
Alma 7 — The Condescension at Gideon — He Shall Take Upon Him Their Infirmities, That His Bowels May Be Filled with Mercy, That He May Know According to the Flesh How to Succor His People

Alma 7: still in the ninth year of the reign of the judges (c. 82 BC). Alma the Younger arrives at Gideon and finds a faithful Church, not the proud Church of Zarahemla. The sermon shifts from interrogation to instruction. Alma delivers the most developed Christological text in the pre-Christian Book of Mormon: the Son of God shall be born of Mary at Jerusalem, shall take upon him pains and sicknesses and infirmities and temptations, that his bowels may be filled with mercy, that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people. The sermon closes with the triad of faith, hope, and charity, and the bidding of peace.

Alma 7 is the Book of Mormon's master condescension-of-Christ chapter, and one of the most beloved Christological texts in all of scripture. Verses 11–13 — the prophecy that Christ would take upon Him not only the sins but the pains and sicknesses and infirmities of His people, that He might know *according to the flesh* how to succor them — is the foundational Latter-day Saint text on the empathetic Atonement. It is also among the most precise pre-Christian Nephite anticipations of the New Testament. Read carefully, the chapter does the work a New Testament epistle would later do for the saints of the Mediterranean: it tells a faithful people, in advance, who their Savior is and how He has chosen to save them.

Hebrew Word Studies

***rachamim* / *yada* / *cheled* (רַחֲמִים / יָדָעַ / חֵלֵד) — bowels of mercy, compassion / to know experientially / mortal lifetime, transient existence vv. 11–13.** The chapter's three Hebrew anchors of the condescension. *Rachamim* — *bowels of mercy* — is a plural noun whose singular is *rechem*, the womb. Biblical Hebrew locates the deepest felt emotion in the womb, the kind of pity that comes from the place where life is carried. When the chapter says Christ's *bowels* are to be *filled with mercy*, the precise Hebrew underneath is *rachamim malei* — the mercy that comes from the womb-place is to be filled to its fullness by the experience of bearing the pains of His people. The Greek New Testament translates *rachamim* as *splanchna* (bowels), the same noun behind Col. 3:12 and 1 Jn. 3:17. *Yada* — *to know experientially* — is the verb of Gen. 4:1's *Adam knew Eve*: knowledge by intimate union, not by mere observation. When the chapter twice says Christ will *know according to the flesh*, the underlying verb is *yada*. The chapter is the Book of Mormon's clearest text on the doctrine that Christ acquires by *yada*-knowledge what no observation from above could give Him. *Cheled* — *mortal lifetime, transient existence* — is the noun in Ps. 17:14 (*men of the world, anshei cheled*) and Ps. 39:5 (*mine age is as nothing before thee*). The chapter's *according to the flesh* shares the flavor of *cheled* — the transient, suffering realm Christ enters in order to know His people from within it.

From the Chapter's Architecture

Finally, the chapter is the cleanest pre-New-Testament echo chamber in the Book of Mormon. The Lamb of God, the only-begotten full of grace and truth, the easily doth beset us of Hebrews, the faith-hope-charity triad of First Corinthians, the sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob of the Olivet sayings — all appear here in their pre-Christian Nephite form. The chapter is one of the strongest scriptural witnesses that the Book of Mormon and the New Testament are not two unrelated streams but two channels carrying the same water.