

Mosiah 18 — Waters of Mormon — The Baptismal Covenant, the Mourning-with-Them-that-Mourn, and the First Nephite Church

Mosiah 18: Alma teaches in private; gathers believers at the fountain of Mormon in a forest; delivers the BoM's master-baptismal-covenant; baptizes Helam first, then 204 souls; founds the Nephite Church of Christ; ordains priests; teaches the pattern of mourn-with-them-that-mourn; King Noah discovers and sends army; the Lord warns; 450 flee into the wilderness; c. 147 BC.

Mosiah 18 is the BoM's-master-chapter of the founding-of-the-Nephite-Church and-the master-articulation of-the-baptismal-covenant. Alma, who-believed-and-fled-with-the-record in-Mosiah 17:4, now-emerges from-hiding to-teach in-secret. Believers gather; the meeting-place is the place of Mormon, the waters of Mormon, the forest of Mormon (v. 4); the chapter names this place over-and-over because the BoM-itself-is-named after-it — Mormon-the-fourth-century-redactor was-named for-this-place, and-the-record we-call-by-his-name therefore carries-the-name-of-the-fountain-where Alma-baptized. The chapter delivers vv. 8–10 — the BoM's-most-recited-covenant-formula, the one-baptismal-charge that-LDS-converts have-recited-at-the-water's-edge for nearly-two-centuries. The chapter ends-with-flight: Noah's-army discovers-the-meeting, the Lord-warns, and 450 souls escape-into-the-wilderness.

Load-Bearing Texts

1. vv. 8–9. *if ye are desirous to come into the fold of God, and to be called his people, and are willing to bear one another's burdens, that they may be light; yea, and are willing to mourn with those that mourn; yea, and comfort those that stand in need of comfort, and to stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all things, and in all places that ye may be in, even until death* — the chapter's-master five-fold baptismal-covenant catalog
2. v. 10. *what have you against being baptized in the name of the Lord, as a witness before him that ye have entered into a covenant with him, that ye shall serve him and keep his commandments, that he may pour out his Spirit more abundantly upon you?* — the chapter's-master question-of-the-water
3. v. 11. *they clapped their hands for joy, and exclaimed: This is the desire of our hearts* — the chapter's-master Spirit-confirmed-yes
4. v. 13. *having authority from the Almighty God... I baptize thee, having authority from the Almighty God, as a testimony that ye have entered into a covenant to serve him until you are dead as to the mortal body* — the chapter's-master baptismal-formula
5. v. 21. *and he commanded them that there should be no contention one with another, but that they should look forward with one eye, having one faith and one baptism, having their hearts knit together in unity and in love one towards another* — the chapter's-master Zion-of-one-eye statement
6. vv. 27–28. *and they should impart of their substance, of their own free will and good desires towards God, and to those priests that stood in need, yea, and to every needy, naked soul* — the chapter's-master imparted-substance doctrine
7. v. 30. *and how blessed are they, for they shall sing to his praise forever* — the chapter's-master place-of-Mormon doxology

Hebrew Word Studies

nasa / *avel* / *chesed* (נָסָא / אָוֵל / חֶסֶד) — **to lift, bear, carry / to mourn, lament / loyal love, covenant-loyalty, mercy** vv. 8–9. The chapter's baptismal-covenant triad. *Nasa* — *to lift, bear, carry* — the verb behind Isa. 53:4's *surely he hath borne (nasa) our griefs*; *avel* — *to mourn, lament* — the verb behind Isa. 61:2's *to comfort all that mourn (avelim)*; *chesed* — *loyal love, covenant-loyalty, mercy* — the noun-pair with *emet* (truth) in the Hebrew-Bible's-most-loaded covenant-vocabulary, behind Ps. 23:6's-*surely-goodness-and-mercy*. The doctrine: the baptismal-covenant is to-*nasa*-burdens, to-*avel*-with-mourners, and to-show-*chesed* in-comforting; the three-Hebrew-verbs name-the-disciple's-three-acts. Same *nasa-avel-chesed* grammar as Isa. 53:4; Isa. 61:1–3; Mic. 6:8 — *what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy (chesed), and to walk humbly with thy God*; Rom. 12:15 — *rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep (avel) with them that weep*. The Restoration's D&C 81:5 — *succor the weak, lift up the hands which hang down, and strengthen the feeble knees* — is the chapter's-clearest cross-reference, the same covenant-content articulated to-Frederick-G.-Williams in-1832. The chapter is the BoM's clearest articulation of the *nasa-avel-chesed* baptismal-covenant doctrine — the threefold-act that-makes-the-baptized.

From the Chapter's Architecture

The chapter is also the BoM's-most-direct verbal-parallels to Acts 2-4 and-to Ephesians 4. The 204-souls-baptized (v. 16) parallels Acts 2:41's-3,000-souls; the one-eye-one-faith-one-baptism (v. 21) parallels Eph. 4:5; the graduated-giving (v. 27) parallels Acts 4:34-35 and 2 Cor. 8:13-15; the priests-labor-with-own-hands (v. 24) parallels Acts 18:3 and 1 Thess. 4:11. The chapter is one of the BoM's-most-Acts-resonant texts.