twenty-ninth year of the reign of the judges (the letter reaches Moroni in the thirtieth). The city of Manti cannot be decoyed — the Lamanites now remember Helaman's tricks — and is too strongly held to assault, so the Nephites must wait for reinforcements and provisions that come slowly and meagerly. Helaman's army endures many months of want, 'even until we were about to perish for the want of food,' receiving at last only two thousand men and a little food. Not knowing why so little help is sent, and fearing the judgments of God, they pour out their souls in prayer — and God answers, not by changing their circumstances but by speaking peace to their souls, granting them great faith, and causing them to hope for deliverance in him. Strengthened inwardly, they devise the campaign's third bloodless stratagem: a decoy that draws the whole Lamanite army out of Manti into the wilderness while hidden bands seize the empty city, so that Manti is taken 'without the shedding of blood.' The Lamanites flee the whole quarter, the lost cities are recovered, and families return home. Helaman closes by naming his fear that 'some faction in the government' explains the want of support — the first clear sounding of the internal crisis that Alma 60 and 61 will lay bare — and by testifying that his sons, though wounded, stand fast in the liberty wherewith God has made them free. He signs the letter: 'I am Helaman, the son of Alma.'

Helaman's epistle reaches its close in Alma 58, and the chapter is shaped by a hardship the previous two did not carry: not the hardship of battle, but the harder, slower hardship of *want* — of waiting, hungry and unsupported, for help that does not come. Manti, the last and strongest of the lost cities, cannot be taken by the methods that took the others. The Lamanites *remembered that which we had hitherto done; therefore we could not decoy them away* (v. 1); the enemy has learned. And Manti is too strongly held to storm. So the Nephites are reduced to waiting — *we did wait in these difficult circumstances for the space of many months, even until we were about to perish for the want of food* (v. 7). This is a different test than the desperate courage of the decoy battle. It is the test of endurance without relief, of faith held through a long, grinding deprivation with no enemy to charge and no victory in sight — only hunger, and the slow fear that they have been forgotten or, worse, that *the judgments of God* have come upon them (v. 9).

Hebrew Word Studies

dibber shalom (דִּבֶּר שָׁלוֹם) — "to speak peace" — **shalom** meaning not merely the absence of conflict but wholeness, soundness, completeness, well-being; **dibber**, to speak. To speak shalom is for God to pronounce, and thereby give, an inward wholeness and security vv. 10–11 (he did speak peace to our souls, and did grant unto us great faith). When Helaman says God *did speak peace to our souls*, he is using a phrase with deep roots in the Hebrew Bible — *dibber shalom*, "to speak peace" — and the phrase carries more than the English suggests. *Shalom* is one of the great words of scripture, and it does not mean primarily "the absence of war" (though it includes that); it means *wholeness, soundness, completeness, the condition of a life that is integrated and well*. To have *shalom* is to be whole — in body, in mind, in relationship with God and neighbor. And the striking thing about Alma 58 is that God speaks this *wholeness* into souls whose outward conditions are anything but whole: they are starving, cornered, unsupported, afraid. The *shalom* God gives is not a change in their circumstances but an inward wholeness granted *in spite of* their circumstances — exactly what *shalom* most deeply means, a soundness of soul that does not depend on the soundness of one's situation. The phrase *speak peace* has a precise scriptural home. Psalm 85 says, *I will hear what God the Lord will speak: for he will speak peace (yedabber shalom) unto his people, and to his saints* (Ps. 85:8) — God's characteristic word to his people is a word of *shalom*, spoken into their listening. And the prophets use *dibber shalom* for the true comfort of God set against the false comfort of those who *cry peace, peace, when there is no peace* (Jer. 6:14; 8:11). The difference is the speaker: when God speaks *shalom*, the peace is real, because his word creates what it pronounces. This is why Helaman can say the peace was *granted* alongside *great faith* and *hope* — when God speaks *shalom* to a soul, he does not merely describe a peace that exists elsewhere; he *gives* the wholeness in the speaking. The word does the thing. And the order of Helaman's verbs is the order of grace: God *speaks peace*, then *grants faith*, then *causes hope*, then — only then — the men *take courage* and act (v. 12). The whole chain begins with a word of *shalom* spoken by God into starving, frightened souls, making them whole enough on the inside to go and win the wholeness they had prayed for on the outside. The peace of God, the New Testament will say, *passeth all understanding and keeps the heart* (Phil. 4:7) — *shalom* spoken into the soul, guarding it in conditions that ought to destroy peace. Helaman knew that peace by name centuries early, and named the One who speaks it.

shaphakh nefesh (שָׁפַךְ נֶפֶשׁ) — "to pour out the soul" — **shaphakh**, to pour out, spill, empty (as one pours out a liquid); **nefesh**, the soul, the living self. To pour out one's nefesh in prayer is to empty the whole inner self before God, holding nothing back v. 10 (we did pour out our souls in prayer to God). The phrase *pour out our souls in prayer* is not a casual figure; it is a precise and ancient biblical idiom — *shaphakh nefesh*, "to pour out the soul" — and it names a particular kind of prayer, the prayer of the desperate who empty their whole inner self before God. Its origin is one of the most moving prayers in scripture: Hannah, barren and bitter of soul, prays at the tabernacle so fervently that Eli thinks her drunk, and she answers, *I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit... I have poured out my soul (eshpokh et-nafshi) before the Lord* (1 Sam. 1:15). To *pour out the soul* is to do what Hannah did — to bring the whole self, the grief and the fear and the need, and empty it out before God without reserve. The Psalms take up the phrase for the same kind of extremity: *I pour out my soul (eshpekhah... nafshi) in me* (Ps. 42:4); *trust in him at all times; ye people, pour out your heart before him* (Ps. 62:8); *I poured out my complaint before him* (Ps. 142:2). It is the prayer of those at the end of themselves. And the image is physical and total: *shaphakh* is the verb for pouring out a liquid until the vessel is empty — the same verb used for the pouring out of blood (Gen. 9:6) and the pouring out of water before the Lord (1 Sam. 7:6). To pour out the *nefesh* is to hold nothing back, to spill the entire contents of the inner self at God's feet. There is a quiet resonance with the chapter just before. In Alma 57 the sons *poured out their blood* — the vessel of the *nefesh* — and were kept alive; here, in Alma 58, the army *pours out its nefesh* in prayer, and is answered with peace. The same emptying, in two registers: the blood poured out in battle, the soul poured out in prayer, and in both the God who receives the pouring-out gives back life and peace. And the answer to the poured-out soul is exactly suited to it — they *empty* themselves before God, and God *fills* the emptied place, not with the provisions they asked for, but with *peace, faith, and hope*. The vessel poured out is the vessel God fills. This is the deep logic of desperate prayer: that the soul must be *emptied* — its fears and demands and self-sufficiency poured out — before it can be filled with the peace God waits to speak into it. The men who *poured out their souls* are the men into whose souls God could *speak peace*, because they had made room.

From the Chapter's Architecture

```cross-references Ps. 85:8 (*I will hear what God the Lord will speak: for he will speak peace — yedabber shalom — unto his people — the divine dibber shalom Helaman receives, he did speak peace to our souls, v. 11*); Jer. 6:14; 8:11 (*the false peace, peace, when there is no peace — set against the true peace God himself speaks*); 1 Sam. 1:15 (*I have poured out my soul — eshpokh et-nafshi — before the Lord — Hannah's phrase, the pour out our souls in prayer of v. 10*); Ps. 42:4; 62:8; 142:2 (*pour out your heart before him... I poured out my complaint — the prayer of the emptied soul*); Phil. 4:6–7 (*the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts — peace given in answer to prayer, guarding the soul in unchanged trouble, vv. 10–11*); Isa. 26:3 (*thou wilt keep him in perfect peace — shalom shalom — whose mind is stayed on thee — the inward peace of the trusting, granted amid affliction*); John 14:27 (*peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you... not as the world giveth — the peace Christ speaks, the peace Helaman's army received*); Gal. 5:1 (*stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free — the phrase Helaman reaches independently, they stand fast in that liberty wherewith God has made them free, v. 40*); 2 Cor. 4:8–9 (*troubled on every side, yet not distressed... persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed — kept through affliction, not out of it, the pattern of vv. 7–11*); Alma 53:9 (*the dissensions and intrigue among themselves — the danger Helaman now hears as a faction in the government, v. 36*); Alma 60:1–9 (*Moroni's epistle on the army's neglect — the faction Helaman suspected, named and denounced*); Alma 61:1–8 (*Pahoran's reply revealing the king-man rebellion in Zarahemla — the confirmation of Helaman's fear*); Alma 56:47; 57:21 (*the faith taught by the mothers and obeyed with exactness — sustained here to the campaign's faithful end, v. 40*); Alma 52:21; 55:16 (*the earlier bloodless stratagems at Mulek and Gid — completed by Manti without the shedding of blood, v. 28*). ```