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The Restoration of Plain and Precious Parts: The Book of Helaman

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Monte S. Nyman

In a revelation commemorating the organization of the Church, the Lord revealed that one of the major purposes of the Book of Mormon was to prove “to the world that the holy scriptures are true” (D&C 20:11). Throughout the Book of Mormon there are restorations of plain and precious parts that have been lost from the Bible, and further teachings from it also verify several other biblical passages and teachings. However, the specific focus in this chapter is the restorations and verifications found in the book of Helaman.

There are four separate areas of Bible study where the book of Helaman restores and/or verifies the biblical text: (1) personages and incidents; (2) prophets; (3) prophecies; and (4) New Testament principles that were originally taught in the Old Testament. These four areas will be examined below.

Biblical Personages and Incidents

In today’s world of sophisticated “intellectualism,” often-times critics cast doubt upon the existence of certain biblical characters, particularly those who lived during the first few thousand years of the Old Testament. By questioning the existence of the characters, the critics also question the incidents

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recorded about these characters, often referring to them as only myths and legends of an ancient people. However, many of the modern critics' "myths and legends" about biblical personages and incidents are verified throughout the Book of Mormon, including the book of Helaman. Let me illustrate.

The Interpreter's Bible, considered a standard work by many modern Bible scholars, states the following on Adam and Eve: "The idea of man being created in the image of God is probably dependent on Babylonian mythology" (1:484). Concerning their fall it explains: "The story in this chapter of man's disobedience to God's command and of his expulsion from the garden to a life of toil is dependent upon an ancient myth. . . . A fragment of this myth is now preserved in [Gen 3] vs. 22" (1:501).

The book of Helaman, however, gives us a different view about Adam and Eve. As Mormon abridged the larger plates, he recorded that Satan "did entice our first parents to partake of the forbidden fruit" (6:26). This reference is only one of many in modern scripture confirming the doctrine that Adam and Eve were the head of the entire human family (see 2 Nephi 2:15–20; 9:21; D&C 84:16; Moses 1:34; 3:7; 4:26; Abr 1:3). The Book of Mormon also verifies their fall in the Garden of Eden, another doctrine questioned as being mythological by the critics in our present world (see 1 Nephi 10:6; 2 Nephi 2:19; Mosiah 3:19; Alma 12:22).

A second reference to Adam in the book of Helaman is equally revealing. In the great sermon Samuel the Lamanite delivered from the walls of Zarahemla, he testified that Christ "redeemeth all mankind from the first death—that spiritual death; for all mankind, *by the fall of Adam* being cut off from the presence of the Lord, are considered as dead, both as to things temporal and to things spiritual" (Hel 14:16; emphasis added). This is one of the most significant passages in the Book of Mormon regarding the unconditional atonement of Jesus Christ and verifies Adam as a character in the beginning of the world.

The book of Helaman also verifies the second major incident of the book of Genesis—the murder of Abel by his brother Cain. Regarding this incident, *The Interpreter's Bible* comments that Genesis 4:19–22

embody, however, as will be shown below, a tradition quite independent of this tale; i.e., in its origin the story of the crime of Cain was told with reference to the existence of some subnomad group, regarded—whether correctly or not—as so squalid that it was understood as being the result only of some heinous crime committed by one of their ancestors. The fact that this ancestor bears the name of Cain suggests that the group was of Kenite extraction. . . . the Kenites were in origin a clan of Israel's hated enemies, the Amalekites, and suggests, it would seem fairly, that the story in vss. 3-12 reflects Israel's opinion of them. (1:520)

In the context of stating that Satan is the father of secret combinations, Mormon records:

Yea, that same being who did plot with Cain, that if he would murder his brother Abel it should not be known unto the world. And he did plot with Cain and his followers from that time forth. (Hel 6:27)

Thus, the book of Helaman validates the tragic story of Cain's taking the life of his righteous brother Abel and notes that the act resulted from a plot between Cain and Satan.

The biblical story of the tower of Babel is another biblical narrative that many modern critics consider as “a naive answer [of language differences]. The facts were not so simple. Differences of languages developed over long periods of time as various groups of the human race went through the separate phases of their existence” (*Interpreter's Bible* 1:562). In the book of Helaman, once more in the context of secret combinations, Mormon records:

And also it is that same being [Satan] who put it into the hearts of the people to build a tower sufficiently high that they might get to heaven. And it was that same being who led on the people who came from that tower into this land; who spread the works of darkness and abominations over all the face of the land, until he dragged the people down to an entire destruction, and to an everlasting hell. (Hel 6:28)

Not only is the incident verified, but Satan's involvement in this attempt to reach heaven by relying on the arm of man is also verified. While Satan's influence may be inferred in the biblical account, it is clearly stated by Mormon. Not only does the book of Helaman confirm all three of the above incidents, the fall of Adam and Eve, the covenant with Cain, and the building of the Tower of Babel, it also confirms the reality of Satan, a concept that Nephi said would be challenged in the day when the Book of Mormon came forth (see 2 Nephi 28:22).

The biblical personages, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are almost an inseparable trio of patriarchs in traditional Christianity. Instead of recognizing them as the personages with whom God made and continued his covenant, modern critics have cleverly sought to separate them and question their historicity. These critics explain that each culture has its hero, real or imagined and these three men existed separately in different geographical locations. With the mergence of the various cultures, the legendary hero of each area was also merged. The *Interpreter's Bible* notes that Abraham was the hero of Hebron:

The central human figure in the tradition of *Hebron* was Abraham, venerated as the founder of the sanctuary and as the father of the community. (1:442)

It says that Isaac was the hero of Beer-sheba, fulfilling

much the same role as that filled by Abraham at Hebron. So long as the communities of Hebron and Beer-sheba had remained separate and distinct, with no consciousness of a common past, the fact that they had different fathers would cause no difficulty. But once Isaac came to be venerated as father by the Israelites who settle in the vicinity of Beer-sheba, the question of his relationship to the father of the Israelite community at Hebron was bound to be raised. This question [was] answered by making Isaac the son promised to Abraham as a reward for his hospitality to Yahweh when he visited Hebron incognito. . . . (1:442)

And it states that Jacob was the hero of the east-Jordan community:

It was therefore necessary for Jacob, who had already come to be known as the *father of the east-Jordan* Israelite community . . . to be made the son of Isaac. But according to the legend ([Gen] 25:21–26) Jacob was not the first-born of his father; that role was filled by Esau, his twin; and *Esau was traditionally the father of the Edomites*. To account for the fact that not Esau but Jacob had inherited the divine promise to Abraham, [a redactor or an editor] adapted *a folk tale to make it an account of how Esau sold his birthright to Jacob*. (443; emphasis added)

To satisfy all of the merging communities, the above source suggests that the heroes were all recognized and arbitrarily put into a patriarchal order. The order was insignificant.

However, the names of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are mentioned extensively throughout the Book of Mormon, and the book of Helaman affirms their historicity as three pillars of the Old Testament. In its third chapter, Mormon inserts three of his editorial comments each introduced with a “we see,” phrase directed to future readers (Hel 3:27–30). In the last comment, Mormon testified that those who would “lay hold of the word of God [would] land their immortal souls, at the right hand of God in the kingdom of heaven, to sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and with Jacob, and with all our holy fathers, to go no more out” (vv 29–30), reminding us that they have an eternal residence in the kingdom of God. Another witness of Abraham was given by Nephi, son of Helaman, who testified that “Abraham saw of [Christ’s] coming, and was filled with gladness and did rejoice” (Hel 8:17). This statement parallels Christ’s words in John 8:56 that “Abraham rejoiced to see my day; and he saw it with gladness and did rejoice.”

Probably the most oft-mentioned biblical character in the Book of Mormon, other than Jesus, is Moses, but *The Interpreter’s Bible* attributes Moses’ existence to oral traditions—tribal or hero sagas.

Such sagas, with Moses as hero, formed the basis of Exodus . . . It may be that such noncultic and “local” oral traditions were gradually absorbed with their themes by the more formally controlled universal tradition. Or . . . it is possible that the originally minor role of Moses was developed wholly within the context of the oral tradition. In

either case it is safe to say that Moses is not the “hero” of Exodus. (1:834-35)

The many Book of Mormon references show that Moses was not just a mythical folk hero of Egypt, but a true biblical prophet. The book of Helaman confirms the reality of Moses and verifies several of the incidents related to his ministry on earth. Nephi, the Son of Helaman, referred to the power the Lord had given Moses to part the Red Sea.

Therefore he was constrained to speak more unto them saying: Behold, my brethren, have ye not read that God gave power unto one man, even Moses, to smite upon the waters of the Red Sea, and they parted hither and thither, insomuch that the Israelites, who were our fathers, came through upon dry ground, and the waters closed upon the armies of the Egyptians and swallowed them up? (Hel 8:11; compare Ex 14:16-27)

He further testified of Moses lifting up the serpent in the wilderness (see Numbers 21:4–9) as a testimony of the coming of the Messiah.

Yea, did he not bear record that the Son of God should come? And as he lifted up the brazen serpent in the wilderness, even so shall he be lifted up who should come.

And as many as should look upon that serpent should live, even so as many as should look upon the Son of God with faith, having a contrite spirit, might live, even unto that life which is eternal. (Hel 8:14–15)

Nephi’s testimony is only one of several in the Book of Mormon about Moses and the serpent (see 1 Nephi 17:41; Alma 33:19–20; 37:46). That incident is also mentioned in the New Testament (see John 3:14) and the Apocrypha (see Wisdom of Solomon 16:5–8), and the Book of Mormon supports John, who connects this incident with the Messiah.

Other references in the book of Helaman refer to the law of Moses (13:1; 15:5). The Book of Mormon confirms the fact that the Nephites lived the law of Moses until Jesus said it was fulfilled when he visited them after his resurrection in Jerusalem (see 3 Nephi 9:17; 15:28). However, they observed only the

outward ordinance because it brought them to Christ (see 2 Nephi 25:24–25; Alma 25:15). Moses was known to the Nephites as a real personage to whom the Lord had given a law that was to be added to the gospel (see *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* 160; hereafter *TPJS*).

Thus, the book of Helaman verifies the reality of biblical personages and incidents related to them. It further adds significant knowledge that Jesus Christ and his gospel were known in Old Testament times.

Bible Prophets

Nephi, son of Helaman, proclaimed that “all the holy prophets, from [Moses’] days even to the days of Abraham” had testified of the Son of God (Hel 8:16). He said further that “Abraham not only knew of these things, but there were many before the days of Abraham who were called by the order of God; yea, even after the order of his Son; and this that it should be shown unto the people, a great many thousand years before his coming, that even redemption should come unto them” (v 18). Nephi then described several of the prophets who had testified of Christ since the days of Abraham. He declared that:

... the prophet Zenos did testify boldly; for the which he was slain.

And behold, also Zenock, and also Ezias, and also Isaiah, and Jeremiah, (Jeremiah being that same prophet who testified of the destruction of Jerusalem) and now we know that Jerusalem was destroyed according to the words of Jeremiah. O then why not the Son of God come, according to his prophecy? (vv 19–20).

Zenos, Zenock, and Ezias were prophets whose writings were found on the Plates of Brass but have been lost from the Old Testament. Their words are a part of the “plain and precious” things spoken of by Nephi that have been lost from the record “of the twelve apostles of the Lamb” (1 Nephi 13:24–29, 40). These prophets were descendants of Joseph, they testified of the Son of God, and sealed their testimonies with their blood. We

look forward to the time when other manuscripts come forward and verify these restored losses from the Bible.

Most importantly, all of the prophets throughout history testified of Christ. As Jacob, brother of Nephi, bore witness, “none of the prophets have written, nor prophesied, save they have spoken concerning this Christ” (Jacob 7:11). The prophet Zenos testified of the time of the Savior’s death and of all the earth eventually seeing the salvation of the Lord (1 Nephi 19:10–17). He gave the great allegory of the house of Israel (Jacob 5), the longest chapter in the Book of Mormon. This allegory shows us that the stone (Christ) upon which the Jews could have built a sure foundation was rejected by them, but that Christ would “become the great, and the last, and the only sure foundation, upon which the Jews can build” (Jacob 4:15–18). He also testified of how Christ would hear our prayers, turn away our afflictions, and bring redemption (Alma 33:3–11; 34:7). His prophecies were great and powerful. In the words of Elder Bruce R. McConkie:

I do not think I overstate the matter when I say that next to Isaiah himself—who is the prototype, pattern, and model for all the prophets—there was not a greater prophet in all Israel than Zenos. And our knowledge of his inspired writings is limited to the quotations and paraphrasing summaries found in the Book of Mormon. (17)

Zenock and Ezias were quoted primarily as second witnesses to Zenos, but their prophecies may also have been just as lengthy as Zenos’. The Book of Mormon may give us just the tip of the iceberg of these prophecies, but we should relish what we have.

Bible Prophecies

The book of Helaman verifies a number of Bible prophecies and calls attention to others that were once in the Bible but were among the plain and precious parts lost as foreseen by Nephi (1 Nephi 13:24–29). Nephi, son of Helaman, identified Jeremiah as “that same prophet who testified of the

destruction of Jerusalem” (Hel 8:20). This Jeremiah prophesied just prior to Lehi’s party leaving Jerusalem about 600 BC. They would have known of Jeremiah’s prophecies. The book of Jeremiah records many of his prophecies concerning the destruction of Jerusalem (see Jer 1:13–16; 4:27–29; 5:14–20; 7:32–34; 8:1–22). The significance of Jeremiah’s prophecies being known and spoken of among the Nephites about six hundred years after they were given is twofold: first, that the Nephites came to their promised land just prior to the fulfillment of Jeremiah’s prophecies; and second, how they knew that Jeremiah’s prophecies had been fulfilled. The second point needs further analysis.

The first way that the Nephites knew that Jeremiah’s prophecies had been fulfilled was through a vision given to father Lehi showing that Jerusalem had been destroyed (2 Nephi 1:4). Later, the righteous Nephites in journeying north, discovered the people of Zarahemla (Omni 1:12–14). These people had left “Jerusalem at the time that Zedekiah, king of Judah, was carried away captive into Babylon” just prior to the destruction of Jerusalem (Omni 1:15). Among these people was one of Zedekiah’s sons named Mulek (Hel 8:21). Thus, the Nephites had a spiritual witness (vision) and a physical one that Jerusalem had been destroyed as prophesied by Jeremiah.

The contribution of the above passage in Helaman verifies and clarifies a number of Bible prophecies concerning the Mulekites, a Book of Mormon people who lived in America after the time of Jerusalem’s destruction about 589 BC (Book of Mormon dating). The first reference to Mulek is made in Mosiah 25:2 regarding the people Zarahemla who [were] descendants of “Mulek, and those who came with him into the wilderness.” The next reference to Mulek is a comment by Mormon, identifying the land north being “called Mulek, which was after the son of Zedekiah” (Hel 6:10). Nephi’s comment, cited previously, that all of Zedekiah’s sons were slain except Mulek (8:21), seems to contradict the Bible since both Jeremiah and the author of Kings states that all of Zedekiah’s sons were

killed (Jer 39:6; 2 Kings 25:6–7). However, there are two Bible prophecies that would sustain the idea that some of Zedekiah’s seed did escape the conquest of Babylon in 589 BC (Book of Mormon dating).

The Lord gave Ezekiel a parable concerning the king of Judah and his seed being taken into Babylon (Ezek 17:1–21). As an apparent addendum to this prophecy the Lord said:

Thus saith the Lord God; I will also take of the highest branch of the high cedar, and will set *it*; I will crop off from the top of his young twigs a tender one, and will plant *it* upon an high mountain and eminent:

In the mountain of the height of Israel will I plant it: and it shall bring forth boughs, and bear fruit, and be a goodly cedar: and under it shall dwell all fowl of every wing; in the shadow of the branches thereof shall they dwell (vv 22–23).

Elder Orson Pratt, who himself had a special gift of prophecy (D&C 34:10), interpreted these verses as a prophecy concerning the Mulekites:

When Zedekiah, king of Judah, was carried away captive into Babylon, the Lord took one of his sons, whose name was Mulok [sic.], with a company of those who would hearken unto His words, and brought them over the ocean, and planted them in America. This was done in fulfillment of the 22nd and 23rd verses of the seventeenth chapter of Ezekiel . . . By reading this chapter, it will be seen that the Jews were the “high cedar,” that Zedekiah the king was the “highest branch,” that the “tender one” cropped off from the top of his young twigs, was one of his sons, whom the Lord brought out and planted him and his company upon the choice land of America, which He had given unto a remnant of the tribe of Joseph for an inheritance, in fulfillment of the blessing of Jacob and Moses upon the head of that tribe. (280-81)

The last phrase of the Ezekiel prophecy “in the shadow of the branches thereof shall they dwell” (17:23) may be an allusion to their dwelling with the Nephites and Lamanites, the branches of Joseph who were to run over the wall to the utmost bound of the everlasting hills of America (Gen 49:22–26).

Further evidence that the young son Mulek escaped from Jerusalem is found in the writings of the Jewish historian Josephus:

when Zedekiah was sensible of it, he took his wives and his children, and his captains and friends, and with them fled out of the city, through the fortified ditch, and through the desert; and when certain of the deserters had informed the Babylonians of this, at break of day, they made haste to pursue after Zedekiah, and overtook him not far from Jericho, and encompassed him about. But for those friends and captains of Zedekiah who had fled out of the city with him, when they saw their enemies near them, they left him and dispersed themselves, some one way and some another, and every one resolved to save himself; so the enemy took Zedekiah alive, when he was deserted by all but a few, with his children and his wives, and brought him to the king. (220)

This account by Josephus can be read as indicating that one of Zedekiah's young sons could have escaped to America. Another evidence that Mulek was a son of Zedekiah is the name Mulek. The Hebrew letters, written, without vowels (or points—as called in the Hebrew), “mem,” “lamet,” “koph,” whose equivalent in English is “mlk,” means king. The English equivalent that includes vowels is thus “mulek.”

There is another prophecy of the Mulekites in Isaiah, although it does not specifically say the remnant who escaped had the son of Zedekiah among them. In answer to king Hezekiah's prayer, the Lord sent Isaiah to him to calm his concern about the threats of Assyria. In addition, an angel made a prediction concerning the Mulekites:

And the remnant that is escaped of the house of Judah shall again take root downward, and bear fruit upward;

For out of Jerusalem shall go forth a remnant; and they that escape out of *Jerusalem shall come up upon* mount Zion; the zeal of the Lord of hosts shall do this. (JST Isaiah 37:31–32; emphasis added)

Since this prophecy is about a remnant of the house of Judah that escapes, it seems to be a prophecy of the Mulekites rather than one about the Nephites who were of Joseph. It notes that they would come to Mount Zion, which was identified by

the Prophet Joseph as “*the whole of America is Zion itself from north to south, and is described by the Prophets*” (TPJS 362). Thus, through the book of Helaman we can verify Bible prophecies of the Mulekites and clarify other biblical passages regarding the Mulekites.

Another verification in the book of Helaman of Bible prophecies concerns the Lamanites. According to Samuel the Lamanite, Zenos and many other Old Testament prophets foretold

the restoration of our brethren, the Lamanites, again to the knowledge of the truth Yea, I say unto you, that in the latter times the promises of the Lord have been extended to our brethren, the Lamanites; and notwithstanding the many afflictions which they shall have, and notwithstanding they shall be driven to and fro upon the face of the earth, and be hunted, and shall be smitten and scattered abroad, having no place for refuge, the Lord shall be merciful unto them.

And this is according to the prophecy, that they shall again be brought to the true knowledge, which is the knowledge of their Redeemer, and their great and true shepherd, and be numbered among his sheep. (Hel 15:11–13)

Although there are many prophecies throughout the Book of Mormon that the Lamanites will be blessed in the latter days, this one in the book of Helaman is attributed to having been originally recorded on the plates of brass or the Bible. It further verifies Nephi’s declaration that many biblical prophets knew of the Nephites (1 Nephi 19:21). Thus, we have further evidence that plain and precious parts have been lost from the record of the Jews. The book of Helaman is once again a source that restores some of those missing parts.

New Testament Principles Taught in the Old Testament

Many principles found in the New Testament were originally taught in the Old Testament. Some of these principles are also taught throughout the Book of Mormon and are further

evidence that the plain and precious parts have been lost from the Bible. We will consider three of these principles which are taught in the book of Helaman.

The Sermon on the Mount, as Matthew chapters 5–7 are designated today, concludes with a comparison of the wise man building upon the rock and the foolish building upon a sandy foundation (7:24–27). The nearly identical sermon given by Jesus to the Nephites in AD 34 is prefaced with an admonition to build upon the rock of Christ so that the gates of hell will not prevail against it (3 Nephi 11:39–40). It seems possible that the Matthew account could have had a similar preface which has been lost. The book of Helaman shows that this concept was known among the Nephites before they were ever visited by the Savior. Helaman told his two sons, Nephi and Lehi:

And now, my sons, remember, remember that it is upon the rock of our Redeemer, who is Christ, the Son of God, that ye must build your foundation; that when the devil shall send forth his mighty winds, yea, his shafts in the whirlwind, yea, when all his hail and his mighty storm shall beat upon you, it shall have no power over you to drag you down to the gulf of misery and endless wo, because of the rock upon which ye are built, which is a sure foundation, a foundation whereon if men build they cannot fall. (Hel 5:12)

Furthermore, he also admonished them “to lay up for yourselves a treasure in heaven, yea, which is eternal, and which fadeth not away” (Hel 5:8, see also 8:25). This concept is also a part of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5:19–20). Apparently these parts of the sermon and others (for example compare 2 Nephi 32:4 and Matt 7:7) were once included in the Old Testament since Helaman had a copy of part of the Old Testament inscribed on the plates of brass. Could it be that Jesus was quoting from other revelations he had given to Old Testament or Nephite prophets when he gave these two great sermons on the Mount of Beatitudes and in Bountiful? It seems possible that he was.

Nephi, son of Helaman, was given power over the Nephite people and over the earth. The Lord told him “Behold, I give unto you power, that whatsoever ye shall seal on earth shall be

sealed in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven; and thus shall ye have power among this people” (Hel 10:7). New Testament students will recognize these words as almost identical to those in Matthew 16:19 and 18:18. It is likely that such power would have been given to faithful prophets in the Old Testament as well as apostles of the New Testament. The near identical wording between the Matthew and book of Helaman accounts would seem to suggest that the original Old Testament may have recorded such promises.

As Mormon abridged the records into the book of Helaman, he gave this alternative promise to the Nephites:

And I would that all men might be saved. But we read that in the great and last day there are some who shall be cast out, yea, who shall be cast off from the presence of the Lord;

Yea, who shall be consigned to a state of endless misery, fulfilling the words which say: They that have done good shall have everlasting life; and they that have done evil shall have everlasting damnation. And thus it is. Amen. (Hel 12:25–26)

Since Mormon was writing around AD 385, he may have been quoting from the record of Jesus’ visit to the Nephites. We note that he says, “But we read” and “fulfilling the words that say.” The above passage in the book of Helaman is close to the words of John 5:29, which inspired Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon to seek fuller understanding and to receive the vision of the three degrees of glory (D&C 76:15–19). While Mormon may have been reading from the Nephites records of Jesus’ speeches, he could also have been reading from the plates of brass. Certainly the doctrine of the resurrection was known among the Nephites long before Christ visited them (2 Nephi 9:10–13; Mosiah 3:10; 15:20–27; Alma 11:40–45). It was also taught in the Old Testament, but it is more difficult to identify in our present Bible (see 1 Sam 2:6; Isa 26:19; Ezek 37:1–14; Hosea 13:14). Undoubtedly the Resurrection was once clearly taught to the ancient prophets in Palestine as well as those in the Americas.

Conclusion

The Book of Mormon does indeed prove that the holy scriptures are true (D&C 20:11). It restores many of the plain and precious parts that were lost from the Bible (1 Nephi 13:23–29). The book of Helaman makes a significant contribution to this overall function of the Book of Mormon. It verifies and clarifies biblical personages and incidents. It sustains Bible prophets and prophecies, and illustrates the use of New Testament principles known and taught in the Old Testament. We would do well to analyze the teachings of Helaman in this light.

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