

Alma 61 — The Greatness of Your Heart — Pahoran's Reply

Alma 61: Pahoran's answer to Moroni's epistle of condemnation. Far from the comfortable governor Moroni imagined, Pahoran writes as a man driven from the judgment-seat — overthrown by king-men who used 'great flattery' to lead away the hearts of the people, who have withheld the armies' provisions, daunted the freemen, seized the city of Zarahemla, appointed a king, and entered an alliance with the king of the Lamanites to conquer the whole land. Pahoran has fled to the land of Gideon with as many men as he could gather and is raising a force to retake the capital. To Moroni's scalding accusation he returns no anger at all: 'In your epistle you have censured me, but it mattereth not; I am not angry, but do rejoice in the greatness of your heart.' He declares that he seeks no power but to keep his judgment-seat and preserve his people's liberty, that he will resist evil 'even unto bloodshed' yet shed no blood needlessly, and that he would submit to bondage only if the justice of God required it. He calls Moroni his beloved brother, asks him to come quickly with a few men — leaving Lehi and Teancum in charge of the eastern war — and to gather what force he can on the march, so that together they may reclaim Zarahemla 'in the strength of the Lord.' It is one of the great answers in all of scripture: a wronged man who meets a false accusation not with self-defense but with magnanimity, and turns a censure into an alliance.

This is the reply, and it is one of the most beautiful letters ever written. Moroni has just sent Pahoran a blistering condemnation — accused him of sitting in *thoughtless stupor* on a comfortable throne while good men starve, hinted that he might be a traitor seeking power, threatened to march on Zarahemla and put him down by the sword. It is about as harsh a letter as one leader has ever sent another. And then Pahoran writes back, and the first thing you need to know about his reply is what is *not* in it. There is no defense. No wounded pride. No *how dare you*. No itemized rebuttal of the charges. A man who had every right to be furious — who had been gravely and publicly insulted by someone working from bad information — simply declines to be insulted. *In your epistle you have censured me, but it mattereth not; I am not angry, but do rejoice in the greatness of your heart* (v. 9).

Hebrew Word Studies

godel lev (גִּדְל לֵב) — "greatness of heart" — *godel*, greatness, magnitude, largeness; *lev*, the heart, understood in Hebrew as the seat not of emotion alone but of thought, will, courage, and character — the whole inner person. A "great heart" is a large soul: capacious, courageous, generous, not easily made small by injury v. 9 (I am not angry, but do rejoice in the greatness of your heart). When Pahoran says he rejoices in the *greatness of your heart*, the Hebrew behind it would be something like *godel lev* — and to feel what he means, you have to remember that in Hebrew the *lev*, the heart, is not mainly the place of feelings. It is the center of the whole inner person: the mind that thinks, the will that decides, the courage that acts, the character that endures. So a *great heart* is not a sentimental thing; it is a *large* inner person — large in courage, large in capacity, large in the room it has for other people and for great causes. Scripture uses the dimensions of the heart with real precision. Solomon is given *largeness of heart, even as the sand that is on the sea shore* (1 Kgs. 4:29) — a vastness of understanding. The heart can be *enlarged* with love (2 Cor. 6:11, *our heart is enlarged*) or made *wide* with generosity. And its opposite is the small, narrow, hard heart that has shrunk around its own grievances. Now watch what Pahoran is doing. Moroni has just wounded him badly and unfairly. The small-hearted response — the natural one — would be to let the injury shrink Pahoran's heart down around itself, to nurse the offense, to answer largeness of fury with smallness of pride. Instead Pahoran reads Moroni's very harshness as a sign of a *great* heart: only a soul that large, that committed, that full of love for its people, could burn that hot over their suffering. And here is the quiet marvel — *it takes a great heart to recognize one*. Pahoran could only see the greatness in Moroni's heart because his own was large enough to hold the insult without being diminished by it. A small heart, wronged, sees only the wrong. A great heart, wronged, can still see the greatness in the one who wronged it. So the phrase reveals two great hearts at once: Moroni's, large enough to rage over dying men; and Pahoran's, large enough to be falsely accused and answer with rejoicing. The word *godel*, greatness, names the magnitude of soul that refuses to let an injury make it smaller — and the whole letter of Alma 61 is what *godel lev* looks like when it picks up a pen.

over al pesha (עָשָׂה לֵעָוֹן) — "passing over a transgression" — *over*, to pass over, cross, overlook; *al*, over/upon; *pesha*, a transgression, rebellion, offense. The idiom names the deliberate choice to pass over an offense rather than seize on it — to let a wrong go by without answering it, treated in Hebrew wisdom not as weakness but as glory v. 9 (you have censured me, but it mattereth not; I am not angry). Pahoran's *it mattereth not* is the lived form of one of the most beautiful lines in Proverbs: *the discretion of a man deferreth his anger; and it is his glory to pass over a transgression* (Prov. 19:11). The Hebrew for to pass over a transgression is *over al pesha* — literally to cross over, to step past, an offense, the way you

would walk past something lying in the road rather than stopping to pick it up and carry it. And the stunning claim of the proverb is the word *glory*: it is a man's *glory*, his *tiph'eret*, his beauty and honor, to pass over an offense. The world says your honor is *defended* by answering every insult; the proverb says your honor is *displayed* by declining to. To overlook a wrong you had every right to resent is not to lose face — it is the very thing that makes a face worth looking at. This is exactly what Pahoran does with Moroni's censure. He does not deny it happened, does not pretend it was just, does not say it didn't hurt. He *passes over* it — *over al pesha* — steps across it as a thing too small to stop for, and keeps walking toward the cause and the brother on the far side of it. And the proverb's first half is just as much Pahoran: *the discretion of a man deferreth his anger*. He has anger available to him; any man would. But his *discretion* — his good sense about what actually matters — *defers* it, sets it aside, refuses to let it drive. The same wisdom runs through the tradition: *love covereth all sins* (Prov. 10:12); *he that covereth a transgression seeketh love; but he that repeateth a matter separateth very friends* (Prov. 17:9). Pahoran could have *repeated the matter* — rehearsed Moroni's offense, demanded an apology, separated two friends who needed each other desperately. Instead he *covers* it, and by covering it *seeks love* — and gets it, for the letter ends with Moroni's heart taking courage and the two men marching together. The New Testament gathers the whole principle into a sentence Pahoran would have recognized: *charity shall cover the multitude of sins* (1 Pet. 4:8). To pass over a transgression is not to pretend it wasn't one. It is to decide, in glory, that love matters more than being owed. That decision, made in half a verse — *it mattereth not* — is what saved the Nephite cause.

From the Chapter's Architecture

“cross-references Prov. 19:11 (*the discretion of a man deferreth his anger; and it is his glory to pass over a transgression — the wisdom Pahoran embodies in it mattereth not*, v. 9); Prov. 10:12 (*love covereth all sins — the covering of Moroni's offense rather than the repeating of it*); Prov. 17:9 (*he that covereth a transgression seeketh love; but he that repeateth a matter separateth very friends — the friendship Pahoran preserves by not rehearsing the wrong*); 1 Pet. 4:8 (*charity shall cover the multitude of sins — the New Testament seal on Pahoran's grace*, v. 9); 1 Kgs. 4:29 (*Solomon's largeness of heart, even as the sand... on the sea shore — the godel lev, greatness of heart, Pahoran names and shows*, v. 9); 2 Cor. 6:11 (*our heart is enlarged — the great, capacious heart that holds an injury without shrinking*); Matt. 5:9 (*blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God — Pahoran turning a censure into an alliance*); Rom. 12:19–21 (*avenge not yourselves... be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good — Pahoran overcoming Moroni's harshness with rejoicing*); Gal. 5:1 (*stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free — the phrase Pahoran reaches in v. 21, joining Helaman in Alma 58:40*); Alma 58:40 (*Helaman's they stand fast in that liberty wherewith God has made them free — the same covenant-freedom Pahoran invokes*); Alma 60:36 (*Moroni's I seek not for power, but to pull it down — answered by Pahoran's I do not seek for power, save only to retain my judgment-seat*, v. 9, revealing the two men as one heart); Alma 59:13 (*Moroni was angry with the government — the anger Pahoran refuses to return*); Alma 51:5–8 (*the king-men's origin — the rebellion now come to its worst form, the seizure of Zarahemla*, v. 8); Alma 46:11–20 (*the title of liberty and the covenant of the freemen — the freedom Pahoran defends in the strength of the Lord*, vv. 17–18). ”