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The Book of Mormon: Helaman Through 3 Nephi 8, According to Thy Word

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Abstract: “All things shall be done unto thee according to thy word, for thou shalt not ask that which is contrary to my will.” This was the Lord’s glorious promise to Nephi, son of Helaman. The general wickedness that prevailed in much of Nephite society during Nephi’s day was in stark contrast to his exemplary faithfulness. Why was this so? How did the people’s decline come about so rapidly? What specific messages do the book of Helaman and the early chapters of 3 Nephi contain for our day? Seventeen symposium papers collected in this volume address these and other issues related to events and conditions among the Nephites and the Lamanites during the eighty or so years prior to the Savior’s appearance on the American continent. Contributors not only discuss great doctrinal teachings of stalwarts like Nephi, Samuel the Lamanite, and Mormon but also provide detailed analyses of how and why the Nephites moved from a condition of righteousness to one of wickedness during this critical period in their history.



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The Book of Mormon:

HELAMAN
*Through 3 Nephi 8,
According
To Thy Word*

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The Book of Mormon:
HELAMAN
Through 3 Nephi 8,
According
To Thy Word

Papers from the Seventh Annual
Book of Mormon Symposium, 1992

Edited by Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate, Jr.



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Jesus the Christ—Our Master and More

1

Elder Russell M. Nelson

Tonight's meeting concludes the annual Book of Mormon Symposium which has focused intensively on the book of Helaman and the first eight chapters of 3 Nephi. I find it intriguing that scholars can feast for days on a banquet based on fewer than sixty printed pages. It is somewhat reminiscent of another phenomenon that I have also found to be most fascinating. I once regularly attended meetings of the American Heart Association, mingling with thousands of fellow scientists from many institutions and diverse disciplines, all congregated to learn more about the human heart. Surely God's gifts are great, and their importance is infinite. How blessed we are to be recipients of His word and of His works.

My lifelong interest in the human heart took an unexpected turn in April 1984, when I was called to leave the operating room of the hospital and enter the upper room of the temple. There I became an ordained Apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ. I did not seek such a call, but have humbly tried to be worthy of that trust and privilege of being His representative, now hoping to mend hearts spiritually as I previously did surgically.

So I come to you as one who has been called, sustained, and ordained—one of the twelve special witnesses of our Lord and Master. In speaking with you, I sense our mutual desire and sacred responsibility to follow this vital theme from the Book

Elder Russell M. Nelson is a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

of Mormon: “We talk of Christ, we rejoice in Christ, we preach of Christ, [and] we prophesy of Christ” (2 Nephi 25:26).

We honor Him as the most important individual ever to live on planet earth. He is Jesus the Christ—our Master and more. He has numerous names, titles, and responsibilities, all of eternal significance (see Ludlow). The Topical Guide under the heading “Jesus Christ” has 18 pages (240–58) filled with references listed under 57 subheadings. In the time allotted we could not fully consider or comprehend all of these important facets of His life. But this evening, I would like to review, even briefly, ten of those mighty responsibilities of Jesus the Christ. I will not number these responsibilities—not wanting to imply any order of priority—because all that He accomplished was equally supernal in scope.

Creator

Under the direction of the Father, Jesus bore the responsibility of CREATOR. His title was *the Word*—spelled with a capital *W*. In the Greek language of the New Testament, that *Word* was *Logos* (Λογος), or “divine Expression.” It was another name for the Master. That terminology may seem strange, but it is so reasonable. We use words to convey our expression to others. So Jesus was the “Word” or “Expression” of His Father to the world. The Gospel of John begins with this important proclamation: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made” (John 1:1–3; see also D&C 93:21).

The book of Helaman records similar testimony declaring that “Jesus Christ [is] . . . the Creator of all things from the beginning” (Hel 14:12). Another clarifying quotation came from

the Lord God [who] said unto Moses: For mine own purpose have I made these things. . . . And by the word of my power, have I created

them, which is mine Only Begotten Son, who is full of grace and truth. And worlds without number have I created; and I also created them for mine own purpose; and by the Son I created them, which is mine Only Begotten (Moses 1:31–33).

In modern revelation, Jesus' responsibility as Creator of many worlds is again affirmed:

Therefore, in the beginning the Word was, for he was the Word, even the messenger of salvation—The light and the Redeemer of the world; the Spirit of truth, who came into the world, because the world was made by him, and in him was the life of men and the light of men. The worlds were made by him; men were made by him; all things were made by him, and through him (D&C 93:8–10; see also Heb 1:2; 1 Cor 8:6; 2 Nephi 9:5; 3 Nephi 9:15; D&C 76:23–24; 88:42–48; 101:32–34).

This hallowed Creator provided that each of us may have a physical body, uniquely individual, yet in many respects comparable to every other human body. Just as a well-educated musician can recognize the composer of a symphony by its style and structure, so a well-educated surgeon can recognize the creator of human beings by the similarity of style and structure of our anatomy. Individual variations notwithstanding, this similarity provides additional evidence and deep spiritual confirmation of our divine creation by our same Creator. It enhances the understanding of our relationship to Him: “The Gods went down to organize man in their own image, in the image of the Gods to form they him, male and female to form they them. And the Gods said: We will bless them” (Abr 4:27–28).

Indeed, they have blessed each of us. Our bodies can repair and defend themselves. They regenerate new cells to replace old ones. Our bodies carry seeds that allow reproduction of our own kind with our unique individual characteristics. Little wonder our Creator is also known as the great Physician (see Matt 9:12)—able to heal the sick (see 3 Nephi 9:13; D&C 35:9; 42:48–51), restore sight to the blind (see John 9:1–11), unstop ears of the deaf (see Isa 35:5; 3 Nephi 26:15), and raise the dead (see Matt 9:23–26; John 11:5–45). And in these latter days, He

has revealed a code of health known as the Word of Wisdom that has blessed the lives of all who have obeyed those teachings in faith. So we honor Jesus as our Creator, divinely directed by His Father.

Jehovah

Jesus was JEHOVAH. This sacred title is recorded only four times in the King James version of the Holy Bible (see Ex 6:3; Ps 83:18; Isa 12:2; 26:4). The use of this holy name is also confirmed in modern scripture (see Moroni 10:34; D&C 109:68; 110:3; 128:9). *Jehovah* is derived from the Hebrew word *Hayah*, which means “to be” or “to exist.” A form of the word *Hayah* in the Hebrew text of the Old Testament was translated into English as “I AM” (Ex 3:14). Remarkably, “I AM” was used by Jehovah as a name for himself (see D&C 29:1; 38:1; 39:1). Listen to this intriguing dialogue from the Old Testament. Moses had just received a divine appointment that he did not seek—a commission to lead the children of Israel out of bondage. The scene takes place atop Mount Sinai: “Moses said unto God, Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt? . . .” (No doubt Moses felt inadequate for his calling, even as you and I may when given a challenging assignment.)

And Moses said [again] unto God, Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What is his name? what shall I say unto them?

And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you.

And God said moreover unto Moses, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you: this is my name for ever. (Ex 3:11, 13–15)

Jehovah had thus revealed to Moses this very name that He had meekly and modestly chosen for His own premortal identification—“I AM.”

Later in His mortal ministry, Jesus occasionally repeated this name. Do you remember His terse response to tormenting questioners? Note the double meaning in His reply to Caiaphas, the chief high priest: “The high priest asked him, . . . Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed? And Jesus said, I am” (Mark 14:61–62). He was declaring both His lineage and His name. Another instance occurred when Jesus was taunted about His acquaintanceship with Abraham: “Then said the Jews unto him, . . . hast thou seen Abraham? Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am.” (John 8:57–58)

Jehovah—the great I AM—God of the Old Testament—clearly identified Himself when the resurrected Jesus personally appeared in His glory to the Prophet Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery in the Kirtland Temple, April 3, 1836. I quote from their written testimony:

We saw the Lord standing upon the breastwork of the pulpit, before us; and under his feet was a paved work of pure gold, in color like amber. His eyes were as a flame of fire; the hair of his head was white like the pure snow; his countenance shone above the brightness of the sun; and his voice was as the sound of the rushing of great waters, even the *voice of Jehovah*, saying: I am the first and the last; I am he who liveth, I am he who was slain. (D&C 110:2–4; emphasis added; see also D&C 76:23)

Jesus fulfilled His responsibility as Jehovah, “the Great I AM,” with eternal consequence.

Advocate with the Father

Jesus is our **ADVOCATE WITH THE FATHER** (see 1 John 2:1; D&C: 29:5; 32:3; 45:3; 110:4). The word *advocate* comes from Latin roots meaning a “voice for,” or “one who pleads for another.” Other related terms are used in scripture, such as *intercessor* or *mediator* (see 1 Tim 2:5; 2 Nephi 2:28; D&C 76:69). From the Book of Mormon we learn that this responsibility was foreseen before His birth: “[Jesus] shall make

intercession for all the children of men; and they that believe in him shall be saved” (2 Nephi 2:9).

This mission was clearly evident in the compassionate intercessory prayer of Jesus. Picture Him in your mind, kneeling in fervent supplication. Listen to the beautiful language of His prayer. Sense His feeling for His weighty responsibility as mediator:

I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept thy word. Now they have known that all things whatsoever thou hast given me are of thee. For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me. I pray for them. (John 17:6–9)

He is also known as the mediator of the new testament or covenant (see Heb 9:15; 12:24). Comprehending Him as our advocate—intercessor—mediator—with the Father gives us assurance of His unequalled understanding, justice, and mercy (see Alma 7:12).

Immanuel

Jesus was foreordained to be the promised IMMANUEL. Remember Isaiah’s remarkable prophecy: “The Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel” (Isa 7:14). Fulfillment of that prophecy was not just unlikely—it was humanly impossible. Incredible! Everyone knew that a virgin could not bear a child. And then for that child to be given such a pretentious name was doubly daring. The Hebrew name Isaiah announced—*Immanuel*—literally means “with us [is] God!”

That holy name was subsequently given to Jesus in the New Testament, the Book of Mormon, and the Doctrine and Covenants (see Matt 1:23; 2 Nephi 17:14; D&C 128:22).

Immanuel could be such only at the will of His Father.

Son of God

Jesus alone bore His responsibility as the SON OF GOD—the Only Begotten Son of the Father (see John 1:14, 18; 3:16). Jesus was literally “the Son of the Highest” (Luke 1:32, 35). In more than a dozen verses of scripture, the solemn word of God, the Father bears testimony that Jesus was truly His Beloved Son. That solemn testimony was often coupled with God’s pleading for mankind to hear and obey the voice of His revered Son (see Matt 3:17; 17:5; Mark 1:11; 9:7; Luke 3:22; 9:35; 2 Peter 1:17; 2 Nephi 31:11; 3 Nephi 11:7; 21:20; D&C 93:15; Moses 4:2; JS-H 1:17). Through the condescension of God, that most unlikely prophecy of Isaiah had become reality.

The unique parentage of Jesus was also announced to Nephi, who was thus instructed by an angel: “Behold, the virgin whom thou seest is the mother of the Son of God, after the manner of the flesh. . . . Behold the Lamb of God, yea, even the Son of the Eternal Father!” (1 Nephi 11:18, 21).

From His mother, Jesus inherited His potential for mortality and death (see Gen 3:15; Mark 6:3). From His Heavenly Father, Jesus inherited His potential for immortality and eternal life. Prior to His crucifixion, He spoke these words of clarification: “I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This . . . have I received of my Father” (John 10:17–18).

Though separate from His Heavenly Father in both body and spirit, Jesus is one with His Father in power and purpose. Their ultimate objective is “to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39).

Some of you may wonder why the Son is occasionally referred to as “the Father.” The designation used for any man can vary. Every man here is a son, but may also be called “father,” “brother,” “uncle,” or “grandfather,” depending on conversational circumstance. So we must not allow ourselves to become confused regarding divine identity, purpose, or

doctrine. Because Jesus was our Creator, He is known in scripture as “the Father of all things” (Mosiah 7:27; see also 15:3; 16:15; Hel 14:12; Ether 3:14). But please remember, “Jesus Christ is not the Father of the spirits who have taken or yet shall take bodies upon this earth, for He is one of them. He is The Son, as they are sons or daughters of Elohim” (Statement of The First Presidency and the Council of the Twelve Apostles, 30 June 1916; qtd. in Talmage 473).

We comprehend that distinction well when we pray to our Heavenly Father in the name of His Son, Jesus Christ, through the power of the Holy Ghost. And as we do so regularly, we honor our heavenly and earthly parentage, just as Jesus honored His, as the Son of God.

Anointed One

“God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power” (Acts 10:38). So Jesus was the ANOINTED ONE. Because of this fact, He was accorded two specific titles. One was the *Messiah* (מָשִׁיחַ), which in Hebrew means “the anointed.” The other was the *Christ*, which comes from the Greek word (Χριστός), which also means “the anointed.” Thus, “Jesus is spoken of as the Christ and the Messiah, which means he is the one anointed of the Father to be his personal representative in all things pertaining to the salvation of mankind” (BD 609). Scriptures declare that *Christ* is the only name under heaven whereby salvation comes (see 2 Nephi 25:20). So you may add either of these titles to signify your adoration for Jesus—as “the Christ,” or as “the Messiah”—anointed by God for that supernal responsibility.

Savior and Redeemer

Jesus was born to be SAVIOR and REDEEMER of all mankind (see Isa 49:26; 1 Nephi 10:5). He was the Lamb of God (see 1 Nephi 10:10), who offered Himself without spot or

blemish (see 1 Peter 1:19) as a sacrifice for the sins of the world (see John 1:29). Later, as the resurrected Lord, He related that sacred responsibility to the meaning of *the gospel*, which He described in one powerful passage:

Behold I have given unto you my gospel, and this is the gospel which I have given unto you—that I came into the world to do the will of my Father, because my Father sent me. And my Father sent me that I might be lifted up upon the cross. (3 Nephi 27:13–14)

Thus, Jesus personally defined *the gospel*. This term comes from the Old English *godspell* which literally means “good news.” The LDS Bible Dictionary notes the following: “The good news is that Jesus Christ has made a perfect atonement for mankind that will redeem all mankind from the grave and reward each individual according to his/her works. This atonement was begun by his appointment in the premortal world but was worked out by Jesus during his mortal sojourn” (BD 682).

His atonement had been foretold long before Jesus was born in Bethlehem. Prophets had so prophesied His advent for many generations. Since this year’s Book of Mormon Symposium’s spotlight focuses partly on Helaman, let us sample from its record, written some thirty years before the Savior’s birth: “Remember that there is no other way nor means whereby man can be saved, only through the atoning blood of Jesus Christ, who shall come; yea, remember that he cometh to redeem the world” (Hel 5:9).

His atonement blesses each of us in a very personal way. Listen carefully to this explanation from Jesus:

For behold, I, God, have suffered these things for all, that they might not suffer if they would repent; But if they would not repent they must suffer even as I; Which suffering caused myself, even God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of pain, and to bleed at every pore, and to suffer both body and spirit—and would that I might not drink the bitter cup, and shrink—Nevertheless, glory be to the Father, and I partook and finished my preparations unto the children of men. (D&C 19:16–19)

Jesus fulfilled His glorious promise made in pre-earthly councils by atoning for the fall of Adam and Eve unconditionally, and for our own sins upon the condition of our repentance. His responsibility as Savior and Redeemer was indelibly intertwined with His responsibility as Creator. To shed additional insight on this relationship, I would like to share a remarkable quotation that I found in a rare book in London one day while searching through the library of the British Museum. It was published as a twentieth-century English translation of an ancient Egyptian text. It was written by Timothy, Archbishop of Alexandria, who died in AD 385. This record refers to the creation of Adam; premortal Jesus is speaking of His Father:

He . . . made Adam according to Our image and likeness, and He left him lying for forty days and forty nights without putting breath into him. And He heaved sighs over him daily, saying, "If I put breath into this [man], he must suffer many pains." And I said unto My Father, "Put breath into him; I will be an advocate for him." And My Father said unto Me, "If I put breath into him, My beloved Son, Thou wilt be obliged to go down into the world, and to suffer many pains for him before Thou shalt have redeemed him, and made him to come back to his primal state." And I said unto My Father, "Put breath into him; I will be his advocate, and I will go down into the world, and will fulfil Thy command." (Timothy 482; brackets appear in printed text; see Moses 3:7; 6:8–9, 22, 29)

Jesus' responsibility as Advocate, Savior, and Redeemer was foredetermined in premortal realms and fulfilled by His atonement (see Job 19:25–26; Matt 1:21). Your responsibility is to remember, to repent, and to be righteous.

Judge

Closely allied to the Lord's status as Savior and Redeemer is His responsibility as JUDGE. Jesus revealed this inter-relationship after He had declared His definition of *the gospel* which we just cited:

As I have been lifted up [upon the cross] by men even so should men be lifted up by the Father, to stand before me, to be judged of their

works, whether they be good or whether they be evil . . . therefore, according to the power of the Father I will draw all men unto me, that they may be judged according to their works. (3 Nephi 27:14–15)

The Book of Mormon sheds further light on how that judgment will occur. So does the temple endowment. When we approach that threshold of the eternal court of justice, we know who will personally preside: “The keeper of the gate is the Holy One of Israel; and he employeth no servant there; and there is none other way save it be by the gate; for he cannot be deceived, for the Lord God is his name. And whoso knocketh, to him will he open” (2 Nephi 9:41–42).

Scriptures indicate that the Lord will receive apostolic assistance when exercising judgment upon the house of Israel (see 1 Nephi 12:9; D&C 29:12). Your personal encounter at judgment will be aided by your own “bright recollection” (Alma 11:43) and “perfect remembrance” (Alma 5:18) of your deeds, as well as by the desires of your hearts (see D&C 137:9).

Exemplar

Another responsibility of the Lord is that of EXEMPLAR. To people of the Holy Land, He said, “I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you” (John 13:15; see also 14:6; 1 Peter 2:21). To people of ancient America, He again emphasized His mission as exemplar: “I am the light; I have set an example for you” (3 Nephi 18:16, see also 27:27; 2 Nephi 31:9, 16). In His sermon on the mount, Jesus challenged His followers with this admonition: “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect” (Matt 5:48).

Sinless and flawless as Jesus was in mortality, we should remember that He viewed His own state of physical perfection as being yet in the future (see Luke 13:32). Even He had to endure to the end. Can you and I be expected to do any less?

When the crucified and resurrected Lord appeared to the people in ancient America, He again stressed the importance of

His example. But now He included Himself as a perfected personage: “I would that ye should be perfect even as I, or your Father who is in heaven is perfect” (3 Nephi 12:48).

Are you vexed by your own imperfections? For example, have you ever locked your keys inside the car? Or to accomplish a task, have you ever moved from one room to another only to find you had forgotten what you wanted to do? (Incidentally, troubles of that nature don’t disappear as you grow older.) Meanwhile, please do not be discouraged by the Lord’s expression of hope for your perfection. You should have faith to know that He would not require development beyond your capacity. Of course you should strive to correct habits or thoughts which are improper. Conquering of weakness brings great joy. You can attain a certain degree of perfection in some things in this life. And you can become perfect in keeping various commandments. But the Lord was not necessarily asking for your errorless and perfect behavior in all things. He was pleading for more than that. His hopes are for your full potential to be realized—to become as He is! That includes the perfection of your physical body, when it will be changed to an immortal state that cannot deteriorate or die.

So while you earnestly strive for continuing improvement in your life here, remember your resurrection, exaltation, and perfection await you in the life to come. That precious promise of perfection could not have been possible without the Lord’s atonement and His example.

Millennial Messiah

I have chosen to speak last of the Lord’s ultimate responsibility which lies yet in the future. That will be His masterful status as the MILLENNIAL MESSIAH. When that day comes, the physical face of the earth will have been changed: “Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain” (Isa 40:4). Then Jesus will return to the earth. His

second coming will be no secret. It will be broadly known: “The glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together” (Isa 40:5).

Then, “the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace” (Isa 9:6). He will govern from two world capitals—one in old Jerusalem (see Zech 14:4–7; D&C 45:48–66; 133:19–21) and the other in the New Jerusalem, “built upon the American continent” (A of F 10; see also Ether 13:3–10; D&C 84:2–4). From these centers He will direct the affairs of His Church and Kingdom. Then He “shall reign for ever and ever” (Rev 11:15; see also Ex 15:18; Ps 146:10; Mosiah 3:5; D&C 76:108).

In that day He will bear new titles and be surrounded by special Saints. He will be known as “Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that [will be] with him [will be those who] are called, and chosen, and faithful” to their trust here in mortality (Rev 17:14; see also 19:16).

He is Jesus the Christ—our Master and more. We have discussed but ten of His many responsibilities: Creator, Jehovah, Advocate with the Father, Immanuel, Son of God, Anointed One, Savior and Redeemer, Judge, Exemplar, and Millennial Messiah.

As His disciples, you and I bear mighty responsibilities, too. So I now speak in a very personal tone. In my lifetime I have visited all 50 states in the USA. I have also set foot upon the soil of 86 other countries of the earth. Wherever I walk, it is my divine calling and sacred privilege to bear fervent testimony of Jesus the Christ. He lives! I love Him. Eagerly I follow Him, and willingly I offer my life in His service. As His special witness, I solemnly teach of Him. I testify of Him.

I also express my deep admiration and affection for each of you, my beloved brothers and sisters, along with my hope and blessing that you will bear your responsibility to know the Lord, love Him, follow Him, serve Him, teach and testify of Him, as do I. His church has been restored to the earth in these

latter days to prepare the world and its people for His second coming, I so testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

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The Only Sure Foundation: Building on the Rock of Our Redeemer

2

Robert L. Millet

It is often the case that at a time of spiritual crisis the Lord raises up someone to minister to the needs of a wandering generation. In a day when pride had afflicted the Nephites, when because of their own feelings of self-sufficiency God had left the people “in their own strength” (Hel 4:13), he called and prepared Nephi and Lehi, sons of Helaman. These two chosen servants, surely than which there were no greater in all the Nephite saga, lived and taught in such a way as to be the means of transforming hundreds of people and leading them out of spiritual darkness into the marvelous light of Christ. At a time when it was obvious that the preservation of the society depended wholly upon cleansing the inner vessel, Nephi yielded up his position as chief judge and, like his great-grandfather Alma, confined himself with his brother Lehi to the work of the ministry (see Alma 4:15–20). The success of these two missionaries seemed to be a direct result of the foundation upon which they built, a doctrinal base founded on the teachings of their father Helaman. This chapter will focus upon the salient doctrines contained in the words of Helaman to his sons just prior to his death: a plea and a commission to build our lives and establish our faith on Jesus Christ, the rock of our salvation.

Robert L. Millet is dean of Religious Education and associate professor of Ancient Scripture at Brigham Young University.

Power in a Name

The Holy Ghost often speaks to our consciences through the medium of memory. One Book of Mormon prophet leader after another pleads with his flock to remember: remember what the Lord has done; remember the covenants of the Lord with our fathers; remember the trials and tribulations of our forebears and that the Lord delivered them from captivity. In the spirit of that same call to devotion, Helaman said to his sons:

Behold, my sons, I desire that ye should remember to keep the commandments of God; and I would that ye should declare unto the people these words. Behold, I have given unto you the names of our first parents who came out of the land of Jerusalem; and this I have done that when you remember your names ye may remember them; and when ye remember them ye may remember their works; and when ye remember their works ye may know how that it is said, and also written, that they were good. (Hel 5:6)

We do not know the meanings of the names Lehi and Nephi, but we do know, as Helaman reminded his sons, that the names stood for steadfastness and goodness. Because the first Lehi and Nephi were true to their charge to lead their little branch of Israel out of a wicked world and initiate a new gospel dispensation in America, because they sacrificed all and forsook the treasures of this world, and because they sought for the Lord and found him, basked in the light of his Spirit and power, and endured the crosses associated with total Christian commitment, their names are and forever will be enshrined among the sanctified. To be named after Nephi or Lehi is to be designated and identified, but, more appropriately, it is to be called and enlisted in the works they performed and the righteousness they brought to pass. One could hardly bear the names of Nephi and Lehi without being motivated by the memory of what they had done. "Therefore, my sons," Helaman continued, "I would that ye should do that which is good, that it may be said of you, and also written, even as it has been said and written of them" (Hel 5:7).

Helaman counseled his sons to glory in their Lord and Redeemer, never in themselves or in their names. “And now my sons,” he added, “behold I have somewhat more to desire of you, which desire is, that ye may not do these things that ye may boast, but that ye may do these things to lay up for yourselves a treasure in heaven, yea, which is eternal, and which fadeth not away; yea, that ye may have that precious gift of eternal life, which we have reason to suppose hath been given to our fathers” (Hel 5:8). Simply stated, we are not assured of the highest heaven in the celestial world because of our parentage, surname, or given name. Ancestry and heritage can guarantee nothing more than a great legacy, a memory, and a motivation to goodness. To be sure, all of us, whether reared in the Church or converts, are under covenant to be true to our shared heritage, to those who went before, who gave their lives that we might enjoy the privileges of Church membership today. We have a moral obligation to be loyal to the royal within us, to be true to our good names, to bear them with dignity and fidelity.

Nephi and Lehi were called to bear a name, however, which was more significant than that of their noble forebears. It is a name that is above every name that is named, whether on earth or in heaven, save only the name of the Almighty Elohim. It is a name that brings joy to the desolate heart, a name that speaks peace to the sorrowing soul. It is a name that falls in hushed and hallowed tones from the lips of Saints and angels, a name that leads true believers on both sides of the veil to glory and honor everlasting. It is the name of the One sent of God to bring salvation, the name of the One who paid an infinite price to ransom us from Satan’s grasp. It is the blessed name of Jesus Christ.

We do not fully appreciate the significance of bearing the name of the Lord until we sense what our plight would be had Jesus not redeemed a lost and fallen world. The fall of Adam and Eve, though a fortunate fall and an essential step toward mortality and thus a pillar in the plan of salvation, brought about dramatic changes in the earth and all forms of life on it. Spiritual death represents an alienation from God, in a sense a

disinheritance from the royal family. Unless appropriate reconciliation with the family head is made, the blessings and the family name may be lost. That is, unless an atonement, an at-one-ment, is brought to pass, we lose that kind of association and sociality, that family life which the scriptures denominate as eternal life. We are then nameless and familyless, spiritual orphans, and thereby alone in the world. From an eternal perspective, in the words of Malachi, we have neither root nor branch (see 3 Nephi 25:1). In order to experience those joys and feel that warmth known only in family living, we must be reinstated in the family, literally re-deemed or deemed worthy once again of the privileges and opportunities of being called sons or daughters of God. Deliverance from this state—redemption from spiritual death—is made available only through the labors of a god, through the majestic ministry of one mightier than death, one upon whom justice had no claims and death had no hold. In order to be released from carnality and restored to righteousness, men and women must exercise saving faith in Jesus Christ and thus receive the blessings of the Atonement; they must put off the natural man through Christ, must crucify the old man of sin spoken of in Romans 6:6, and rise through their Redeemer unto a newness of life (Mosiah 3:19).

Because people are not born in mortality into the family of God, because on earth we are estranged by the Fall from holiness, we must be *adopted* into that family—must comply with the laws of adoption, must meet the legal requirements. This is accomplished through subscribing to and receiving what Joseph Smith called the “articles of adoption,” the first principles and ordinances of the gospel (see *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* 328; hereafter *TPJS*; see also *Pratt* 48). As the Savior and foreordained Messiah, Jesus, our Lord, became the “author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him” (Heb 5:9), and the Father’s gospel, the gospel of God (see Rom 1:1–3), became his gospel, the gospel of Jesus Christ. Christ is the Father of salvation, the Father of resurrection, and the Father of redemption. He is also the King of kings, and

spiritual adoption represents acceptance into his family kingdom. Those who have been born again become members of the family of Christ and thus take upon them the family name—they become Christians in the true and full sense of that word and are obligated by covenant to live by the rules and regulations of the royal family, to live a life befitting the new and sacred name they have taken.

It is in the spirit of this doctrine—the new birth and the new name—that Helaman again appeals to memory: “O remember, remember, my sons, the words which king Benjamin spake unto his people; yea, remember that there is no other way nor means whereby man can be saved, only through the atoning blood of Jesus Christ, who shall come; yea, remember that he cometh to redeem the world” (Hel 5:9). More specifically, Benjamin testified that “there shall be no other name given nor any other way nor means whereby salvation can come unto the children of men, only in and through the name of Christ, the Lord Omnipotent” (Mosiah 3:17). Salvation, meaning exaltation and eternal life, cannot come in any other way; it cannot be brought to pass through humanity’s devising or genius. There is nothing people can do to save themselves; they can, as we shall discuss shortly, place themselves in a position to be saved, can yield their hearts and focus their faith on the Master, but they cannot save themselves any more than they can create themselves. And in no other name—not that of the grandest Apostle or the mightiest prophet—can this greatest of all gifts be bestowed. Had there been no Christ, had there been no Advocate with the Father, no Mediator, no Intercessor for the children of men, then no amount of good works on the part of fallen man could have made up the difference. As Benjamin declared: “Men drink damnation to their own souls except they humble themselves and become as little children, and believe that salvation was, and is, and is to come, in and through the atoning blood of Christ, the Lord Omnipotent” (v 18).

Deliverance from Sin, Not in Sin

Helaman calls his sons to remembrance once again, this time to the words of Amulek spoken to Zeezrom the lawyer a half-century earlier (see Alma 11:34–37). “[Amulek] spake unto [Zeezrom] . . . that the Lord surely should come to redeem his people, but that he should not come to redeem them in their sins, but to redeem them from their sins” (Hel 5:10). This is an old issue, much older than Amulek’s encounter with Zeezrom. It dates, in fact, to the War in Heaven. Lucifer, a son of the morning, rebelled against the plan of the Father and offered his own amendments: “Behold, here am I,” he said, “send me, I will be thy son, and *I will redeem all mankind, that one soul shall not be lost*, and surely I will do it; wherefore, give me thine honor” (Moses 4:1; emphasis added).

We note that there is no mention in this scriptural passage of coercion, of force, of denied agency. Though such things may have been necessary eventually to bring to pass Lucifer’s nefarious purposes, they certainly would not have been a part of his public proclamation or proposal. Instead, Satan simply proposed to save us all. Joseph Smith observed: “The contention in heaven was—Jesus said there would be certain souls that would not be saved; and *the devil said he could save them all*, and laid his plans before the grand council, who gave their vote in favor of Jesus Christ. So the devil rose up in rebellion against God, and was cast down, with all who put up their heads for him” (TPJS 357; emphasis added). Satan cannot make saints out of untried and untested souls. Salvation cannot come to those who have not experienced temptation, been exposed to sin and spiritual sickness, and overcome it all through the application of divine powers.

Nor can a place in heaven be given to those of us who remain in our sins. Christ came to earth on a search and rescue mission; he came to search out those who yearn for higher and greater things than an everlasting residence in this terrestrial tenement, those who desire more than life itself to be

transformed into the image of Christ himself. The Atonement of our Lord is infinite in scope. It is endless and eternal, but it has limitations; it cannot save any *in* their sins, meaning it cannot bestow power and glory and eternal life upon those who are unrepentant, unclean, and unprepared for celestial society. It cannot, as Alma explained to Corianton, restore one from debauchery and depravity to purity and holiness, cannot deliver one from mortal wickedness to immortal happiness (see Alma 41). Jesus Christ is a God of justice, just as he is a God of mercy. Though his arms of mercy are forever extended to the sinner, he cannot tolerate sin. To do so would be to go against his very nature. Abinadi thus explained that those who rebel against truth and die in their sins, those who have known the commandments and refuse to keep them “have no part in the first resurrection. . . . For salvation cometh to none such; for the Lord hath redeemed none such; yea, neither can the Lord redeem such; for *he cannot deny himself; for he cannot deny justice* when it has its claim” (Mosiah 15:26–27; emphasis added).

We might add that salvation does not come to a people who glory in repentance. Repentance is a necessary part of redemption in Christ, but we must always remember and teach our children that prevention is far, far better than redemption. As Joseph Smith counseled: “Repentance is a thing that cannot be trifled with every day. Daily transgression and daily repentance”—that is, constantly returning to the well in search of the cleansing waters when we have not sought to forsake or prevent sinful contacts—“is not that which is pleasing in the sight of God” (*TPJS* 148). We could not believe and teach otherwise and claim divine approbation. “The more I see of life,” President Harold B. Lee observed, “the more I am convinced that we must impress [the Saints] . . . with the awfulness of sin rather than to content ourselves with merely teaching the way of repentance” (88). “Yes, one can repent of . . . transgression,” declared President Ezra Taft Benson. “The miracle of forgiveness is real, and true repentance is accepted of the Lord. But it is not pleasing to the Lord to sow one’s wild oats . . . and then expect that planned

confession and quick repentance will satisfy the Lord” (*Teachings* 70). Any form of what Elder Neal A. Maxwell has called “ritual prodigalism” (33)—a deliberate detour, a programmed and predetermined plan to stray from the path and return eventually and effortlessly—evidences that we are still “in sin” and thus desperately in need of redemption.

Sometimes we tend to focus so much upon the fact that Jesus Christ *died for us* that we do not attend to an equally important facet of his redemptive enterprise—the fact that he also came to *live in us*. It is marvelous beyond the power of expression to contemplate that the Savior can and does forgive our sins. There is no way in our present state to comprehend how and in what manner this miracle of miracles was and is brought to pass. It simply happens. And thanks be to God that it does happen. But we cannot enjoy the full and complete powers of the atonement of Christ until our redemption from sin entails the re-creation of a nature which is foreign to sin. That is to say, Jesus came to cleanse us from guilt and the taints of transgression; he also came to renovate our nature and empower our souls that we are delivered, in process of time, from the effects and pull of those transgressions. We are not in the ultimate sense, therefore, redeemed from our sins, to use Amulek’s and Helaman’s words, until those sins have no more power over us. The additional wonder and beauty of the Atonement is that we are not expected to resist sin by will power and personal resolve alone, though such things are essential; rather, as we come to gain that life which is in Christ—a life which comes as we seek for and cultivate the Spirit of the Lord—we receive that enabling power which extends to us the strength to forsake and overcome, a power which we could not have generated on our own. Elder B. H. Roberts explained that

after the sins of the past are forgiven, the one so pardoned will doubtless feel the force of sinful habits bearing heavily upon him. . . .

There is an absolute necessity for some additional sanctifying grace that will strengthen poor human nature, not only to enable it to resist temptation, but also to root out from the heart concupiscence—the blind tendency or inclination to evil. The heart must be purified,

every passion, every propensity made submissive to the will, and the will of man brought into subjection to the will of God.

Man's natural powers are unequal to this task; so, I believe, all will testify who have made the experiment. Mankind stand in some need of a strength superior to any they possess of themselves, to accomplish this work of rendering pure our fallen nature. Such strength, such power, such a sanctifying grace is conferred on man in being born of the Spirit—in receiving the Holy Ghost. Such, in the main, is its office, its work. (169–70; emphasis added)

“I am crucified with Christ,” the Apostle Paul wrote; *“nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me”* (Gal 2:20; emphasis added). As the Lord, through his Spirit, comes to live in us in this manner, we literally take part in an exchange with the Master. *“We pray you in Christ’s stead,”* Paul wrote to the Corinthians, *“be ye reconciled to God.”* And now comes his discussion of this unspeakable exchange: *“For [the Father] hath made [Christ] to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him”* (2 Cor 5:20–21; emphasis added). In short, we are redeemed from sin as the Lord takes our sins upon himself and imputes his righteousness to us.

Redemption Through the Power of the Father

Helaman went on to explain by what means, by what power the Savior could perform his divine labors: *“And he hath power given unto him from the Father to redeem them from their sins because of repentance”* (Hel 5:11). In this brief statement is embodied the doctrine of the divine sonship of Christ. In it is to be found the reason why Jesus alone could and did bring to pass and put into effect the great plan of mercy. Jesus did what he did because of who he was. He was sinless, but this was not sufficient to allow him to redeem humanity. His was a voluntary offering, but his pure motives alone did not provide the means to make the atoning sacrifice. Jesus was the son of Elohim, the Almighty God. President Ezra Taft Benson declared: *“The*

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints proclaims that Jesus Christ is the Son of God in the most literal sense. The body in which He performed His mission in the flesh was sired by that same Holy Being we worship as God, our Eternal Father. Jesus was not the son of Joseph, nor was He begotten by the Holy Ghost. He is the Son of the Eternal Father!” (*Come Unto Christ* 4). As the son of Elohim, Jesus inherited the powers of life and immortality. He was a man, but was more than man. He was human, but performed acts that required a superhuman endowment. On the other hand, as the son of Mary, a mortal woman, Jesus was subject to the throes and pulls of this mortal sphere. From Mary he inherited the capacity to suffer and die.

In the words of Abinadi, the Messiah would be many things—spirit and flesh, God and man, Father and Son (see Mosiah 15:1–4). Only by having such a nature could our Lord surrender to death and also rise from the tomb and win the victory over death. “Therefore doth my Father love me,” he stated in Jerusalem, “because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again” (John 10:17–18). Lehi affirmed to Jacob that “there is no flesh that can dwell in the presence of God, save it be through the merits, and mercy, and grace of the Holy Messiah, *who layeth down his life according to the flesh*”—his mortal inheritance—“*and taketh it again by the power of the Spirit*”—his immortal inheritance—“that he may bring to pass the resurrection of the dead, being the first that should rise” (2 Nephi 2:8; emphasis added).

Christ’s divine nature allowed him to do more than bring about the resurrection, to transcend physical death and open the door for all other mortals to eventually do the same. In Helaman’s words, “he hath power given unto him from the Father *to redeem them from their sins* because of repentance” (Hel 5:11; emphasis added). In a way that is incomprehensible to us, the Son of Man bore the effects of the sins of all the sons and daughters of humankind. In an act of infinite irony, the

sinless One became the great sinner (see 2 Cor 5:21; Gal 3:13; Heb 2:9) and assumed the awful agony of those burdens in Gethsemane and then again on Calvary. He who had always walked in the light of God's Spirit was left to trod the winepress alone, so very alone and without that comforting and confirming influence which had always been a constant companion. He who had brought life and light to the world was subjected to the powers of death and darkness. He who deserved to suffer least suffered most. In the words of the Prophet Joseph Smith, the Mediator "descended in suffering below that which man can suffer; or, in other words, he suffered greater sufferings and was exposed to more powerful contradictions than any man can be" (*Lectures on Faith* 5:2). In doing so our Lord and Master descended below all things (2 Cor 8:9; Eph 4:8–10; D&C 88:6). Elder Boyd K. Packer has taught:

Before the crucifixion and afterward, many men have willingly given their lives in selfless acts of heroism. But none faced what the Christ endured. Upon Him was the burden of all human transgression, all human guilt. . . . In choosing He faced the awesome power of the evil one, who was not confined to flesh nor subject to mortal pain. . . . How the Atonement was wrought we do not know. No mortal watched as evil turned away and hid in shame before the light of that pure being. All wickedness could not quench that light. When what was done was done, the ransom had been paid. Both death and hell forsook their claim on all who would repent. Men at last were free. Then every soul who ever lived could choose to touch that light and be redeemed. (*Let Not Your Heart Be Troubled* 76)

Jesus the Christ was able to do for us what we could not do for ourselves because he had been endowed and empowered to do so. C. S. Lewis observed:

I have heard some people complain that if Jesus was God as well as man, then His sufferings and death lose all value in their eyes, "because it must have been so easy for him." Others may (very rightly) rebuke the ingratitude and ungraciousness of this objection; what staggers me is the misunderstanding it betrays. In one sense, of course, those who make it are right. They have even understated their own case. The perfect submission, the perfect suffering, the perfect death were . . . possible only because He was God. But surely that

is a very odd reason for not accepting them? . . . If I am drowning in a rapid river, a man who still has one foot on the bank may give me a hand which saves my life. Ought I to shout back (between my gasps) “No, it’s not fair! You have an advantage! You’re keeping one foot on the bank”? That advantage—call it “unfair” if you like—is the only reason why he can be of any use to me. To what will you look for help if you will not look to that which is stronger than yourself? (61)

The power of the Father enabled his Only Begotten to endure the physical, mental, and spiritual anguish associated with bleeding from every pore, suffering “both body and spirit” (D&C 19:18), and bearing up under a load greater than mortal mind can fathom (see Mosiah 3:7).

The blessings of life and light and liberation from a sinful nature—available because of the love and condescension of the Holy One of Israel—come to those who acknowledge their dire condition and turn to Christ through repentance. Lehi thus declared that “redemption cometh in and through the holy Messiah; for he is full of grace and truth. Behold, he offereth himself a sacrifice for sin, to answer the ends of the law, unto all those who have a broken heart and a contrite spirit; and unto none else can the ends of the law be answered. Wherefore, how great the importance to make these things known unto the inhabitants of the earth” (2 Nephi 2:6–8). No message is more central, no pronouncement more poignant. For this reason, as Helaman explained, God “hath sent his angels to declare the tidings of the conditions of repentance, which bringeth [people] unto the power of the Redeemer, unto the salvation of their souls” (Hel 5:11).

The Rock of Our Redeemer

Every person builds a house of faith. We do so knowingly or unknowingly. And every builder soon learns that a good building with bad foundations is worse than useless; it is dangerous. As one Christian writer has observed, “If the stability of buildings depends largely on their foundations, so

does the stability of human lives. The search for personal security is a primal instinct, but many fail to find it today. Old familiar landmarks are being obliterated. Moral absolutes which were once thought to be eternal are being abandoned” (Stott 22). Thus our house of faith can be no more secure than the foundation upon which it is built. Foolish men build upon the shifting sands of ethics and the marshlands of human philosophies and doctrines. The wise build upon the rock of revelation, heeding carefully the living oracles, lest they be “brought under condemnation . . . and stumble and fall when the storms descend, and the winds blow, and the rains descend, and beat upon their house” (D&C 90:5). All that we do as members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints must be built upon a foundation of faith and testimony and conversion. When external supports fail us, then our hearts must be riveted upon the things of the Spirit, those internal realities which provide the meaning, the perspective, and the sustenance for all else that matters in life.

A very old story among the Jews holds that during the early stages of construction of the second temple, the builders, by mistake, discarded the cornerstone. Centuries later, in the midst of a long day of debate, Jesus, seemingly drawing upon this story, spoke of the irony associated with ignoring or dismissing him and his message. “Did ye never read in the scriptures,” he asked, “The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord’s doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes?” (Matt 21:42; compare Ps 118:22-23; Acts 4:11). Among the Nephites, Jacob prophesied: “I perceive by the workings of the Spirit which is in me, that by the stumbling of the Jews they will reject the stone upon which they might build and have safe foundation” (Jacob 4:15).

It is appropriate, therefore, that the climax of Helaman’s commission to his sons contains the following admonition:

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)

Surely the supreme challenge of this life for those of us who aspire to Christian discipleship is to build our lives on Christ, to erect our house of faith, a divine domicile in which he and his Spirit would be pleased to dwell. There is safety from Satan and his minions only in Christ. There is security only in his word and through his infinite and eternal power.

How, then, do we build on Christ? In a day when the winds are blowing and the waves are beating upon our ship, how do we navigate our course safely into the peaceful harbor? What must we do to have our Savior pilot us through life's tempestuous seas? Amidst the babble of voices—enticing voices which threaten to lead us into forbidden paths or which beckon us to labor in secondary causes—how do the Saints of the Most High know the Way, live the Truth, and gain that Life which is abundant? The revelations and the prophets offer us some simple yet far-reaching suggestions:

Treasure Up His Word

The scriptures are the words of Christ. They contain the warnings and doctrinal teachings of those who were moved upon by the Holy Ghost and who thus spoke with the tongue of angels (see 2 Nephi 31:13; 32:1–3; 33:10). To read and ponder them is to hear the voice of the Master (see D&C 18:34–36). Holy writ has been preserved to bring us to Christ and to establish us upon his doctrine. Those who are serious students of the revelations, who seek diligently to know and apply scriptural precepts and principles—they can more readily see the hand of God and can also discern the handiwork of Lucifer. Such persons are more equipped to sift and sort through the sordid, more prepared to distinguish the divine from the diabolical, the sacred from the secular.

Mormon explained that “whosoever will may lay hold upon the word of God, which is quick and powerful, which shall divide asunder all the cunning and the snares and the wiles of the devil, and lead the man of Christ in a strait and narrow course across that everlasting gulf of misery which is prepared to engulf the wicked” (Hel 3:29). The word of God, especially that found in the canon of scripture, allows us to discern and expose those teachings or schools of thought which lead us on intellectual or spiritual detours, to cut through false educational ideas, and to discard spurious notions which may be pleasing to the carnal mind but are in fact destructive to the eternal soul. Further, those who search and study the institutional revelations open themselves more fully to that individual revelation which is promised. Elder Bruce R. McConkie explained to Church leaders that “however talented men may be in administrative matters; however eloquent they may be in expressing their views; however learned they may be in worldly things—they will be denied the sweet whisperings of the Spirit that might have been theirs unless they pay the price of studying, pondering, and praying about the scriptures” (*Doctrines* 238). Those who are grounded and settled in truth, anchored to the Lord’s word, are built upon the rock of Christ. Or, to complete Mormon’s thought, those men and women of Christ who manage to lay hold upon the word of God and follow the strait and narrow path, eventually “land their souls, yea, 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” (Hel 3:30).

Teach His Doctrine

There is a supernal power which accompanies the plain and direct teaching of doctrine. The views and philosophies of men—no matter how pleasingly they are stated or how lofty and timely they may seem—simply cannot engage the soul the same way the doctrines of the gospel can. If we teach doctrine,

particularly the doctrine of Christ, and if we do so with the power and persuasion of the Holy Ghost, our listeners will be turned to Christ.

The gospel is the glad tidings—the good news that Christ has come into the world (see 3 Nephi 27; D&C 76:40–42), broken the bands of death, and made eternal life available through faithful obedience to him and his principles and ordinances. The gospel is the doctrine of Christ (see 2 Nephi 31; Jacob 7:6). When we preach the gospel we preach Jesus Christ and him crucified. Joseph Smith was asked: “What are the fundamental principles of your religion?” He answered: “The fundamental principles of our religion are the testimony of the apostles and prophets, concerning Jesus Christ, that He died, was buried, rose again the third day, and ascended into heaven; and all other things which pertain to our religion are only appendages to it” (*TPJS* 121). This declaration says something about what we ought to teach as well as what we ought to stress. Other doctrines or programs or policies, no matter their inherent and even obvious value, will have light and power breathed into them only to the degree that they are attached to this fundamental verity. “Truth, glorious truth, proclaims there is . . . a Mediator,” Elder Boyd K. Packer testified.

Through Him mercy can be fully extended to each of us without offending the eternal law of justice. *This truth is the very root of Christian doctrine. You may know much about the gospel as it branches out from there, but if you only know the branches and those branches do not touch that root, if they have been cut free from that truth, there will be no life nor substance nor redemption in them.* (“The Mediator” 56; emphasis added)

Sustain His Servants

The Savior taught his apostles in the eastern hemisphere: “He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me” (Matt 10:40). To the Nephites the resurrected Lord said: “Blessed are ye if ye shall give heed unto the words of these twelve whom I have chosen from among you

to minister unto you, and to be your servants” (3 Nephi 12:1). To receive the apostles meant to accept them as the mouthpiece of Deity, recognizing their voice as his voice and their authority as his authority. Certainly no one could accept the Father while rejecting the Son, and no one could accept the Son while rejecting those he had commissioned to act in his name. A rejection of Peter, James, Nephi, or any of his apostolic ministers was at the same time a rejection of Jesus.

There are members who feel they can enjoy a relationship with the Lord independent of his Church, separate and apart from the organization established by revelation. There are even those who feel they can stay close to the Lord while they criticize or find fault with the Church and its leaders. They are wrong. They are deceived. They are painfully mistaken and are walking in slippery paths. No person comes to the Master who does not acknowledge the mantle worn by his anointed. There is no power to be found in Christ independent of his constituted priesthood authorities. In the words of Elder Marvin J. Ashton, “Any Church member not obedient to the leaders of this Church will not have the opportunity to be obedient to the promptings of the Lord” (23).

Trust In and Rely on the Lord

There is power in Christ, power not only to create the worlds and divide the seas but also to still the storms of the human heart, to heal the pain of scarred and beaten souls. We must learn to trust in him more, in the arm of flesh less. We must learn to rely on him more, on solutions of humanity less. We must learn to surrender our burdens more. We must learn to work to our limits and then be willing to seek that grace or enabling power which will make up the difference, that consummate power which indeed makes all the difference. As C. S. Lewis pointed out:

In one sense, the road back to God is a road of moral effort, of trying harder and harder. But in another sense it is not trying that is ever

going to bring us home. All this trying leads up to the vital moment at which you turn to God and say, "You must do this. I can't." Do not, I implore you, start asking yourselves, "Have I reached that moment?" Do not sit down and start watching your own mind to see if it is coming along. That puts a man quite on the wrong track. When the most important things in our life happen we quite often do not know, at the moment, what is going on. A man does not always say to himself, "Hullo! I'm growing up." It is often only when he looks back that he realises what has happened and recognises it as what people call "growing up." You can see it even in simple matters. A man who starts anxiously watching to see whether he is going to sleep is very likely to remain wide awake. As well, the thing I am talking of now may not happen to every one in a sudden flash . . . it may be so gradual that no one could ever point to a particular hour or even a particular year. And what matters is the nature of the change in itself, not how we feel while it is happening. *It is the change from being confident about our own efforts to the state in which we despair of doing anything for ourselves and leave it to God.*

I know the words "leave it to God" can be misunderstood, but they must stay for the moment. *The sense in which a Christian leaves it to God is that he puts all his trust in Christ: trusts that Christ will somehow share with him the perfect human obedience which He carried out from His birth to His crucifixion: that Christ will make the man more like Himself and, in a sense, make good his deficiencies. . . .* In yet another sense, handing everything over to Christ does not, of course, mean that you stop trying. *To trust Him means, of course, trying to do all that He says.* There would be no sense in saying you trusted a person if you would not take his advice. Thus if you have really handed yourself over to Him, it must follow that you are trying to obey Him. *But trying in a new way, a less worried way.* (128–29; emphasis added)

The Satanic shafts in the whirlwind may take many forms. They may come in the form of temptations described by President Joseph F. Smith: enticements to be immoral, to yield to the "flattery of prominent men," or to succumb to "false educational ideas" (313). We may be tempted to judge all things, including the gospel and the Church, through the lenses of our own academic discipline or professional position. In this regard Elder Dallin H. Oaks has recently written:

We can liken the various ways of the world to implements that can draw water from a worldly well. We need such implements. We can and do use them to make our way in the world.

But while we are doing this, in our occupations, in our civic responsibilities, and in our work in other organizations, we must never forget the Savior's words, "Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again." Only from Jesus Christ, the Lord and Savior of this world, can we obtain the living water whose partaker shall never thirst again, in whom it will be "a well of water springing up into everlasting life." And we do not obtain that water with worldly implements. (14)

Whatever may come in the mighty storms that shall beat upon our houses of faith—and they shall come, as surely as the Lord lives—we shall be able to withstand and endure, if we are properly grounded. Satan shall not have power sufficient to drag us down to hell, to that gulf of misery and wo, if we will have built securely on the rock of our Redeemer (Hel 5:12).

Conclusion

There are few gifts of the Spirit of greater worth in a day of doubt and a time of confusion than the gift of discernment. We have the challenge of not only discerning good from evil, light from darkness, but also that which matters from that which is of but little value. In a time like our own when a babble of voices is heard, discordant voices which vie for our attention and seek for our time and interest, it is incumbent upon us to be discerning, to be discriminating. Some things simply matter more than others. But, in the words of Alma, "there is one thing which is of more importance than they all" (Alma 7:7). That something is the knowledge and testimony of Jesus, the calm certitude which comes by the spirit of revelation. We may know many things, but if we do not know this, our testimony is deficient and our foundation less solid than it might otherwise be. "Upon this rock"—the rock of revelation, the Master said at Caesarea Philippi—"I will build my church" (Matt 16:18; *TPJS* 274). "And how could it be otherwise?" Elder Bruce R. McConkie asked.

There is no other foundation upon which the Lord could build his Church and kingdom. The things of God are known only by the power of his Spirit. God stands revealed or he remains forever unknown. No man can know that Jesus is the Lord but by the Holy Ghost.

Revelation: Pure, perfect, personal revelation—this is the rock!

Revelation that Jesus is the Christ: the plain, wondrous word that comes from God in heaven to man on earth, the word that affirms the divine Sonship of our Lord—this is the rock!

The divine Sonship of our Lord: the sure, heaven-sent word that God is his Father and that he has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel—this is the rock!

The testimony of our Lord: the testimony of Jesus, which is the spirit of prophecy—this is the rock!

All this is the rock, and yet there is more. *Christ is the Rock:* the Rock of Ages, the Stone of Israel, the Sure Foundation—the Lord is our Rock! (“Upon This Rock” 77; emphasis in original)

Truly, as the Apostle Paul testified: “Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 3:11).

Save only what is written in scripture, perhaps nowhere do we find the invitation and the challenge to build upon the rock of our Redeemer taught so forcefully as in hymns. Consider the words of E. Mote:

My hope is built on nothing less
than Jesus' blood and righteousness;
no merit of my own I claim,
but wholly trust in Jesus' name.

On Christ, the solid rock, I stand—
all other ground is sinking sand.

When weary in this earthly race,
I rest on his unchanging grace;
in every wild and stormy gale
my anchor holds and will not fail.

His vow, his covenant and blood
are my defence against the flood;
when earthly hopes are swept away
he will uphold me on that day.

When the last trumpet's voice shall sound,
O may I then in him be found!
clothed in his righteousness alone,
faultless to stand before his throne.

On Christ, the solid rock, I stand—
all other ground is sinking sand.
(qtd. Stott 29)

Or, ponder the significance of the words of a hymn we
frequently sing:

How firm a foundation, ye Saints of the Lord,
Is laid for your faith in his excellent word!
What more can he say than to you he hath said,
Who unto the Savior for refuge have fled?

* * * * *

When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie,
My grace, all sufficient, shall be thy supply.
The flame shall not hurt thee; I only design
Thy dross to consume and thy gold to refine.

E'en down to old age, all my people shall prove
My sov'reign, eternal, unchangeable love;
And then, when gray hair shall their temples adorn,
Like lambs shall they still in my bosom be borne.

The soul that on Jesus hath leaned for repose
I will not, I cannot, desert to his foes;
That soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake,

I'll never, no never, no never forsake!
(*Hymns* 88)

Those who accept the invitation to “come unto Christ and be perfected in him” (Moroni 10:32) thus come out of the world, enjoy citizenship with the Saints of the Most High, and erect their houses of faith on “the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone” (Eph 2:19–20).

On Christ’s mighty arm we rely. Because of who he is and what he has done, there is no obstacle to eternal life too great to overcome. Because of him, our minds may be at peace, our souls may rest. As Helaman told 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)

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The Promised Land and Its Covenant Peoples

3

Douglas Brinley

At least four groups of covenant people have settled the American continent: the Antediluvians, from Adam to Noah; the people of Jared, called Jaredites; the Lehites and Mulekites; and the present inhabitants of the land, the Gentiles. The Book of Mormon contains an account of the latter three immigrant groups and notes that the Lord's promise to each colony appears to have been the same: serve the God of the land, who is Jesus Christ, and prosper on the land (Ether 2:8; 2 Nephi 1:9). If the inhabitants choose evil, they will be "swept off" the face of the land.

And now, we can behold the decrees of God concerning this land, that it is a land of promise; and whatsoever nation shall possess it shall serve God, or they shall be swept off when the fulness of his wrath shall come upon them. And the fulness of his wrath cometh

¹ That the ancient patriarchs of the Antediluvian period presided and labored in what is now part of the American continent may be seen from D&C 116, where Joseph Smith indicated that Adam lived in a portion of what is presently the state of Missouri, and from D&C 107:53. See also Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, 3:74. For a discussion of Enoch's ministry in this land, see Orson Pratt, *Journal of Discourses*, 12:338. Enoch came from the line of patriarchs, and it is reasonable to suppose that the promised land spoken of in Moses 8:17 and 41 was that of his fathers—part of what is now the American continent. All the land mass was in one place until many years after the Flood. It was divided in the days of Peleg (Gen 10:25). I treat the Lehites and the people of Mulek as one settlement group since we have no records of the history of the people of Mulek prior to the time they joined the Nephites. Although they were contemporaries who arrived in the promised land at different spots, they were unaware of each other's existence until the people in Zarahemla were discovered by Mosiah and united with his people, thus becoming Nephites (Omni 1:13–19; Mosiah 25:12–13).

upon them when they are ripened in iniquity. (Ether 2:9; see also 1 Nephi 2:20; 2 Nephi 1:6–11)

This dominant theme—America is a covenant land reserved for a people who will have Jesus Christ (Jehovah) to be their God—appears again and again in the Book of Mormon. For example, the Jaredite account proclaims this continent to be a “land of promise . . . choice above all other lands which the Lord God had preserved for a righteous people” (Ether 2:7). Lehi reminded his family in a final discourse that the Lord had led them to a “land of promise” (2 Nephi 1:3). The Lord promised Nephi that if he kept the commandments he would be “led to a land of promise; yea, even a land which I have prepared for you; yea, a land which is choice above all other lands” (1 Nephi 2:20).

The Book of Mormon clearly outlines a pattern of the inhabitants settling in the promised land, of establishing laws to maintain political and moral standards, and of God’s covenanting to protect and bless them if they will uphold spiritual and political laws. Unfortunately, the first three civilizations failed to maintain their covenants and standards, and their tragic cycles concluded with each one “ripening in iniquity” and being “swept off” the land. The Jaredites and Nephites passed through a number of stages from the time of their arrival in the promised land until they were ripened in iniquity and destroyed. The Gentiles who now occupy the land, have not yet completed all the stages.

This chapter identifies the covenants between God and the land’s inhabitants and then discusses how they fared. The primary focus, however, will be the Nephites’ passage through ten stages of decline, which are particularly clear in the book of Helaman and the first chapters of 3 Nephi. It will note, briefly, similarities between the Nephite decline and the decline of the other occupants of the land and give some observations on the Lamanites. Summary comments on the future of the Gentiles will conclude the paper.

The Covenants

The covenants between God and the inhabitants of the promised land may be summarized as follows:

God's Promises	The Inhabitants' Promise
1. America(s) as a land of promise choice above all others (Ether 2:10)	1. To serve the God of the land— Jesus Christ (Ether 2:8, 12)
2. Freedom from bondage (Ether 2:12)	2. To keep his commandments (2 Nephi 1:9)
3. Freedom from captivity from all other nations (Ether 2:12)	3. To repent of any iniquity (Ether 2:11)
4. Prosperity in the land (2 Nephi 1:9)	
5. Sole possession of the land (2 Nephi 1:9)	
6. Safe dwelling forever (2 Nephi 1:9)	
7. Hidden from the knowledge of other nations (2 Nephi 1:9)	

The Civilizations of the Promised Land

The People from Adam to Noah

The covenants between God and the people who resided in the land from Adam's day to the Flood are not clearly detailed in the Bible. However, the Book of Moses speaks of Cainan as a "land of promise" (Moses 6:17). The fact that God swept the land clean of its inhabitants except for eight souls indicates that the covenants between God and these first inhabitants was similar to those of later colonies where the promises were more explicit. We learn from the Nephite record, for example, that

the inhabitants of this land are never swept off until they have broken covenants, sinned against the fulness of the gospel light, desecrated priesthood, and ignored repeated prophetic warnings that destruction is imminent. Such conditions must have prevailed in Enoch's day for the Lord commanded him to "go to this people, and say unto them—Repent, lest I come out and smite them with a curse, and they die" (Moses 7:10).

The inhabitants of the world in Noah's day reached that stage where "every man [did] evil continually" (Moses 8:22). The scripture explains that before the Flood, the "earth was corrupt before God, and it was filled with violence. And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt, for all flesh had corrupted its way upon the earth" (vv 28, 29); yet, the people ignored Noah's warnings (vv 20–21). The Great Flood cleansed the wicked from the earth, and the land was prepared for its next occupants, the Jaredites (Ether 13:2).

The Jaredites

Moroni, in abridging the record of this people whom the Lord brought to America from the Tower of Babel, clearly outlined the covenant between God and the land's inhabitants from that time forward. He recorded the Lord's instructions to the brother of Jared:

Thou shalt go at the head of them down into the valley which is northward. And there will I meet thee, and I will go before thee into a land which is choice above all the lands of the earth. And there will I bless thee and thy seed, and raise up unto me of thy seed, and of the seed of thy brother, and they who shall go with thee, a great nation. And there shall be none greater than the nation which I will raise up unto me of thy seed, upon all the face of the earth (Ether 1:42–43).

Noting the Jaredites' arrival in the promised land, Moroni explained the requirements for remaining on the land:

Whoso should possess this land of promise, from that time henceforth and forever, should serve him, the true and only God, or they should be swept off when the fulness of his wrath should come upon them. . . . it is a land of promise; and whatsoever nation shall possess

it shall serve God, or they shall be swept off when the fulness of his wrath shall come upon them. And the fulness of his wrath cometh upon them when they are ripened in iniquity. For behold, this is a land which is choice above all other lands; wherefore he that doth possess it shall serve God or shall be swept off; for it is the everlasting decree of God. And it is not until the fulness of iniquity among the children of the land, that they are swept off (Ether 2:8–10).

Moroni then clearly stated the covenant between God and all future inhabitants:

Behold, this is a choice land, and whatsoever nation shall possess it shall be free from bondage, and from captivity, and from all other nations under heaven, *if* they will but serve the God of the land, who is Jesus Christ, who hath been manifested by the things which we have written (Ether 2:12).

But the Jaredites “ripened in iniquity” and were completely destroyed in a devastating civil war. Of the millions of Jaredites, only the king, Coriantumr, and the prophet, Ether, were left (Ether 15:29, 33).

The Lehites/Mulekites

The next people to inhabitant this land were Lehi’s colony and the people of Mulek, son of Zedekiah. Lehi explained the covenant between God and his seed:

We have obtained a land of promise, a land which is choice above all other lands; a land which the Lord God hath covenanted with me should be a land for the inheritance of my seed. Yea, the Lord hath covenanted this land unto me, and to my children forever. . . . And if it so be that they shall serve him according to the commandments which he hath given, it shall be a land of liberty unto [the inhabitants]; wherefore they shall never be brought down into captivity (2 Nephi 1:5,7).

Soon after Lehi’s death, however, the family split into two factions, the followers of Laman (Lamanites) and of Nephi (Nephites). The Lord warned Nephi to remove his group to another area to avoid confrontation with Laman and his followers who bore a violent hatred for him and his descendants (2 Nephi 5:5–8). In time the Lamanites located the Nephites,

and the two groups warred for many years. During King Mosiah's reign the Nephites moved to another land where they found the people of Zarahemla, descendants of Mulek, a son of Zedekiah, the king of Judah when Lehi and his family departed Jerusalem. These people joined with the Nephites and were integrated into the Nephite culture (Omni 1:12–19; Hel 6:10). Some two centuries after the resurrected Savior visited the Americas, the Nephites had become so ripened in iniquity that God allowed the armies of the Lamanites to annihilate them. Mormon and Moroni led some of those futile final battles that culminated in the Nephites being “swept off” the land.

The Gentiles

The present occupants of the promised land are called Gentiles by Book of Mormon writers (1 Nephi 22:7). The term *Gentile* refers to “latter-day Christians,” and Latter-day Saints are counted as part of the present Gentile culture. Though not mentioning him by name, Nephi foresaw the latter-day Gentile, Columbus, as he was wrought upon by the Spirit of the Lord and “went forth upon the many waters, even unto the seed of my brethren, who were in the promised land” (1 Nephi 13:12). The Gentiles were given this land by the Lord many years after the destruction of the Nephites and the subsequent disintegration of the Lamanites (Mormon 5:19). The Gentiles brought to this land the biblical record of Jesus Christ (1 Nephi 13:29–30). Nephi explained the hand of the Lord in the settlement of the Gentiles:

Nevertheless, thou beholdest that the Gentiles who have gone forth out of captivity, and have been lifted up *by the power of God above all other nations*, upon the face of the land which is choice above all other lands, which is the land that the Lord God hath covenanted with thy father (1 Nephi 13:30; emphasis added).

Nephi told Laman and Lemuel, “The Lord God will raise up a mighty nation among the Gentiles, yea, even upon the face of

this land” (1 Nephi 22:7). Nephi outlined the covenant between God and the Gentiles:

Therefore, wo be unto the Gentiles if it so be that they harden their hearts against the Lamb of God. For the time cometh, saith the Lamb of God, that I will work a great and a marvelous work among the children of men; a work which shall be everlasting, either on the one hand or on the other—*either to the convincing of them unto peace and life eternal, or unto the deliverance of them to the hardness of their hearts and the blindness of their minds unto their being brought down into captivity*, and also into destruction, both temporally and spiritually, according to the captivity of the devil (1 Nephi 14:6–7; emphasis added).

Though the people of each of these civilizations were clearly taught their covenants with God, still they drifted carelessly into corruption and were destroyed. The Flood took the first settlers, the Jaredites annihilated themselves through civil war, while the Nephites were decimated by the Lamanites in a series of ferocious battles. The destiny of the Gentiles, whether they choose to follow the teachings of Christ and be a favored people of the Lord on the promised land, or whether they will choose the fate of the former inhabitants of the land—is an important issue for the coming years.

The Lamanites Preserved

The exception to this general pattern of destruction has been the Lamanites. Many times over the course of their history the Lamanites became more righteous than the Nephites. And at one point there were neither Nephites nor Lamanites, nor any kind of “ites” (4 Nephi 1:17). However, nearly two centuries following the resurrected Christ’s visit to the promised land, the people again divided themselves into two groups using the old terminology *Nephites* and *Lamanites* (4 Nephi 1:36, 38). The Lord extended mercy to the children of these Lamanite separatists, in part, because they did not have the same advantages of having prophets, revelation, and scripture as did the Nephites. They were consequently not under the same degree

of condemnation as the Nephites, and thus the Lord preserved a remnant of them in the land. Nephi explained:

For behold, [the Lamanites] are more righteous than you [Nephites], for they have not sinned against that great knowledge which ye have received; therefore the Lord will be merciful unto them; yea, he will lengthen out their days and increase their seed, even when thou shalt be utterly destroyed except thou shalt repent. (Hel 7:24)

Samuel the Lamanite outlined the promises extended to these people in the last days:

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. . . .

For behold, had the mighty works been shown unto them which have been shown unto you, yea, unto them who have dwindled in unbelief because of the traditions of their fathers, ye can see of yourselves that they never would again have dwindled in unbelief. Therefore, saith the Lord: I will not utterly destroy them, but I will cause that in the day of my wisdom they shall return again unto me, saith the Lord. (Hel 15:12, 15–16)

Samuel's statement has proved prophetic in our modern era. The latter-day clash between the Lamanites and the Gentiles is an important feature of the modern history of North and South America (see 3 Nephi 16:8–9; 1 Nephi 13:31). But currently it is in the lands of the modern Lamanites that the harvesting of many souls into the latter-day Kingdom of God is taking place.

Ten Stages from Righteousness to Wickedness

The general evolution from righteousness to wickedness and eventual sweeping from the land involves the following ten stages:

1. The Lord leads the righteous to the Land of Promise (America).

2. He establishes a covenant with the inhabitants of the land.
3. He establishes laws (a constitution) for self-government.
4. When the majority break the laws and begin to choose evil over good, they breach the covenant; the judgments of God begin.
5. The Lord sends out prophets and missionaries to warn the inhabitants to repent or be destroyed.
6. The inhabitants may choose to (1) accept the invitation to repent; (2) reject outright the message of the prophets and seek to destroy them; or (3) ignore the prophetic warnings.
7. If the people reject the message, then initial judgments—natural calamities, wars, plagues, famine, drought—begin to destroy the people.
8. The Spirit of the Lord withdraws from the people.
9. The inhabitants increase in wickedness until they are “fully ripe in iniquity” and have cast out the righteous.
10. The forces of nature, civil war, or conquering hosts destroy the wicked completely; the righteous members of that society having been led elsewhere.

Stage 1: The Lord leads the righteous to the Land of Promise (America).

God reserved this land as a habitation for the righteous, those who sought religious freedom and political liberty. The Lehites and Mulekites were led from the Jerusalem area to escape the Babylonian captivity of the Jews (Hel 6:10).

Antediluvians: Adam and Eve were placed here in the beginning and lived in what is now known as a part of the present state of Missouri (D&C 116). Enos and his people “dwelt in a land of promise”; Cainan, and Enoch came out of that promised land (Moses 6:17, 41).

Jaredites: The Jaredites were guided to this land by the Lord (Ether 1:42–43).

Gentiles: The “discovery” of this land by Columbus was the beginning of its being peopled by the latter-day Gentiles (Mormon 5:19; 1 Nephi 22:7–9).

Stage 2: The Lord establishes a covenant with the inhabitants of the land.

This covenant is best outlined in the Jaredite record (Ether 2:7–12), but it was clearly taught by Lehi to his sons (2 Nephi 1:5–9). The prophets passed this information to their posterity through their sermons and writings (1 Nephi 2:20–21; 2 Nephi 4:4; Jarom 1:9; Omni 1:6; Mosiah 2:31; Alma 9:13, 18; Alma 36:1, 30; 37:13; 38:1).

This second stage represents the basic commitment of God to his children whom he led to the land. There are two options: either (1) serve the God of the land, who is Jesus Christ, by living His commandments, or (2) if you refuse to serve him and become grossly wicked, you will not be permitted to remain on the land. It is a decision the inhabitants themselves must make. Unfortunately, all the former peoples chose the second option and were destroyed—the Lamanites excepted.

Antediluvians: The Lord promised Enoch that he would bless his followers and curse the wicked (Moses 7:20), and his people would be safe from their enemies because of their faithfulness (Moses 7:16–17).

Jaredites: These people were clearly taught the elements of the covenants with God (Ether 9:20; 13:2; Ether 2:7–11).

Gentiles: The Gentiles face the same potential blessing or cursing as the former inhabitants (1 Nephi 14:2; 6–7).

Stage 3: He establishes laws (a constitution) for self-government.

In the third stage, God inspires people to establish laws so that the inhabitants may govern themselves responsibly.

Accountability is best achieved when people are free from political tyranny, free to determine their own destiny.

Under Nephi, the people were governed by kings. When the kings were righteous, the people had inspired laws—including the Law of Moses. Under King Mosiah, all knew the “laws which have been given you by our fathers, which are correct, and which were given them by the hand of the Lord” (Mosiah 29:25). The Nephites were smitten by the Lamanites because they “had altered and trampled under their feet the laws of Mosiah, or that which the Lord commanded [Mosiah] to give unto the people; and they saw that their laws had become corrupted, and that they had become a wicked people” (Hel 4:22).

Antediluvians: These people were governed by patriarchs who received revelation from the Lord on spiritual and practical elements of daily living.

Jaredites: The Jaredites were governed by kings. We know little of how the laws were given or carried out, except that when the kings were righteous, the laws were administered fairly (Ether 7:25). However, wicked kings suspended the “constitution” (Ether 9:29).

Gentiles: Concerning the law in the present Gentile era, the Lord said that he “suffered [the Constitution] to be established, and [it] should be maintained for the rights and protection of all flesh, according to just and holy principles. . . . And for this purpose have I established the Constitution of this land, by the hands of wise men whom I raised up unto this very purpose, and redeemed the land by the shedding of blood” (D&C 101:77,80).

Stage 4: When the majority break the laws and begin to choose evil over good, they breach the covenant; the judgments of God begin.

The principle of the majority choosing evil over good leads to judgments on the inhabitants. Mosiah 29 addresses this topic,

when the Nephites changed the form of government from one of kings to a system of judges, a pattern similar to the present American system (see Mosiah 29:25, 28–29, 38–39). King Mosiah taught his people thusly in this transition:

Let us appoint judges, to judge this people according to our law . . . for we will appoint wise men to be judges, that will judge this people according to the commandments of God. . . . Therefore, choose you by the voice of this people, judges. (Mosiah 29:11, 25)

Judges were chosen to measure the acts of the people against a standard of conduct, a “constitution” of some type (Hel 4:21–22).

Then the king explained that when men are free to choose, some individuals will always clamor on the political left and right, usually agitating for unorthodox views. But the citizens will be safe in following the decision of the majority—as long as most of the people live the gospel and keep their covenants. When people are righteous, they make decisions consistent with the will of God and with correct principles of agency and accountability. Mosiah taught his people,

Now it is not common that the voice of the people desireth anything contrary to that which is right; but it is common for the lesser part of the people to desire that which is not right; therefore this shall ye observe and make it your law—to do your business by the voice of the people. (Mosiah 29:26; emphasis added)

The King then explained how the covenant would be broken when the majority of the people chose evil, thus setting the stage for judgments and destruction upon the inhabitants. “And *if* the time comes that the voice of the people doth choose iniquity, *then is the time he will visit you with great destruction* even as he has hitherto visited this land” (Mosiah 29:27; emphasis added).

The Nephites, in fact, in the days of Helaman reached that level of wickedness:

For as their laws and their governments were established by the voice of the people, and they who chose evil were more numerous than

they who chose good, therefore they *were ripening for destruction*, for the laws had become corrupted. (Hel 5:2; emphasis added)

Having political freedom and economic prosperity often tempt people to seek ever greater worldly possessions. When they fail to yield to spiritual promptings, they begin to covet material things (even to taking them illegally) to distinguish themselves by class and rank. Mormon described the trend:

And the people began to be distinguished by ranks, according to their riches and their chances for learning; yea, some were ignorant because of their poverty, and others did receive great learning because of their riches. . . . And thus there became a great inequality in all the land, insomuch that the church began to be broken up. (3 Nephi 6:12, 14)

Increased prosperity and wealth divided the Nephites (see Hel 3:24,36; 6:17; 3 Nephi 6:4–5). They set their hearts upon riches (see Hel 3:1, 33–34; 4:12; 7:21, 26–28; 13:20–22; 16:10; and 3 Nephi 6:13). They began boasting that they were invincible (see Hel 4:13; 6:16–17; 13:22; 16:12; 3 Nephi 10).

Greed and lust for power lead people to tamper with the laws designed to protect and prevent exploitation of all citizens. The wicked desire to change the “constitution,” so they can seek their own ends, but the system of judges and law prevent them from doing so. But because changing the laws requires the consent of the people through popular vote, the wicked are frustrated unless they can get a majority to join their schemes. Also, Satan works to influence people to make evil appear good (2 Nephi 15:20). If the majority permit changes in the laws, either by apathy or through ever growing numbers of people who are tempted and confused about right and wrong, the stage is set for the judgments of the Almighty, for he will not allow such wickedness to continue (see Mosiah 29:27; Hel 4:22; 5:2–3; 6:23; 7:3; 3 Nephi 7:6).

When voting did not give the wicked Nephites their demands, they organized secret combinations, such as the Gadianton band, to “get gain” and obtain political power through clandestine practices and political intrigue. This

particular band of marauders, Mormon lamented, “did prove the overthrow, yea, almost the entire destruction of the people of Nephi” (Hel 2:13).

Mormon summarized the process of the Nephites’ transition from prosperity to gross wickedness:

Yea, and we may see at the very time when he doth prosper his people, yea, in the increase of their fields, their flocks and their herds, and in gold, and in silver, and in all manner of precious things of every kind and art; sparing their lives, and delivering them out of the hands of their enemies; softening the hearts of their enemies that they should not declare wars against them; yea, and in fine, doing all things for the welfare and happiness of his people; yea, then is the time that they do harden their hearts, and do forget the Lord their God, and do trample under their feet the Holy One—yea, and this because of their ease, and their exceedingly great prosperity.

And thus we see that except the Lord doth chasten his people with many afflictions, yea, except he doth visit them with death and with terror, and with famine and with all manner of pestilence, they will not remember him. (Hel 12:2–3)

Antediluvians: Not only did this civilization reach a majority of wicked people, but “*every man* was lifted up in the imagination of the thoughts of his heart, being only evil *continually*” (Moses 8:22). Such wickedness paved the way for their destruction.

Jaredites: The power of secret combinations led to their destruction (Ether 8:21–22). When the people allowed the wicked to gain the upper hand, they lost control of their own society (see Ether 7:24; 9:29; 11:5–7; 13:15, 18; 14:1).

Gentiles: The resurrected Lord revealed to the Nephites that the same options confronting the Nephites would face the latter-day settlers (3 Nephi 16:6–10; 21:4–11).

Stage 5: The Lord sends out prophets and missionaries to warn the inhabitants to repent or be destroyed.

Among the Nephites, when the wicked tried to change or modify God-given laws to support wickedness, the prophets and missionaries went forth to warn the people to repent, for the

people were violating the terms and conditions of the covenant. By such actions the people brought upon themselves the judgments of God (Hel 5:2–3). While Nephi, son of Helaman, administered the laws, the people looked for loopholes to carry out their wicked schemes. He grew “weary because of their iniquity; and he yielded up the judgment-seat, and took it upon himself to preach the word of God all the remainder of his days, and his brother Lehi also, all the remainder of his days” (v 4).

The books of Mosiah, Alma, and Helaman record major efforts by the prophets and missionaries to declare repentance to the people, knowing that only repentance could save them from destruction. These prophets warned the Nephites of their impending destruction if they continued in their wickedness. The prophets in Helaman through 3 Nephi Chapter 8, labored among their people full time to preach repentance to turn them from certain destruction. They knew from Alma’s earlier success that their only hope to turn the people back to the Lord was to go among the people and call them to repentance. Mormon wrote of Alma’s ministry,

And this he did that he himself might go forth among his people, or among the people of Nephi, that he might preach the word of God unto them, to stir them up in remembrance of their duty, and that he might pull down, by the word of God, all the pride and craftiness and all the contentions which were among his people, seeing no way that he might reclaim them save it were in bearing down in pure testimony against them. (Alma 4:19)

The early chapters in the book of Helaman record the entire cycle: from a state of prosperity through spiritual decline, to war when the people failed to repent, to a state of compelled humility. To illustrate: At this point in the record, (Hel 3), the Nephites were living the gospel and enjoying great prosperity. They were faithful to their covenants and even brought many converts into the Kingdom. However, with increased prosperity, the people began to set their hearts on greater possessions, yielding to the temptation to obtain them by whatever means they could. Mormon labeled it “exceedingly

great pride,” which, he said, “had gotten into the hearts of the people; and it was because of their exceedingly great riches and their prosperity in the land” (Hel 3:36). To make matters worse, the candidates who lost the election incited the Lamanites to attack the Nephites out of revenge for that loss. Of the ensuing battle, in which many Nephites died, Mormon lamented:

Now this great loss of the Nephites, and the great slaughter which was among them, would not have happened had it not been for their wickedness and their abomination which was among them . . . And it was because of the pride of their hearts, because of their exceeding riches; yea, it was because of their oppression to the poor, withholding their food from the hungry, withholding their clothing from the naked, and smiting their humble brethren upon the cheek, making a mock of that which was sacred, denying the spirit of prophecy and of revelation, murdering, plundering, lying, stealing, committing adultery, rising up in great contentions, and deserting away into the land of Nephi, among the Lamanites. (Hel 4:11–12)

As wickedness increased, the Lord’s servants—Moronihah, Nephi, and Lehi—did “preach many things unto the people because of their iniquity, . . . yea, and did prophesy many things unto them concerning their iniquities, and what should come unto them if they did not repent of their sins” (Hel 4:14). The effect of their preaching was “that [the Nephites] did repent, and inasmuch as they did repent they did begin to prosper,” and they were able to recapture much of their land which had been lost to the Lamanites in an earlier skirmish (vv 15–16). The cycle of prosperity to humility was complete. But this cycle, like all cycles, began again before many years had passed away.

Antediluvians: Noah went forth to preach the gospel (Moses 8:19). The people of his day were so wicked that “every man was lifted up in the imagination of the thoughts of his heart, being only evil continually” (Moses 8:22). The entire civilization was filthy and corrupt. Yet, Noah was obedient to the Lord’s command to lift a warning voice to the people of his time.

Jaredites: Many prophets came to warn the people that they faced the judgments of God. Before the final battle scenes where millions were killed, the prophet Ether presented to the king the options of repenting and retaining his kingdom, or losing everything (Ether 13:20–21).

Gentiles: In 1974, President Spencer W. Kimball, as the Lord’s prophet, called “every young man” into missionary service (*Ensign* [Oct 1974] 9). The Gentiles are clearly “ripening in iniquity,” and the youth of this generation are called to stem the tide of evil. The first section of the Doctrine and Covenants calls for the Saints to take up spiritual arms and go forth among the Gentiles, warning them of their need to repent (D&C 1:4–5, 8–9).

Stage 6: The inhabitants may choose to (1) accept the warning and repent, (2) reject outright the message of the prophets, or (3) ignore the prophets and their warnings.

As prophets warn the inhabitants of the consequences of their sins, the people must choose to repent or change, accept or reject the counsel of the prophets. If the inhabitants choose to repent, the covenant with God is reestablished, returning to Stage 2. If they reject the message, wickedness increases and the society begins to “ripen in iniquity.” If the people choose to ignore or just tolerate the prophets’ warnings—then the ripening process is inevitable.

The sons of Helaman went forth to preach repentance with these results:

And it came to pass that they did preach with great power, insomuch that they did confound many of those dissenters who had gone over from the Nephites, insomuch that they came forth and did confess their sins and were baptized unto repentance, and immediately returned to the Nephites to endeavor to repair unto them the wrongs which they had done. . . . Therefore they did speak unto the great astonishment of the Lamanites, to the convincing them, insomuch that there were eight thousand of the Lamanites who were in the land of Zarahemla and round about baptized unto repentance, and were

convinced of the wickedness of the traditions of their fathers. (Hel 5:17, 19)

Most of these converts, however, were Lamanites. Few among the Nephites were touched by the power of the Spirit of the Lord because of their wickedness, and they cast the prophets into prison.

Antediluvians: The people in Noah's day rejected his message (Moses 8:21, 24, 30).

Jaredites: The Jaredites rejected the counsel of Ether, their prophet, and continued in their murderous and destructive ways (Ether 13:20–22).

Gentiles: The Gentiles are not accepting the gospel as rapidly as the remnants of the House of Israel (Lamanites). Yet Americans have tolerated religious groups canvassing the populace, allowing the word of the Lord to spread in the land. As long as some people accept the message of repentance and join the Kingdom of God, the Lord will delay his judgments.

Stage 7: If the people reject the message, initial judgments—natural calamities, plagues, famine, drought—begin to destroy the people.

The prophets preach repentance as the only solution to spiritual decadence. When the citizens choose not to repent, they strive to change the laws of God to justify their wickedness. The righteous are called to labor against this evil, because the Lord will not allow the population to remain on the land except on conditions of righteousness. The ripening process quickens.

Following the miracle of their being released from prison, Nephi and Lehi

did go forth, and did minister unto the people, declaring throughout all the regions round about all the things which they had heard and seen, insomuch that the more part of the Lamanites were convinced of them, because of the greatness of the evidences which they had received. And as many as were convinced did lay down their weapons of war, and also their hatred and the tradition of their

fathers. And it came to pass that they did yield up unto the Nephites the lands of their possession. (Hel 5:50–52)

Changing hearts is more effective in winning the souls of men than winning physical battles (Alma 31:5). In time the Lamanites became more righteous than the Nephites. The wicked among the Nephites rejected the prophets' warnings, and soon divine judgments began (3 Nephi, Chapter 8); the righteous were preserved and enjoyed the spirit and power of God (3 Nephi 7:18–19).

Antediluvians: “And there came forth a great famine into the land, and the Lord cursed the earth with a sore curse, and many of the inhabitants thereof” (Moses 8:4). The Lord used judgments to humble the people, desiring to prevent their “utter destruction.” In the days of Noah, the people rejected his message, and some even sought his life (Moses 8:18, 20–21, 26, 30).

Jaredites: The Jaredites experienced drought and famine (Ether 9:28–30), wars and dissensions, as the judgments commenced (Ether 11:6–7, 12–13, 20–21; 13:20–22; 14:1, 25).

Gentiles: As people accept the message of repentance, the work moves forward. At present, many good people in America and other Gentile lands are accepting the gospel and thereby delaying divine judgments.

Stage 8: The Spirit of the Lord withdraws from the people.

As people reject the warning voices of the prophets and the message of famine, pestilence, and war, they become spiritually insensitive. When the Spirit of God withdraws, the carnal, sensual man is left to his own greed; contention becomes inevitable, as men exploit each other for gain, or seek each other's life.

Mormon describes the stage: “And thus we see that the Spirit of the Lord began to withdraw from the Nephites, because of the wickedness and the hardness of their hearts” (Hel 6:35).

The more the Nephites made evil choices, the more determined they became to follow wickedness.

Antediluvians: After seeking the life of Noah, the people were left without excuse and were subject to divine judgment (Moses 8:26). The Lord explained the outcome to Enoch: “Among all the workmanship of mine hands there has not been so great wickedness as among thy brethren . . . These which thine eyes are upon shall perish in the floods” (Moses 7:36, 38). To Noah the Lord said, “My Spirit shall not always strive with man, for he shall know that all flesh shall die . . . I will send in the floods upon them” (Moses 8:17).

Jaredites: Coriantumr refused to repent, but he sought Ether’s life, and a great spirit of warring began in the land (Ether 14:24; 15:22). Of the climactic struggle between Coriantumr and Shiz, Moroni lamented: “And thus we see that the Lord did visit them in the fulness of his wrath, and their wickedness and abominations had prepared a way for their everlasting destruction” (Ether 14:25). Because a spirit of war and death gripped the survivors, “the Spirit of the Lord had ceased striving with them” (15:19), and they were left to suffer their own fate.

Gentiles: The Gentiles have not reached this stage of decline though many people are choosing evil. No doubt a loss of the spirit of repentance contributes to our present physical and spiritual condition. Abortion, immorality, murder, abuse, hardness of heart, a great disparity in economic levels, materialism—all take a toll among the wicked and hasten the ripening process.

Stage 9: The Inhabitants increase in wickedness until they are “fully ripe in iniquity” and have cast out the righteous.

The metaphor of “ripening” occurs frequently in the Book of Mormon. Bananas, for example, as they ripen, do not return to a condition of green or unripe; rather they continue to ripen until they are overripe and finally rotten. Such is the term as it

applies to the level of wickedness among the inhabitants. The term “ripening” is also connected to casting out of the righteous (Hel 13:14). The Lord’s servants raise the warning voice to the inhabitants of the land, but the wicked do not tolerate what they consider to be a “self-righteous” judgment of their actions by the prophets. Mormon recorded, “And thus we see that they were in an awful state, and ripening for an everlasting destruction” (Hel 6:40).

Samuel the Lamanite, during a missionary tour, explained to the wicked majority:

Yea, wo unto this great city of Zarahemla; for behold it is because of those who are righteous that it is saved. . . . If it were not for the righteous who are in this great city, behold, I would cause that fire should come down out of heaven and destroy it. But behold, it is for the righteous’ sake that it is spared. But behold, the time cometh, saith the Lord, that *when ye shall cast out the righteous from among you*, then shall ye be ripe for destruction. (Hel 13:12, 14; see also Hel 8:26; 11:36–37; 13:12–14; 16:12, 15; 3 Nephi 6:18; Ether 2:9; D&C 18:6; 29:9; and 62:31)

Antediluvians: These people justified their lifestyles and rejected the message of Noah (Moses 8:21).

Jaredites: Ether was forced into hiding, because the Jaredites “esteemed him as naught, and cast him out; and he hid himself in the cavity of a rock by day” (Ether 13:13).

Gentiles: The Gentiles have not yet reached Stage 9. Many Gentiles accept the gospel around the world today. But in the main, the Gentiles will reject the Restoration message (2 Nephi 28:32; D&C 45:28–29). Many Gentiles resist street or home contacting. Referrals from members seem to be the most successful way to bring the gospel to the Gentiles. But, as long as the Lord’s servants are not “cast out” of countries and communities, and Church members continue to share the gospel with friends and associates, God will withhold devastating judgments.

Stage 10: The forces of nature, civil war, or conquering hosts destroy the wicked completely; righteous survivors are led elsewhere.

If the warning cries of the prophets go unheeded and the Spirit of the Lord withdraws from the people, there is little hope of survival. People become emotionally aroused to fight for what they think are just causes. When repeated warnings go unheeded and their own lives are threatened, the prophets withdraw and let the people face the consequences of their own evil desires (Ether 11:13; See the warning voices in Hel 10:11, 14; 13:5–10, 30, 32, 38; 3 Nephi 2:13, 19). The curse upon the land and the destruction of the inhabitants are sure and absolute unless there is swift repentance. But at this point there is no desire to repent, only the drive to seek enemy blood and avenge the loss of their dead.

The book of Helaman outlines this stage of wickedness among the Nephites before the resurrected Lord's advent among them. As the wicked were destroyed, the Lord preserved the righteous. Samuel's prophecies of signs of the birth of the Messiah were all fulfilled. After Christ's visit to the Nephites, the people remained righteous for at least two hundred years. After two more centuries, however, the Nephites passed through the same stages again; and this time, despite Mormon's and Moroni's preaching and pleading for repentance, the Nephites rebelled and sealed their own doom. They were swept off the face of the earth. Samuel had earlier predicted, "The sword of justice hangeth over this people; and four hundred years pass not away save the sword of justice falleth upon this people . . . and there shall be those of the fourth generation who shall live, of your enemies, to behold your *utter* destruction" (Hel 13:5, 10; emphasis added). Such was the outcome.

Antediluvians: The people of Noah were drowned in the great worldwide flood.

Jaredites: The Jaredites were destroyed to the last man.

Gentiles: The inhabitants of the land are “ripening in iniquity” (D&C 18:6; 61:31). Latter-day scriptures mention many judgments that will come upon the Gentiles on this land unless they repent (D&C 29:15–21; D&C 45:28–31). If Gentile nations cast out the missionaries, or if the Church feels the need to call them home for their own safety, or if faithful Saints are persecuted and killed for their beliefs, then the judgments of God will fall upon the wicked in great force, even unto their destruction.

Conclusion: The Future of the Gentiles

To the Gentiles who now live on the promised land, the relevant question is “Which choice will we make?” The Book of Mormon is a warning voice to them to repent and live God’s laws or be destroyed (Mormon 8:34–35; Ether 2:12). Will these latter-day Christians choose the same path as the land’s former inhabitants did? Are the violations of God’s laws (abortion, sabbath-breaking, immorality, dishonesty, pollution, political corruption, spouse and child abuse) equal to or greater than those which led to the destruction of earlier peoples? Mormon warned the Gentiles:

Hearken, O ye Gentiles, and hear the words of Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, which he hath commanded me that I should speak concerning you, for, behold he commandeth me that I should write, saying: Turn, all ye Gentiles, from your wicked ways; and repent of your evil doing, of your lyings and deceivings, and of your whoredoms, and of your secret abominations, and your idolatries, and of your murders, and your priestcrafts, and from all your wickedness and abominations, and come unto me, and be baptized in my name, that ye may receive a remission of your sins, and be filled with the Holy Ghost, that ye may be numbered with my people who are of the house of Israel. (3 Nephi 30:1–2)

And Moroni reminded the Gentiles,

And this cometh unto you, O ye Gentiles, that ye may know the decrees of God—that ye may repent, and not continue in your iniquities until the fulness come, that ye may not bring down the

fulness of the wrath of God upon you as the inhabitants of the land have hitherto done. (Ether 2:11)

Prophets and modern scripture warn the latter-day people of similar dangers. Though predicted calamities are conditioned upon repentance, it appears that, in general, the Gentiles are little interested in repentance. They appear to be treading the path of the former inhabitants, but have not entered the final stages yet. However, people living the laws of the land are often ridiculed and scorned as foolish, naive, or unrealistic. While prophets are still protected under “freedom of speech” in America, persecution in more subtle ways exists and, one might argue, is becoming more and more flagrant.

In 1975, Ezra Taft Benson, as the President of the Quorum of Twelve, warned the Gentiles:

Destruction, even more terrible and far-reaching than attended the last great war, will come with certainty unless rulers and people alike repent and cease their evil and godless ways. God will not be mocked. He will not permit the sins of sexual immorality, secret murderous combinations, the killing of the unborn, and disregard for all his holy commandments and the messages of his servants to go unheeded without grievous punishment for such wickedness. The nations of the world cannot endure in sin. The way of escape is clear. The immutable laws of God remain steadfastly in the heavens above. When men and nations refuse to abide by them, the penalty must follow. They will be wasted away. Sin demands punishment. (“A Message to the World,” *Ensign* [Nov 1975] 5:34; CR [Oct 1975] 48)

The same judgments—sword, famine, and pestilence—that afflicted the Nephites will be repeated in the latter days among the Gentiles if they do not repent. The Lord said to a modern prophet, “And thus, with the *sword* and by bloodshed the inhabitants of the earth shall mourn; and with *famine*, and *plague*, and *earthquake* . . . shall the inhabitants of the earth be made to feel the wrath and indignation, and chastening hand of an Almighty God” (D&C 87:6; emphasis added).

Though the final destiny of the Gentiles is beyond the scope of this paper, it should be remembered that these principles govern all the inhabitants who live upon the land. Mormon,

reflecting on the tragedies of which he was writing, seemed to confirm the Lord's words to Lehi:

Blessed art thou and thy children; and they shall be blessed, inasmuch as they shall keep my commandments they shall prosper in the land. But remember, inasmuch as they will not keep my commandments they shall be cut off from the presence of the Lord.

And we see that these promises have been verified to the people of Nephi; for it has been their quarrelings and their contentions, yea, their murderings, and their plunderings, their idolatry, their whoredoms, and their abominations, which were among themselves, which brought upon them their wars and their destructions.

And those who were faithful in keeping the commandments of the Lord were delivered at all times, whilst thousands of their wicked brethren have been consigned to bondage, or to perish by the sword, or to dwindle in unbelief (Alma 50:20–22)

The Gentiles have yet to make their final choice.

Patterns of Apostasy in the Book of Helaman

4

Robert J. Matthews

The purpose of these yearly symposia is to demonstrate, book by book, the important things the Book of Mormon says to the people in the last days. As you know, the Book of Mormon was written specifically and pointedly for our time. The principles needed for salvation anciently are the same principles needed now. Likewise, the way of apostasy in ancient times is a pattern of apostasy in our day. The Book of Mormon shows how apostasies occur, and the terrible effects that apostasy has in the lives of individuals as well as in groups such as political governments and churches. Men such as Sherem, Nehor, and Korihor are notable examples of individual apostates in the Book of Mormon, and it clearly demonstrates their pride and sophistry. These were intellectual giants, but they were spiritually undeveloped and each fell victim to the cunning of the devil who captured them with an appeal to their carnal and natural desires.

The particular focus of this paper is on group apostasy—the apostasy of a people—which is described and explained in the book of Helaman. In this book we read of the immense damage that came to almost an entire people in just one generation and left them ripened for destruction. In the book of Helaman we read what happens in the Church when people who once were righteous begin to slip into unrighteousness, and we see how

Robert J. Matthews is professor of Ancient Scripture and director of the Pearl of Great Price area of the Religious Studies Center at Brigham Young University.

quickly they lose the strength and wisdom they once had from the Lord. We read also of what happens to a nation when government officials succumb to the temptations for unrighteous power, wealth, and pride.

The book of Helaman graphically illustrates the swift downfall of a people. Covering a short period of 52 years, it shows the rapid change of values and erosion of standards, and presents the alarming transition of a culture that occurred between the time of the book of Alma and the book of 3 Nephi. It is alarming because it happened so quickly. And remember, this is not a novel. This is a record of people who lived and died in the Western Hemisphere. They were real people, and these events really happened. The record is preserved for us to read as a warning.

We are familiar with the account in 3 Nephi, chapters 8 and 9, telling of the great destructions, storms, earthquakes, tempests, lightnings, fires, and darkness, during which the more wicked part of the people were slain. This destruction, so the record states (3 Nephi 9), was sent from God because of their iniquity. The book of Helaman chronicles the rapid decline of their culture into the decadent situation that caused the Lord to remove them from the face of the earth.

The book of Helaman is a record of extremes and of opposites. Among the righteous are Helaman, who was the son of Alma; his sons Nephi and Lehi and Samuel the Lamanite. These men are as righteous and holy as any men we know. At the same time there are Kishkumen, Gadianton, and the Gadianton robbers. These men are as wicked as any we know. During the half-century covered by the book of Helaman there are times of miraculous conversions to the gospel of Jesus Christ, with tens of thousands coming into the Church. On the other hand, there are major problems within the Church because of pride, and there are many dissenters from the Church. In the government, in the short space of 40 years, there are five chief judges slain, four of them by the stealth and intrigue of those who belong to a secret organization with oaths and covenants

designed to protect the guilty from detection. And the fifth chief judge was slain because the government did not provide adequate defenses, due to internal strife. We will read of these events directly from the book itself, for our own words would not be as explicit as is the scripture.

The Decline of Free Government

We shall read a few examples of what happened to the civil government during this time.

1. Because of internal turmoil and conflict, the Nephite state neglected to provide adequate defenses, and the attacking Lamanite army easily conquered the city of Zarahemla. Here are the words:

And it came to pass that because of so much contention and so much difficulty in the government, that they had not kept sufficient guards in the land of Zarahemla; for they had supposed that the Lamanites durst not come into the heart of their lands to attack that great city Zarahemla.

But it came to pass that Coriantumr did march forth at the head of his numerous host, and came upon the inhabitants of the city, and their march was with such exceedingly great speed that there was no time for the Nephites to gather together their armies.

Therefore Coriantumr did cut down the watch by the entrance of the city, and did march forth with his whole army into the city, and they did slay every one who did oppose them, insomuch that they did take possession of the whole city.

And it came to pass that Pacumeni, who was the chief judge, did flee before Coriantumr, even to the walls of the city. And it came to pass that Coriantumr did smite him against the wall, insomuch that he died. (Hel 1:18–21)

2. Because of the general lawlessness it was impossible to maintain order, for citizens had no respect for law, order, or authority. It was a time when the majority of the people chose evil.

And it came to pass that . . . , Nephi delivered up the judgment-seat to a man whose name was Cezoram.

For as their laws and their governments were established by the voice of the people, and they who chose evil were more numerous than they who chose good, therefore they were ripening for destruction, for the laws had become corrupted.

Yea, and this was not all; they were a stiffnecked people, insomuch that they could not be governed by the law nor justice, save it were to their destruction. (Hel 5:1–3)

3. Because those of the secret combinations seduced the people by flattery, and used the system to get themselves duly elected or appointed to the important positions of Nephite government, it was possible for them to practice great wickedness under the protection of the state:

And it came to pass on the other hand, that the Nephites did build them up and support them, beginning at the more wicked part of them, until they had overspread all the land of the Nephites, and had seduced the more part of the righteous until they had come down to believe in their works and partake of their spoils, and to join with them in their secret murders and combinations.

And thus they did obtain the sole management of the government, insomuch that they did trample under their feet and smite and rend and turn their backs upon the poor and the meek, and the humble followers of God.

And thus we see that they were in an awful state, and ripening for an everlasting destruction.

And it came to pass that thus ended the sixty and eighth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi. (Hel 6:38–41)

While all of this was happening, the prophet Nephi was away on a mission tour. When he returned to Zarahemla from the land northward, he was startled and saddened to see how quickly the manner of the people had changed.

And seeing the people in a state of such awful wickedness, and those Gadianton robbers filling the judgment-seats—having usurped the power and authority of the land; laying aside the commandments of God, and not in the least aright before him; doing no justice unto the children of men;

Condemning the righteous because of their righteousness; letting the guilty and the wicked go unpunished because of their money; and moreover to be held in office at the head of government, to rule and do according to their wills, that they might get gain and glory of

the world, and, moreover, that they might the more easily commit adultery, and steal, and kill, and do according to their own wills—

Now this great iniquity had come upon the Nephites, in the space of not many years. . . . (Hel 7:4–6)

Seeing this great and rapid change in the affairs of the people was a shock to Nephi.

The Secret Murders of Four Chief Judges

Here is a summary of the murders of four chief judges: Pahoran (51 BC); Cezoram (26 BC); the son of Cezoram (26 BC), and Seezoram (about 23–20 BC).

Pahoran, 51 BC

Now when those people who were desirous that [Paanchi] should be their governor saw that he was condemned unto death, [and that Pahoran was appointed by the voice of the people] therefore they were angry, and behold, they sent forth one Kishkumen, even to the judgment-seat of Pahoran, and murdered Pahoran as he sat upon the judgment-seat.

And he was pursued by the servants of Pahoran; but behold, so speedy was the flight of Kishkumen that no man could overtake him.

And he went unto those that sent him, and they all entered into a covenant, yea, swearing by their everlasting Maker, that they would tell no man that Kishkumen had murdered Pahoran.

Therefore, Kishkumen was not known among the people of Nephi, for he was in disguise at the time that he murdered Pahoran. And Kishkumen and his band, who had covenanted with him, did mingle themselves among the people, in a manner that they all could not be found. . . . (Hel 1:9–12)

Cezoram, 26 BC

And it came to pass that in the sixty and sixth year of the reign of the judges, behold, Cezoram was murdered by an unknown hand as he sat upon the judgment-seat. (Hel 6:15)

Son of Cezoram, 26 BC

And it came to pass that in the same year, that his son, who had been appointed by the people in his [father's] stead, was also murdered. And thus ended the sixty and sixth year. (Hel 6:15)

Seezoram, between 23–20 BC

There is a dramatic account of the murder of Seezoram and of Nephi's public announcement and detection of the murderer. In exhorting the Nephites because of their wickedness, Nephi says:

Yea, even at this time ye are ripening, because of your murders and your fornication and wickedness, for everlasting destruction; yea, and except ye repent it will come unto you soon.

Yea, behold it is now even at your doors; yea, go ye in unto the judgment-seat, and search; and behold, your judge is murdered, and he lieth in his blood; and he hath been murdered by his brother, who seeketh to sit in the judgment-seat.

And behold, they both belong to your secret band, whose author is Gadianton and the evil one who seeketh to destroy the souls of men. (Hel 8:26–28)

Because the people did not at first believe what Nephi said, they sent five men to investigate. When these five reached the judgment seat, they saw that the judge had fallen and was lying in his own blood. They then believed Nephi, not only in his prediction about the death of the judge, but they also decided that all the words of Nephi were true, even those about the judgments that were soon to come upon them.

However, a complication developed: some of the people said that Nephi had conspired with these five men to deceive the people, whereupon, the five were put into prison. Some of the judges thought that this whole event was contrived so as to make Nephi look like a prophet, a great man chosen of God. Some of the judges accused Nephi of having agreed with someone to murder the chief judge and they put him in prison. They offered him money and promised him his life if he would confess his scheme and identify the man. At this point Nephi said to them:

Behold I say unto you: Go to the house of Seantum, who is the brother of Seezoram, and say unto him—

Has Nephi, the pretended prophet, who doth prophesy so much evil concerning this people, agreed with thee, in the which ye have murdered Seezoram, who is your brother?

And behold, he shall say unto you, Nay.

And ye shall say unto him: Have ye murdered your brother?

And he shall stand with fear, and wist not what to say. And behold, he shall deny unto you; and he shall make as if he were astonished; nevertheless, he shall declare unto you that he is innocent.

But behold, ye shall examine him, and ye shall find blood upon the skirts of his cloak.

And when ye have seen this, ye shall say: From whence cometh this blood? Do we not know that it is the blood of your brother?

And then shall he tremble, and shall look pale, even as if death had come upon him.

And then shall ye say: Because of this fear and this paleness which has come upon your face, behold, we know that thou art guilty.

And then shall greater fear come upon him; and then shall he confess unto you, and deny no more that he has done this murder.

And then shall he say unto you, that I, Nephi, know nothing concerning the matter save it were given unto me by the power of God. And then shall ye know that I am an honest man, and that I am sent unto you from God.

And it came to pass that they went and did, even according as Nephi had said unto them. And behold, the words which he had said were true; for according to the words he did deny; and also according to the words he did confess.

And he was brought to prove that he himself was the very murderer, insomuch that the five were set at liberty, and also was Nephi.

And there were some of the Nephites who believed on the words of Nephi; and there were some also, who believed because of the testimony of the five, for they had been converted while they were in prison. (Hel 9:26–39)

Pacumeni, who was also a chief judge, had earlier been slain in battle due to the neglect of the government, brought about by internal difficulties, as we have already noted (Hel 1:21). Governmental problems were great and life was in turmoil.

Even a Good Form of Civil Government Fails in Times of Wickedness

Helaman 5:2–3 contains a very significant concept pertaining to civil government that we would do well to notice and read

again, even though we have referred to it earlier. The passage reads as follows:

For as their laws and their governments were established by the voice of the people, and they who chose evil were more numerous than they who chose good, therefore they were ripening for destruction, for the laws had become corrupted.

Yea, and this was not all; they were a stiffnecked people, insomuch that they could not be governed by the law nor justice, save it were to their destruction. (Hel 5:2–3)

In other words, in a democracy or a republic when the majority of the people desire wickedness and become more numerous than they who choose righteousness, the people can no longer be governed by law or by justice. This principle applies to our own form of constitutional government. We who live in the United States tend to feel that we would always be protected by the Constitution. However, some experienced political scientists and jurists have said that if the day ever comes that the majority favor that which is morally wrong, we as a people would not be safe—even with the Constitution. Here are some reasons why.

Direct democracy is impractical in a large population, so representatives appointed by the voice of the people are necessary. The principle of popular sovereignty is perhaps the most important fundamental of our government. Concerning this matter Elder Dallin H. Oaks, speaking in Provo, Utah, in 1987, at a Freedom Festival honoring the United States Constitution explained:

The people are the source of government power. . . . God gave the power to the people, and the people consented to a constitution that delegated certain powers to the government. Sovereignty is not inherent in a state or nation just because it has the power that comes from force of arms. . . . The sovereign power is in the people. . . . *Popular sovereignty necessarily implies popular responsibility.* . . . There is divine inspiration in the fundamental underlying premise of this whole constitutional order. All the blessings enjoyed under the United States Constitution are dependent upon the rule of law. . . . The rule of law is the basis of liberty. (72–73; emphasis added)

Later in the same year, Elder L. Tom Perry, speaking on 17 September 1987 at a Brigham Young University assembly honoring the Constitution of the United States, quoted extensively from Elder Oaks' address, and also noted the need for morality and righteousness in order to preserve our political freedom. In making this point Elder Perry quoted President John Adams, as saying: "We have no government armed with power capable of contending with human passions, unbridled by morality and religion" (27–35). Elder Perry added, "We are facing this situation to a degree in the world today. Therefore, we have the responsibility to remain unspotted from the world, to be upright and honest in all our dealings, to *set the example*" (34).

John Adams often expressed his conviction that a nation's liberty is ultimately dependent upon the morality of the people. President Adams is quoted as saying: "[The Constitution] was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other" (Nelson 101).

When king Mosiah was about to establish the system of judges among the Nephites in 92 BC, he discussed the matter of doing business by the voice of the people:

Now it is not common that the voice of the people desireth anything contrary to that which is right; but it is common for the lesser part of the people to desire that which is not right; therefore this shall ye observe and make it your law—to do your business by the voice of the people. (Mosiah 29:26)

But what happens if and when the majority desires that which is wrong? King Mosiah explained in the next verse:

And if the time comes that the voice of the people doth choose iniquity, then is the time that the judgments of God will come upon you; yea, then is the time he will visit you with great destruction even as he has hitherto visited this land. (27)

The point that is made here is that the *form* of government may not be as important in obtaining and maintaining freedom as is the *attitude* of the people who are governed. What the

majority desire long enough they will eventually obtain, and even good laws cannot permanently protect a people if the majority desire things unsupportive of freedom. King Mosiah also said that if all people were righteous, a kingdom would be entirely satisfactory, but since all are not so, a system of judges and representative government is safer. We should here observe that the government of heaven, which has perfect freedom and liberty, is a kingdom—the celestial kingdom—not the celestial democracy or celestial commonwealth.

Frances J. Grund, a European by birth and a keen observer of American life in the nineteenth century, was impressed with the morality of early U.S. citizens, but also spoke of the danger that could come to our nation if the majority of the people departed from integrity, honesty, and morality:

I consider the domestic virtue of the Americans as the principal source of all their other qualities. It acts as a promoter of industry, as a stimulus to enterprise, and as the most powerful restrainer of public vice. It reduces life to its simplest elements, and makes happiness less dependent on precarious circumstances; it ensures the proper education of children, and acts, by the force of example, on the morals of the rising generation: in short, it does more for the preservation of peace and good order, than all the laws enacted for that purpose; and is a better guarantee for the permanency of the American government, than any written instrument, the constitution itself not excepted.

No government could be established on the same principle as that of the United States, with a different code of morals. The American Constitution is remarkable for its simplicity; but it can only suffice a people habitually correct in their actions, and would be utterly inadequate to the wants of a different nation. Change the domestic habits of the Americans, their religious devotion, and their high respect for morality, and it will not be necessary to change a single letter in the Constitution in order to vary the whole form of their government. The circumstances being altered, the same causes would no longer produce the same effects; and it is more than probable, that the disparity which would then exist between the laws and the habits of those whom they are destined to govern, would not only make a different government desirable, but absolutely necessary, to preserve the nation from ruin. (Grund 71–72)

What this all means is that the majority rules, but sometimes the majority is not morally right. And when it is not morally right,

the governmental structure that once protected the righteous then protects the wicked in their wickedness.

We thus see how the Nephite government even under the reign of the judges, which was a form of free government with provision to control and limit the influence of unrighteous and ambitious judges and other citizens, succumbed to the Gadian-ton robbers. It was because “their laws and their governments were established by the voice of the people” (Hel 5:2), and when the majority desired that which was not right, a condition was created in which the people could no longer be governed by the law. It appears that we are faced with that situation, to a degree, in the world today, and perhaps that is the reason there is so much internal strife and so much difficulty in promoting the general welfare of the people. Remember, the wickedness that is spoken of is a rejection of the gospel of Jesus Christ. If such a condition continues long enough, the power and authority of God will eventually intervene and destroy that nation as was the case of the destruction in 3 Nephi.

Difficulties in the Church Among the Nephites

Let us now read some of the major passages that relate to the troubles that arose in the Church during the book of Helaman.

1. Nephite church members who once had superior strength and wisdom given from God degenerated and became weak.

Now this great loss of the Nephites, and the great slaughter which was among them, would not have happened had it not been for their wickedness and their abomination which was among them; yea, and it was among those also who professed to belong to the church of God.

And because of this their great wickedness, and their boastings in their own strength, they were left in their own strength; therefore they did not prosper, but were afflicted and smitten, and driven before

the Lamanites, until they had lost possession of almost all their lands. . . .

And they saw that they had become weak, like unto their brethren, the Lamanites, and that the Spirit of the Lord did no more preserve them; yea, it had withdrawn from them because the Spirit of the Lord doth not dwell in unholy temples—

Therefore the Lord did cease to preserve them by his miraculous and matchless power, for they had fallen into a state of unbelief and awful wickedness; and they saw that the Lamanites were exceedingly more numerous than they, and except they should cleave unto the Lord their God they must unavoidably perish.

For behold, they saw that the strength of the Lamanites was as great as their strength, even man for man. And thus had they fallen into this great transgression; yea, thus had they become weak, because of their transgression, in the space of not many years. (Hel 4:11, 12, 24–26)

2. They no longer believed in the miracles associated with the gospel of Jesus Christ, and as a consequence of their apostasy, the people made “a mock of that which was sacred, denying the spirit of prophecy and of revelation” (Hel 4:12).

3. Many dissented from the Church, which began to fail in its purpose and mission.

And in the fifty and first year of the reign of the judges there was peace also, save it were the pride which began to enter into the church—not into the church of God, but into the hearts of the people who professed to belong to the church of God— . . . And it came to pass that the fifty and second year ended in peace also, save it were the exceedingly great pride which had gotten into the hearts of the people; and it was because of their exceedingly great riches and their prosperity in the land; and it did grow upon them from day to day. (Hel 3:33, 36)

And it came to pass in the fifty and fourth year there were many dissensions in the church, and there was also a contention among the people, insomuch that there was much bloodshed. . . .

And because of their iniquity the church had begun to dwindle; and they began to disbelieve in the spirit of prophecy and in the spirit of revelation; and the judgments of God did stare them in the face. (Hel 4:1, 23).

It would be well to note here that about 50 years previous, the prophet Alma had warned the Nephites that if they were to

fall into transgression they would be destroyed by the Lord. Here are his words:

For he will not suffer you that ye shall live in your iniquities, to destroy his people . . . after having had so much light and so much knowledge given unto [you] of the Lord [your] God;

Yea, after having been such a highly favored people of the Lord; yea, after having been favored above every other nation, kindred, tongue, or people; . . .

Having been visited by the spirit of God; having conversed with angels, and having been spoken unto by the voice of the Lord; and having the spirit of revelation, and also many gifts, the gift of preaching, and the gift of the Holy Ghost, and the gift of translation;

. . . having been saved from famine, and from sickness, and all manner of diseases of every kind; and they having waxed strong in battle, that they might not be destroyed; having been brought out of bondage time after time, and having been kept and preserved until now; and they have been prospered until they are rich in all manner of things—

And now behold I say unto you, that if this people, who have received so many blessings from the hand of the Lord, should transgress contrary to the light and knowledge which they do have . . . it would be far more tolerable for the Lamanites than for them.

For behold, the promises of the Lord are extended to the Lamanites, but they are not unto you if ye transgress. . . . (Alma 9:19–24)

Alma's words were about to be fulfilled in the books of Helaman and 3 Nephi.

4. The Lamanites, being more righteous than the Nephites, sent missionaries to the Nephites (Hel 5:49–52; 6:1–9).

5. Nephi persuaded the Lord to withhold the rain, which caused a famine, and the people began to repent (Hel 11:1–21).

6. The Lord sent Samuel the Lamanite to warn the Nephites against their wickedness, and to announce the signs of Christ's birth and of his death (Hel chapters 13–16).

As additional evidence of the unbelief and apostasy, the record states that some "began to depend upon their own

strength and upon their own wisdom” (Hel 16:15), and refused to accept the doctrine of Christ, saying:

That it is not reasonable that such a being as a Christ shall come; if so, and he be the Son of God, the Father of heaven and of earth, as it has been spoken, why will he not show himself unto us as well as unto them who shall be at Jerusalem?

Yea, why will he not show himself in this land as well as in the land of Jerusalem?

But behold, we know that this is a wicked tradition, which has been handed down unto us by our fathers, to cause us that we should believe in some great and marvelous thing which should come to pass, but not among us, but in a land which is far distant, a land which we know not; therefore they can keep us in ignorance, for we cannot witness with our own eyes that they are true. . . .

And notwithstanding the signs and the wonders which were wrought among the people of the Lord, and the many miracles which they did, Satan did get great hold upon the hearts of the people upon all the face of the land.

And thus ended the ninetieth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi.

And thus ended the book of Helaman, according to the record of Helaman and his sons. (Hel 16:18–20, 23–25)

As Samuel the Lamanite points out, it is the nature of us mortal, fallen beings to praise those who flatter us, and to reject the prophets who warn us and who could have helped us.

Apostasy and Total Cultural Degeneration Can Occur in One Generation

Three times the book of Helaman makes the point that all of these tragic circumstances, both in the government and in the Church, came upon the people in a very short time. The civilization, honor, dignity, happiness, order, wisdom, strength, and character of a once righteous nation can be wasted and lost in one generation. Here are the passages:

. . . And thus had they fallen into this great transgression; yea, thus had they become weak, because of their transgression, in the space of not many years. (Hel 4:26)

And it came to pass that all these iniquities did come unto them in the space of not many years, insomuch that a more part of it had come unto them in the sixty and seventh year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi. (Hel 6:32)

Now this great iniquity had come upon the Nephites, in the space of not many years; and when Nephi saw it, his heart was swollen with sorrow within his breast; and he did exclaim in the agony of his soul:

Oh, that I could have had my days in the days when my father Nephi first came out of the land of Jerusalem, that I could have joyed with him in the promised land; then were his people easy to be entreated, firm to keep the commandments of God, and slow to be led to do iniquity; and they were quick to hearken unto the words of the Lord—

Yea, if my days could have been in those days, then would my soul have had joy in the righteousness of my brethren. (Hel 7:6–8)

Why does destruction occur so quickly? Because the people lose the Spirit and fail to teach their children the doctrine of righteousness and to worship Jesus Christ. The rising generation will not know the history and the doctrine unless they are taught. And if not taught the doctrine, children are unprepared to cope with life's greatest problems. People need a reason not to commit sin; the gospel gives us that reason.

Conclusion

What does all of this portend for us, and what lessons could we learn from the book of Helaman? Perhaps it is this:

1. Since the Book of Mormon was written for our time and the Lord would have known that the same kinds of dangers and threats to the Church and to the government would exist in our day, we have been given a pattern showing how a previous people fell victim.

2. Being warned of the problems, and seeing what occurred to the Nephites, we ought to be especially desirous not to have it happen to us, either in the Church or in the government.

3. The pattern in the book of Helaman shows the symptoms of apostasy: confusion, distress, fear, turmoil, strife,

seduction, deceit, unhappiness, famine, and sorrow. These are accompanied by a lack of belief in spiritual gifts such as prophecy and revelation which are always found in the gospel of Jesus Christ. These symptoms appear in individuals and also among groups.

4. If we detect the symptoms in our twentieth century culture such as a lack of respect for authority, the assassination of public officials, a lack of trust in the doctrines of Jesus Christ, or a cessation of miracles, we should be concerned. If we see spiritual things being replaced by rationalism, humanism, materialism, and skepticism, with many dissenters from the Church, we may be assured that the same forces are at work among us that were at work among the ancient Nephites. It is as the Lord warned the Church in 1831: "Beware of pride, lest ye become as the Nephites of old" (D&C 38:39).

5. And last of all, we learn from the Book of Mormon that a great civilization can be lost in a very short time—in this case, in the short space of 50 years, largely because the children were not taught the right things, leaving the rising generation adrift in a sea of wickedness.

We can be assured that in our day the same results will follow the same causes, as was the case anciently.

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The Decline of the Nephites: Rejection of the Covenant and Word of God 5

John L. Fowles

Introduction

The book of Helaman portrays a fifty year period just preceding the birth of the Messiah and the eventual coming of the Lord to the Nephites (51–1 BC). In it Mormon identifies the problems facing the Nephites at that time, including the wickedness of the Church members. Even though there were times of prosperity, a great part of this period was filled with contention, pride, desire for riches, oppression, denying the spirit of revelation, plundering, lying, stealing, murdering, and adultery (Hel 4:12). He retells example after example of the wicked state of the Nephites and the Church, noting that even during peaceful times, they became proud because of their increased prosperity and riches (3:36).

Mormon reminds his modern-day readers that because he can tell only a hundredth part of the history (Hel 3:13–16), he must necessarily choose what to include. Consequently, the narratives he chose in the book of Helaman, plus his own editorial comments, warn his future readers of the prevailing conditions that will also exist in modern-day society. Seeing the parallel to our day, President Benson declared that we live in a day of great challenge as did the Nephites. Peace has been taken

John L. Fowles is director of the institute of religion at the University of Missouri, Columbia, Missouri.

from the earth and the devil is reigning in “power over his own dominion” (“The Power of the Word” 79). Satan is waging war against the members of the Church who have testimonies and are trying to keep the commandments.

To help us more fully understand our own situation compared to that presented in the book of Helaman, this paper will identify the underlying problem during these decades which caused such unrighteousness to come among the Nephite culture. It will also discuss the method used by faithful Nephite and Lamanite leaders to try to reclaim their people from their unrighteousness in order to prepare them to be there to receive the Lord when he came to the temple at Bountiful. Referring to President Benson’s emphasis on the Book of Mormon, this paper will lastly examine the book of Helaman as a record of the type of the wickedness we see in our day and as a guide to how we can overcome that wickedness to be worthy to meet Christ at his second coming.

Rejection of the Covenant

After writing a commentary in the book of Alma on the fourteen years of war, Mormon continues to tell the story of the decline of the Nephites in the book of Helaman. He continually illustrates how the Nephites had become stiffnecked and refused to keep the commandments or laws of God. However, by the time of the book of Helaman, the Nephites had trampled the words of God under their feet and were sinning against great knowledge (Hel 4:13, 21–22; 7:24). Despite Captain Moroni’s teaching that they owed all of their happiness to the “maintenance of the sacred word of God” (Alma 44:5), the Nephites did not keep the covenant they had made with God. Consequently, the Spirit of the Lord could no longer dwell with them or preserve them (Hel 4:24; Alma 7:21).

To understand the consequences of the Nephites’ rejection of the covenant, we should first understand the connections between accepting the word of God and covenanting with God.

The Book of Mormon confirms the association in other scriptures of the words *covenant*, *law*, *word*, and *everlasting gospel*. As Abinadi preached to King Noah and his priests, he showed how accepting and living according to the word of God and by extension the covenant with God insures eternal life:

Behold I say unto you, that whosoever has heard the words of the prophets, yea, all the holy prophets who have prophesied concerning the coming of the Lord—I say unto you, that all those who have hearkened unto their words, and believed that the Lord would redeem his people, and have looked forward to that day for a remission of their sins, I say unto, that these are his seed, or they are the heirs of the kingdom of God. For these are they whose sins he has borne; these are they for whom he has died, to redeem them from their transgressions. (Mosiah 15:11–12)

It appears that words such as covenant, law, word, or oath were used almost synonymously in the Old Testament as well. G. E. Mendenhall has posited:

In view of the fact that the term for “covenant” is quite rare in the earliest sections of the OT, the tradition of the covenant with Yahweh must have been designated by other words than [*berit*]. It seems quite likely that the oldest designation of the Decalogue as . . . “the ten words” . . . rests on this early tradition, since covenants were regarded and called the “words” of the suzerain. The theological usage of the “word” of God may therefore be very closely bound up in its very origin with the covenant, though, of course, much expanded in scope with the passage of time. (716)

Even the name “Deuteronomy,” which means “second law,” comes from the Greek Septuagint which is actually a mistranslation of the earlier Hebrew term *debarim* or *words*. Therefore, the book of Deuteronomy is in reality the book of the “Words of the Covenant” (Grant 143).

In the book of Numbers, the relationship between the *word* and the *covenant* is also shown when Moses taught the heads of the tribes of Israel that when they made an oath or vow to the Lord they should never break their *word* or anything that proceeded out of their *mouth* (Num 30:2). Or when the Chronicler stated, “He is the Lord our God; his judgments are

in all the earth. Be ye mindful always of his covenant; the word which he commanded to a thousand generations; even of the covenant which he made with Abraham, and of his oath unto Isaac; and hath confirmed the same to Jacob for a law, and to Israel for an everlasting covenant” (1 Chr 16:14–17). Elder Boyd K. Packer has also noted that, “A covenant is a sacred promise, as used in the scriptures, a solemn, enduring promise between God and man. The fulness of the gospel itself is defined as the new and everlasting covenant” (23). Making a covenant involves our accepting the words of God and promising to live by them.

At the beginning of the Book of Mormon, Nephi explained that the phrase “to trample under their feet the God of Israel” means that “they set him at naught, and hearken not to the voice of his counsels” (1 Nephi 19:7). This is what the Nephites had done. Despite their covenants, they had rejected the word of the Lord as delivered by past and present prophets. The apostle Paul also understood the consequences of rejecting the Lord in this manner when he said to the Hebrews, “Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?” (Heb 10:29)

As mentioned above, the Nephites were often described as being “stiffnecked” (Hel 4:21). Quite specifically, this spiritual condition could represent their refusal or inability to bow their heads in humble reverence to God. Symbolically, stiffneckedness also refers to the Nephites’ pride and prosperity, which led to their rejection of the covenant as represented by the word of God. Throughout the Book of Mormon, and especially in the book of Helaman, Mormon ties pride to wickedness. During Samuel the Lamanite’s scathing address against the Nephites’ pride, Mormon editorializes that “the people began to harden their hearts, all save it were the most believing part of them, both of the Nephites and also of the Lamanites, and began to depend upon their own strength and upon their own wisdom”

(16:15). As an additional demonstration of pride, Mormon tells us that these disbelievers could not accept the teachings of the prophet Samuel because they were not reasonable to them and they could not “witness with [their] own eyes that they [were] true” (vv 18, 20).

In addition to his statements against pride, Mormon reminds us that much of the wickedness among the Nephites arose from dissenters who had joined the Lamanites to stir them up to anger against their brethren (Hel 3:3; 4:1). These dissenters were those who had been once enlightened by the Spirit of God and had had great knowledge pertaining to righteousness. Because of transgression, however, many became hardened in their hearts, and their state became worse than if they had never known the ways of the Lord (Alma 24:30). They had dissented from their covenants and rejected the word of God. Mormon likened their condition to an unholy temple. The Spirit of the Lord could not dwell with them anymore because they were unworthy (Hel 4:24).

The problem of the Gadianton robbers is also first mentioned in the book of Helaman. This secret organization, along with pride and the Nephite dissenters, became a major problem for the righteous during this period. Like the proud and disbelieving Nephites, the Gadianton robbers had rejected the words of the covenant and had become a law unto themselves. Their organization was set up in rebellion against the believing Nephites and Lamanites. Mormon tells us that the Gadianton robbers, in imitation of the covenant, had their own secret words, signs, and oaths (see Hel 2). The band of Kishkumen had entered into a covenant, “swearing by their everlasting Maker, that they would tell no man that Kishkumen had murdered Pahoran” (1:11). Further, Gadianton taught them through the use of “many words” to carry out the secret work of murder and robbery (2:4). From his vantage point of abridging the records around AD 385, Mormon resolutely tells us that the Gadianton problem “did prove the overthrow, yea, almost the

entire destruction of the people of Nephi” (v 13). They did this by gaining entrance into the hearts of the Nephites.

The ending chapters of the book of Helaman contain the story of Samuel the Lamanites’ mission to the Nephites. He warned the Nephites that within 400 years the sword of justice would hang over them because of their rejection of the word of God or covenant of the Lord (Hel 13:5). Specifically, because of the hardness of the hearts of the people, the Lord would take away his word and Spirit from among them (v 8). The Nephites not only rejected the word of the Lord, but they also rejected Samuel, a living prophet, who had come to testify of their sins and iniquities. Instead of repenting, they were angry with him because he forced them to acknowledge their wickedness (vv 26–27). Nephite dissenters and Gadianton robbers became the ultimate symbol of rejection of the covenant and word of God as delivered by the prophets during this period.

Return to the Covenant

Mormon explains that the answer to the wickedness among the Nephites and the disbelieving Lamanites was to have the “word of God” preached unto them. Just as Alma left the judgment-seat to recover his people, so does Nephi₂, son of Helaman₂, yield up the judgment-seat to preach the word of God all the remainder of his days to bring his people to a remembrance of their God (Hel 5:4). At the end of the book of Helaman, Samuel describes the way many of the Lamanites were reclaimed from spiritual darkness: they were “brought to the knowledge of the truth, and to know of the wicked and abominable traditions of their fathers” (v 7). These converts were “led to believe the holy scriptures, yea, the prophecies of the holy prophets, which are written, which leadeth them to faith on the Lord, and unto repentance, which faith and repentance bringeth a change of heart unto them” (v 8). These Lamanite converts remained firm, steadfast, and feared to sin anymore (Hel 15:7–8).

Nephi and Lehi tried to bring their people back to a remembrance of the covenant by preaching the word of God to them. The preaching of the word was the instrument of salvation. Samuel the Lamanite told his Nephite audience that salvation had come to his people through the preaching of the Nephites (Hel 15:4). Commenting earlier on Alma's mission to reclaim the Zoramites, Mormon said, "The preaching of the word had a great tendency to lead the people to do that which was just—yea, it had had more powerful effect upon the minds of the people than the sword, or anything else, which had happened unto them—therefore Alma thought it was expedient that they should try the virtue of the word of God" (Alma 31:5).

The book of Helaman illustrates this precept by showing the great tendency for the preaching of the word bringing the people to a remembrance of God and their covenant with him. Mormon explains that the records he is editing testify:

that whosoever will may lay hold upon the word of God, which is quick and powerful, which shall divide asunder all the cunning and the snares and the wiles of the devil, and lead the man of Christ in a strait and narrow course across that everlasting gulf of misery which is prepared to engulf the wicked—and land their souls, yea, 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. (Hel 3:29–30)

Mormon tells us that Nephi and Lehi were highly successful in bringing "many of those dissenters [back] who had gone over from the Nephites, insomuch that they came forth and did confess their sins and were baptized unto repentance, and immediately returned to the Nephites to endeavor to repair unto them the wrong which they had done" (Hel 5:17). Moronihah, along with Nephi and Lehi, preached "many things unto the people because of their iniquity." Many repented and began to prosper in the land which is one of the blessings of being obedient to the covenant (4:14–15). Mormon also relates that in 30 BC righteous Lamanites were endeavoring to preach the word of God to rebelling Nephites. On this occasion, the

Nephites were brought back down “into the depths of humility, to be the humble followers of God and the Lamb” (Hel 6:5). Indeed, there were some good years in the book of Helaman when there was “great joy and peace, yea, much preaching and many prophecies” (6:14).

The book of Helaman consistently shows that the way to reclaim those who have rejected the covenant is to preach the word of God to them with power (5:17). Those who have the word of God preached unto them still have their agency to accept or reject it. Not everyone will accept the gospel. Even Nephi was not successful as when he journeyed to the land northward to preach to Nephite dissenters (7:2–3). However, those who have ears to hear will hear.

Latter-day Parallels and Warnings

According to President Benson, the Book of Mormon contains a pattern for those of us in the latter-days to follow. In the 1986 October general conference he stated: “In the Book of Mormon we find a pattern for preparing for the Second Coming. A major portion of the book centers on the few decades just prior to Christ’s coming to America. By careful study of that time period, we can determine why some were destroyed in the terrible judgments that preceded His coming and what brought others to stand at the temple in the land of Bountiful and thrust their hands into the wounds of His hands and feet” (“The Book of Mormon” 6–7). In other words, as the Lord came to the Nephites in 3 Nephi 11, so he will come again to usher in his millennial reign in power and great glory. The books of Helaman and 3 Nephi are a type or a foreshadow of the Lord’s Second Coming to our generation.

A careful study of President Benson’s addresses reveals a continual appeal to us to study the Book of Mormon, which testifies that its teachings parallel our day. For example, during the 1988 October general conference, he testified that wickedness was rapidly expanding in every segment of our society.

Then, alluding to the Book of Mormon, President Benson said that modern society's problems are "more highly organized, more cleverly disguised, and more powerfully promoted than ever before," including secret combinations which flourish because of lust for power and gain ("I Testify" 87). Elder Bruce R. McConkie has also prophesied, "Bands of Gadianton robbers will infest every nation, immorality and murder and crime will increase, and it will seem as though every man's hand is against his brother" (93).

President Benson has also called pride the universal sin. He noted in April of 1989 that the Nephites had fallen because of pride ("Beware of Pride" 4). Quoting the Book of Mormon, including passages from the book of Helaman, he prophetically said, "My dear brethren and sisters, we must prepare to redeem Zion. It was essentially the sin of pride that kept us from establishing Zion in the days of the Prophet Joseph Smith. It was the same sin of pride that brought consecration to an end among the Nephites (see 4 Nephi 1:24-25). Pride is the great stumbling block to Zion. I repeat: Pride is the great stumbling block to Zion. We must cleanse the inner vessel by conquering pride" (7). According to President Benson, the pride manifested in many aspects of our lives prevents us from repenting of our sins. "Essentially, pride is a 'my will' rather than 'thy will' approach to life. The opposite of pride is humbleness, meekness, submissiveness (see Alma 13:28), or teachableness" ("Cleansing the Inner Vessel" 6).

Throughout President Benson's administration, he has counseled priesthood leaders that the most important thing they could do for their people is study the scriptures ("The Power of the Word" 81). He has shared his hope and vision of the Church today being filled with home teachers, visiting teachers, ward and stake leaders counseling the Saints out of the scriptures especially the Book of Mormon to bring them nearer to God ("Flooding the Earth" 6). The word of God contains the answers to keep their flocks safe from the wolves. Comparing the book of Helaman to our day, President Benson said, "Are there

members of your flock who are deep in sin and need to pull themselves back? Helaman's promise is for them; 'Yea, we see that whosoever will may lay hold upon the word of God, which is quick and powerful, which shall divide asunder all the cunning and the snares and the wiles of the devil' (Hel 3:29)" ("The Power of the Word" 82). Church members and priesthood leaders need to be obedient to President Benson's counsel to study the scriptures for themselves, in preparation for their church callings and in their families in order to have the power of the Spirit to accomplish the great latter-day work of bringing souls to Christ like the leaders in the Book of Mormon.

Conclusion

Throughout President Benson's tenure as the prophet he has counseled that we must all come to Christ. He has pleaded with the Saints to cleanse the inner vessel, meaning their lives in the Church. He said, "As we cleanse the inner vessel, there will have to be changes made in our own personal lives, in our families and in the Church. The proud do not change to improve, but defend their position by rationalizing. Repentance means change, and it take a humble person to change" ("Cleansing the Inner Vessel" 7). One of the ways we can motivate ourselves to repent is to learn from the mistakes of the unrepentant Nephites in the book of Helaman.

The pattern of spiritual and temporal decline in the book of Helaman is sobering when considered as a type of our day. Helaman's record becomes a warning to us of similar spiritual problems preceding the coming of the Lord in the future. The Nephites became impenitent and grossly wicked after they rejected the gospel offered them through prophetic leadership and the preaching of the word. The problems of contention, pride, secret combinations, and wickedness brought spiritual weakness and eventual destruction to the Nephite civilization.

The only way their prophetic leaders were able to recover them was through preaching the word of God with power and

authority. Since the people had rejected the word, it follows that to reclaim them spiritually they had to be reminded of their covenants through the teaching of the word of God. The Book of Mormon shows that there is a great tendency for success through this method. The book of Helaman reminds us, however, that preaching the word to someone does not override that person's agency. Still, it functions as a type and model in reaching those who are unaware of the gospel and in reclaiming less active Latter-day Saints before the Lord comes to this generation.

The message of the book of Helaman is clear. The people who were worthy to stand at the temple in Bountiful to thrust their hands into the Savior's wounds were those who had accepted the preaching of the word and remained true to the covenants of the Lord. Those who were destroyed were those who rejected the word of God, refusing to live according to the commandments or covenants of the Lord. It will be the same when the Lord comes again.

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They Did Remember His Words

6

Brett P. Thomas

One of the most fascinating stories in the Book of Mormon takes place in a prison. An army of Lamanites capture Nephi₂ and Lehi₂ (the second men in the Book of Mormon with those names), throw them into prison, and withhold food from them for many days. The Lamanites then took the prisoners out to slay them, but the slayings did not take place. Instead, this dark, confining prison became a sanctuary of light and power, and about three hundred souls came unto Christ, became ministers unto him, and were instrumental in the conversion of the “more part” of their people.

How did this all come about? We learn of a discourse Nephi and Lehi’s father Helaman had given them before they embarked on their mission. Though we do not know the setting and context of this discourse, its influence is unmistakable. The prison story and the conversion of the Lamanites, as recorded in Helaman 5:20–6:5, is strongly tied to Helaman’s speech which precedes it and has tremendous bearing on the meaning of what follows. By discussing the speech sequentially and the narrative that follows chronologically, I hope to show how Helaman’s discourse and the prison/conversion story are connected, how the role of remembrance affects conversion, and finally, how we can “liken” these verses unto ourselves.

Brett P. Thomas is business manager in the Department of Music at Brigham Young University.

The Event—The Prison/Conversion Story (Helaman 5:20–6:5)

When the captors came to the prison to slay Nephi and Lehi, they found them encircled by a “pillar of fire” and “durst not lay their hands upon them for fear lest they should be burned” (Hel 5:23–24). Nephi and Lehi told the people that God had shown a “marvelous thing” unto them. The earth and walls shook immediately, a cloud of darkness descended, and thus an “awful solemn fear” came over them. They heard a “still voice of perfect mildness” whisper: “Repent ye, repent ye for the kingdom of heaven is at hand; and seek no more to destroy my servants” (vv 28–32). The darkness remained, and the process recurred two more times. The captors were so frightened that they couldn’t run away. They were stuck. They couldn’t even turn themselves around.

An ordinary man named Aminadab then entered center stage. Having once been a member of the Church but having drifted away and “dissented,” he alone saw the faces of Nephi and Lehi shine as if they were angels. He cried unto the multitude to turn around and look. And then comes a telling phrase in the narrative: “And behold, there was power given unto them that they did turn and look” (Hel 5:37).

After being informed by Aminadab that the prophets were conversing with angels, the captors cried: “What shall we do, that this cloud of darkness may be removed from overshadowing us?” Aminadab replied: “You must repent, and cry unto the voice, even until ye shall have faith in Christ” (Hel 5:40–41). As they followed his counsel, the heavens burst forth in great splendor and light. Every soul was encircled as if in the midst of a flaming fire, and the Holy Ghost filled them with unspeakable joy. Angels ministered unto them from heaven and then another miracle happened: these former prisoners and captors became as angels themselves and ministered unto their people.

That’s the story. Three themes from Helaman’s speech which are reinforced by this incredible event are: (1) remember

the promises made to the fathers; (2) remember the conditions of repentance bring the power of the Redeemer; and (3) remember that Jesus Christ is our foundation.

Remember the Promises Made to the Fathers

Although the text does not specifically mention whether Nephi and Lehi remembered their father's words when they were in the prison, we may safely assume they did. Mormon implies that throughout their ministry, "they did remember their father's words; and therefore they went forth, keeping the commandments of God" (Hel 5:14). Helaman admonished his sons to remember their ancestors to motivate them to do good works, not to boast, but "to lay up for yourselves a treasure in heaven, yea, which is eternal, and which fadeth not away; yea, that ye may have that precious gift of eternal life, which we have every reason to suppose hath been given to our fathers" (v 8). One of the great blessings of remembering is turning our hearts to the promises made to the fathers. The greatest promise of all, of course, is the gift of eternal life to the faithful; the desire of all parents, like Helaman, is that their children might treasure the preciousness of that gift.

Helaman knew that if his sons could remember and treasure these gifts promised unto their fathers, they could be sparked with the hope of receiving and experiencing those same blessings. Joseph Smith taught that the ancient saints sought diligently "after a knowledge of the glory of God, [because of the] credence they gave to the testimony of their fathers" (*Lectures on Faith* 51). Elsewhere he said:

The ancients . . . obtained from God promises of such weight and glory, that our hearts are often filled with gratitude that we are even permitted to look upon them. . . . If we are the children of the Most High, and are called with same calling with which they were called, and embrace the same covenant that they embraced, and are faithful to the testimony of our Lord as they were, we can approach the Father in the name of Christ as they approached Him, and for ourselves

obtain the same promises. (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* 65–66; hereafter *TPJS*)

In yet another setting he said,

If there is anything calculated to interest the mind of the Saints, to awaken in them the finest sensibilities, and arouse them to enterprise and exertion, surely it is the great and precious promises made by our heavenly Father. (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* 163; hereafter *TPJS*)

Because Nephi and Lehi embraced and obtained the promises of their forefathers, we can be sure they immersed themselves in the records of their fathers (Mosiah 1:3–7), desiring to know everything about them, that they would more fully know how to follow their examples. Centuries earlier, Nephi₁ (son of Lehi) recorded: “My soul delighteth in *the covenants of the Lord which he hath made to our fathers*; yea, my soul delighteth in his grace, and in his justice, and power, and mercy in the great and eternal plan of deliverance” (2 Nephi 11:5; emphasis added). Time and time again, he leaned on the promises made to the fathers. There was absolutely no doubt in his mind that God would deliver him and make him mighty just as He had those in “times of old” (Tuttle 72–73). Nephi stated with confidence: “The Lord is able to deliver us, even as our fathers” and “If God had commanded me to do all things I could do them” (1 Nephi 4:3; 17:50). I wonder though, if Helaman’s sons ever staggered under the weight of such promises and expectations? Did they ever stumble and feel like they were forever falling short? Did they know that their forefathers struggled too? Even though he had that testimony, he was painfully aware that he was human. Nephi (son of Lehi) recorded:

O wretched man that I am! Yea, my heart sorroweth because of my flesh; my soul grieveth because of mine iniquities. . . . Why should my heart weep and my soul linger in the valley of sorrow, and my flesh waste away, and my strength slacken because of mine afflictions? And why should I yield to sin, because of my flesh? Yea, why

should I give way to temptations, that the evil one have place in my heart to destroy my peace and afflict my soul. (2 Nephi 4:17, 26–27)

Those who come closer to God become more keenly aware of their own limitations and the role of Christ's grace and atonement in their lives. Nephi testified, "Cursed is he that putteth his trust in the arm of flesh" (2 Nephi 4:34); he later wrote, "We know that it is by grace that we are saved after all we can do" (25:23). Echoing these words, Helaman counseled his sons: "Remember that there is no other way nor means whereby man can be saved, only through the atoning blood of Jesus Christ, who shall come; yea, remember that he cometh to redeem the world" (Hel 5:9).

Such remembrance helps us cling to hope and awakens within us the precious seeds of eternal life, a testimony of Jesus Christ (see Alma 33:22–23). Recounting his own earlier spiritual estrangement, Alma² testified: "I remembered also to have heard my father prophesy unto the people concerning one Jesus Christ, a Son of God, to atone for the sins of the world. Now as my mind caught hold upon this thought, I cried within my heart: O Jesus, thou Son of God, have mercy on me" (Alma 36:17–18). The more we come to know the Son of God, the more we understand the depths he had to reach to rescue us. Charles Gabriel wrote: "I marvel that he would descend from his throne divine / To rescue a soul so rebellious and proud as mine; / That he should extend his great love unto such as I, / Sufficient to own, to redeem, and to justify" (Hymns #193).

Nephi¹ prophesied that the Lord's covenant people would "come to the knowledge of their forefathers, and also . . . to the knowledge of their Redeemer and the very points of his doctrine that they may know how to come unto him and be saved. . . . Yea, at that day, will they not receive the strength and nourishment from the true vine?" (1 Nephi 15:14–15). Surely, these "points of doctrine" would include the knowledge of human-kind's bondage and Christ's redemption. Our righteous forefathers yearned that we, their children, would know how

literally they depended on Christ as the source of their “strength and nourishment.” They would “mention the loving kindness of their Lord, and all that he has bestowed upon them according to his goodness, and according to his loving kindness. . . . In all their afflictions he was afflicted. . . . [But] in his love, and in his pity, he redeemed them, and bore them, and carried them all the days of old” (D&C 133:52–53).

An angel commanded Alma: “Go, and remember the captivity of thy fathers . . . and remember how great things [the Lord] has done for them; for they were in bondage, and he has delivered them” (Mosiah 27:16). A converted Alma never forgot that command and consistently shared this message throughout his ministry (Alma 29:11–12; 36:29). Of the Saints in Zarahemla he asked: “Have you sufficiently retained in remembrance the captivity of your fathers? . . . Have you sufficiently retained in remembrance [God’s] mercy and longsuffering towards them? . . . Behold, he changed their hearts; yea, he awakened them out of a deep sleep, and they awoke unto God. Behold, they were in the midst of darkness; nevertheless, their souls were illuminated by the light of the everlasting word. . . . And they did sing redeeming love” (5:6–9).

We often note that the preface to the Book of Mormon states that the book’s purpose is to testify that “Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God.” But we often neglect to rehearse what leads to that declaration. The Book of Mormon was written to “show unto the remnant of the House of Israel what great things the Lord hath done for their fathers; and that they may know the covenants of the Lord, that they are not cast off forever.” Moroni’s famous promise, “by the power of the Holy Ghost ye may know the truth of all things,” (Moroni 10:5), is not only prefaced by the exhortation of prayer, faith in Christ, real intent, and a sincere heart, but by remembrance and pondering as well: “*Remember* how merciful the Lord hath been unto the children of men, from the creation of Adam even down until the time that ye shall receive these things, and ponder it in your hearts”

(v 3; emphasis added). Commenting on these verses, Elder Carlos E. Asay has taught:

I feel strongly that reading the things of God without remembering and pondering how those things fit into the divine scheme tends to confuse, not enlighten. Enlightenment occurs and truth is revealed as things are fitted together in an understandable way. In the process, the mind is stimulated, memory is stirred, and the heart is prepared to respond to the whisperings of the Spirit. (85)

We can understand “the truth of all things” only in the context of the past, present, and future (D&C 93:24). As we grow in our understanding of the past, our vision of the future expands, and, like Nephi and Lehi, we will go forth in the present “keeping the commandments of God” (Hel 5:14). And “he that keepeth his commandments receiveth truth and light, until he is glorified in truth and knoweth all things” (D&C 93:28).

Therefore, when we receive truth and light, our perception of the present changes dramatically. The prison/conversion story begins with angry men desiring to kill the servants of the Lord, but it ends with these same men being converted by those servants and joining them in their sacred ministry.

Remember That the Conditions of Repentance Bring the Power of the Redeemer

As we have seen, remembering the promises made to our forefathers provides a wonderful spark to help us remember the grace of a loving Heavenly Father. Such memories help prepare us to receive the whisperings of the Spirit, which invite us to come unto Christ and partake of his redemptive powers. The fulness of these powers becomes available by what Helaman terms the “conditions of repentance.” Helaman counseled his sons,

Remember that the Lord surely should come to redeem his people, but that he should not come to redeem them in their sins, but to redeem them from their sins. And he hath power given unto him from the Father to redeem them from their sins because of repentance;

therefore he hath sent his angels to declare the tidings of *the conditions of repentance, which bringeth unto the power of the Redeemer, unto the salvation of their souls.* (Hel 5:10–11; emphasis added)

The conditions of repentance are the floodgates to the power of God. “He suffered the pain of all men, that all men *might* repent and come unto him. And he hath risen again from the dead, that he *might* bring all men unto him, on conditions of repentance” (D&C 18:11–12; emphasis added). Jesus suffered for us, bled for us, died for us, and broke the bands of death for us, hoping that we will receive him, rely on him, and come unto him. He paid the awful price for our agency. The prophet Lehi testified:

The Messiah cometh in the fulness of time, that he may redeem the children of men from the fall. And because that they are redeemed from the fall they have become free forever, knowing good from evil; to act for themselves and not to be acted upon. . . . And they are free to choose liberty and eternal life, through the great Mediator of all men, or to choose captivity and death, according to the captivity and power of the devil. (2 Nephi 2:26–27)

Focusing on this crucial choice, the book of Helaman notes that the captors ironically discover the shackles of their own bondage as they are overshadowed by the darkness and filled with awful fear and hear a voice from heaven calling them to repentance: “It did *pierce* even to the very soul” (Hel 5:30; emphasis added). Such piercings are painful awakenings of the awareness that we have alienated ourselves from God. “God is not only there in the mildest expressions of His presence,” Elder Neal A. Maxwell has taught, “but also in those seemingly harsh expressions. For example, when truth ‘cutteth . . . to the very center’ (v 2), this may signal that spiritual surgery is underway, painfully severing pride from the soul” (“Yet Thou” 31).

The narrative in Helaman chapter 5 has come to its most dramatic and pivotal moment. How would the captors respond? Remembrance of wrong doing is never a comfortable subject. Laman and Lemuel complained that Nephi had “declared unto us hard things, more than we are able to bear” (1 Nephi 16:1). In response, they were instructed on two occasions: “the guilty

taketh the truth to be hard” (v 2); “[Y]e say that he hath been angry with you; but behold, his sharpness was the sharpness of the power of the word of God . . . and that which ye call anger was the truth” (2 Nephi 1:26). Again, the question can be asked: How will these angry captors respond to the piercings of the Holy Ghost? It would be stretching the imagination to think that they came to the prison in a humble frame of mind. Lynch mobs seldom do.

Predictably, the captors tried to run away—the course of least resistance. Ultimately, however, everyone must face the truth, for the “voice of the Lord is unto all men, and there is none to escape” (D&C 1:2). All hearts will eventually be penetrated and the “rebellious shall be *pierced* with much sorrow” (D&C 1:3; emphasis added). “Yea, every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess before him. Yea, even at the last day, when all men shall stand to be judged of him, then shall they confess that he is God; then shall they confess, who live without God in the world, that [His] judgment . . . is just upon them; and they shall quake, and tremble, and shrink” (Mosiah 27:31). None can escape the choice of Christ. Contrast the captors to Nephi and Lehi: the captors were “immovable” (Hel 5:34) because of an awful fear, but Nephi and Lehi stood confidently in the midst of fire and their faces shone as they lifted their eyes and voices to heaven. They could look up to God with his image engraved upon their countenances (Alma 5:19). Because of their softened hearts, virtue and truth had distilled upon their souls as the dew from heaven and their confidence had waxed strong in the presence of God. President Benson has stated: “When you choose to follow Christ, you choose to be changed” (61–62). Do we fall down on our knees now, humbly seeking deliverance from our redeemer or do we pridefully resist change and remain immovable and hardened to the truth? Rodney Turner has written,

Spiritual humility—the recognition of one’s dependance upon God for all things temporal and spiritual, coupled with a willingness to accept his law—is a precondition for true repentance. Some achieve

this humility only after they have been “compelled to be humble” by those “slings and arrows of outrageous fortune” of which Hamlet soliloquized. Some do so only after they have been brought face-to-face with the stark truth about themselves and the God they defied, or never knew. Some will never learn humility and, therefore, never repent even when they stand before God with a “perfect knowledge” of their guilt and uncleanness. However, God’s truth will prove irresistible, and they will acknowledge to their “everlasting shame that all his judgments are just.” President Spencer W. Kimball wrote one “disbeliever”: “The time will come when there will be a surrender of every person who has ever lived on this earth . . . and it will be an unforced surrender, an unconditional surrender. When will it be for you? . . . It is not if you will capitulate to the great truth; it is when, for I know that you cannot indefinitely resist the power and pressure of truth.” (19–20)

It is significant that the captors were given power to turn about. Elder Theodore M. Burton noted that the word “turn” can often be interchanged with “repent” (96–97). Three times the voice had commanded them to repent, but they couldn’t even begin their repentance without heaven’s help. The Savior intimately knows our capacity to know and live the truth: “Ye cannot bear all things now; nevertheless, be of good cheer, for I will lead you along” (D&C 78:18). The conditions of repentance begin on bended knees, with a bowed head, and a humble confession that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is the Savior of the world.

After the conversion of the three hundred who went to minister among their brethren, we read: “The more part of the Lamanites were convinced of them. . . . And as many as were convinced did lay down their weapons of war and also their hatred and the *tradition of their fathers*” (Hel 5:50–51; emphasis added). Mormon rigorously references the impact of these traditions from the beginning to the end of the Book of Mormon. Such repetitions warn the world of their influence. Joseph Smith, while in Liberty Jail, recorded:

Tyranny, and oppression, supported and urged on and upheld by the influence of that spirit which hath so strongly riveted the creeds of the fathers, who have inherited lies, upon the hearts of the children, and filled the world with confusion, and has been growing stronger

and stronger, and is now the very mainspring of all corruption, and the whole earth groans under the weight of its iniquity. It is an iron yoke, it is a strong band; they are the very handcuffs, and chains, and shackles, and fetters of hell. (D&C 123:7-8)

Nephi and Lehi's prison experience illustrates that prisons confine not only the wicked, but the righteous as well. Many faithful Latter-day Saints battle with the dark prison of depression. Many others battle within the prison of crippled and diseased bodies. And yet, many have experienced darkness just before the light, as a kind of test of faith. While kneeling in the sacred grove, Joseph Smith described his struggle with darkness in these words: "Thick darkness gathered around me, and it seemed to me for a time as if I were doomed to sudden destruction" (JS-H 1:15). We can all testify of the truth of Moroni's counsel: "Dispute not because ye see not, for ye receive no witness until after the trial of your faith" (Ether 12:6).

To remember repentance is to remember God's mercy. The cry, "What shall we do, that this cloud of darkness may be removed from overshadowing us?" is a cry for mercy. The answer, "You must repent and cry unto the voice, even until ye shall have faith in Christ" (Hel 5:40-41), helps us remember the power of redemption. About forty years earlier, Amulek had taught this same message: "May God grant unto you, my brethren, that ye may begin to exercise your faith unto repentance, that ye begin to call upon his holy name, that he would have mercy upon you; Yea, cry unto him for mercy; for he is mighty to save" (Alma 34:17-18).

Notice how faith and repentance are intertwined. We typically think of faith unto repentance, but Aminadab's phrase reverses the order. He said, "Repent and cry unto the voice, even until ye shall have faith." We repent to do away with sin, but we also repent to develop faith in Christ. Faith in Christ assures us that he has power to cleanse and change us. Elder Dallin H. Oaks has taught:

When a person has gone through the process that results in what the scriptures call a broken heart and a contrite spirit, that person is not

only eligible to be cleansed from sin. He is also strengthened, and that strengthening is essential for us to realize the purpose of the cleansing, which is to return to our Heavenly Father. To be admitted to his presence we must be more than clean. We must also be changed from a weak person who once transgressed into a strong person with the spiritual stature that qualifies one to dwell in the presence of God. (150–51)

This concept is why Helaman made reference to Amulek and Zeezrom’s famous dialogue about sin. “For [Amulek] said unto [Zeezrom] that the Lord surely should come to redeem his people, but that he should not come to redeem them *in* their sins, but to redeem them *from* their sins” (Hel 5:10; emphasis added). Redeeming us in our sins would leave us incapacitated to receive the powers of God that crush the unprepared (D&C 82:3; 88:18, 22; 130:18–21). Inherent in the blessings of God are laws, obligations, and responsibility. Bruce Hafen has written,

The purpose of our existence here is to have an opportunity to develop the skills, the capacities, that are necessary for us to live in the celestial kingdom. When my nine-year-old boy says he wants to drive the car, I must explain to him that if he goes out onto the freeway, he is going to be dangerous—he might kill himself and a lot of other people as well. He does not yet have the capacity to use the freedom offered by a freeway. Until I can help him develop that capacity—the skill, the judgment, the maturity—going out there freely will kill him. The same would be true of our premature introduction to the freedom—and the responsibility—of living in a kingdom governed by celestial laws. The assumption of responsibility can be liberating or crushing, depending upon one’s preparation to receive it. (“The Value of the Veil,” 13; emphasis added)

The “natural man” is unable to withstand the light and glory of God; thus, the scriptures speak of the absolute necessity of becoming a “new creature.” We cannot be “in sin” and “in Christ.” As Paul taught, “If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature” (2 Cor 5:17) and from Alma, “Marvel not that all mankind . . . must be . . . born of God, changed from their carnal and fallen state, to a state of righteousness, being redeemed of God, becoming his sons and daughters; and thus they become

new creatures” (Mosiah 27:25–26). Repentance then, is not just a cleansing of the slate, but the creating of a new slate, a new being, a new son or daughter of God.

The process of partaking of God’s nature is the process of giving away all our sins. God came not to rip our sins away from us, but that we might freely give our sins to him. The more we learn about God, the more we learn how anxious he is to exchange our sins for his righteousness. As we forsake or resist the sin, we gain what President McKay termed a “consciousness of victory over self and of communion with the Infinite.” He continued, “Spirituality impels one to conquer difficulties and to acquire more and more strength. To feel one’s faculties unfolding, and truth expanding the soul is one of life’s sublimest experiences” (1057). Thus, repentance expands and strengthens our souls and infuses us with God’s truth and goodness. Our very natures become changed.

The heavenly fire in and about the prison is allegorical to our lives. While our weak faith grows in strength, God’s grace will shield us and protect us from his burning light. But one day, long after we have passed through the veil, our faith will be sufficiently strong not only to withstand the fulness of His light but also to embrace it as well (*TPJS* 348). The process of partaking of his divine nature is conditioned on our willingness to repent unto faithfulness. The counsel, “you must repent and cry unto the voice, even until you shall have faith in Christ” (Hel 5:41), teaches that we must rely wholly on the merits of Him who is mighty to save and press forward in Christ striving to keep all the commandments and covenants of God. We then receive light and truth as fast as we are able bear it, and in “proportion to the heed and diligence” we give to that light (*TPJS* 51). Thus, our capacity to learn and live the truth requires constant change, but as we do change or repent, we will, in the words of Joseph Smith, “overcome the evils of [our lives] and [lose] every desire for sin; and like the ancients, [arrive] at that point of faith where [we] are wrapped in the power and glory

of [our] Maker and [are] caught up to dwell with Him” (TPJS 51; emphasis added).

Finally, the conditions of repentance must be God’s conditions and not our own. “Many of us have not yet surrendered,” President Kimball has observed, “or if it has been a surrender it has been a conditional surrender, with many reservations” (106). “To every forgiveness there is a condition. The plaster must be as wide as the sore. The fasting, the prayers, the humility must be equal to or greater than the sin. . . . There must be tears and genuine change of heart. . . . *And there must be a new consecration and devotion to the living of all of the laws of God.* In short, there must be an overcoming of self, of sin, and of the world” (84; emphasis added). The repentance process, then, is ultimately dependent on our willingness to submit to the will of the God. We may not know when or how the clouds of darkness will disperse; nevertheless, we must continue to cry unto the Lord. “And it came to pass that they all did begin to cry unto the voice of him who had shaken the earth; yea, they did cry even until the cloud of darkness was dispersed” (Hel 5:42). In the midst of such pleadings, God will try us to see if we really believe him. Only through prisons and clouds of darkness can our faith be tested and forged. Our deliverance may be very different from that of Nephi, Lehi, and their ancient equivalents Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego. Elder Neal A. Maxwell has written concerning these Hebrew captives:

[Their] response to a persecuting king was, as they were about to be thrown into a fiery furnace heated seven times its usual capacity: “If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace . . .” And then the three words: “*But if not*, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.” (Daniel 3:17–18; italics added) *But if not*. . . There will be times in each of our lives when our faith must not be conditioned upon God’s rescuing or relieving us, because in fact He may not—at least, not as we would choose to be rescued. . . . Matching those three young men are three young women whose names we do not have. They are mentioned in the book of Abraham, remarkable young women about whom I am anxious to know more. They were actually sacrificed upon the altar because

“they would not bow down to worship [an idol] of wood or stone.” (Abr 1:11). (*Not My Will* 119–20)

The Savior, of course, is the supreme example of one whose faith was not conditioned on God’s rescuing or relieving him. Descending into the darkness and prison of all sins, wicked traditions, and mortal existence, he willingly took upon himself the pains and sufferings of us all. By drinking that “bitter cup” and suffering the “will of the Father in all things,” He created for us the conditions of repentance (3 Nephi 11:11; D&C 19:16). If only we will remember to choose these conditions, we will “partake of his salvation, and the power of his redemption” (Omni 1:26).

Remember That Jesus Christ Is Our Foundation

Helaman concludes his discourse to Nephi and Lehi with these famous words: “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 . . . which is a sure foundation, a foundation whereon if men build they cannot fall” (Hel 5:12). Those who are founded in Christ become grounded in the gospel and riveted to the rock of revelation. Using the backdrop of the earth that had shaken fearfully, Mormon dramatically illustrates the meaning of making Christ our foundation. Instead of groping in the dark and stumbling on shaking soil, these captors find an anchor to their souls “which would make them sure and steadfast, always abounding in good works, being led to glorify God” (Ether 12:4). Our narrative continues:

And it came to pass that when they cast their eyes about, and saw that the cloud of darkness was dispersed from overshadowing them, behold, they saw that they were encircled about, yea every soul, by a pillar of fire. And Nephi and Lehi were in the midst of them; yea, they were encircled about; yea, they were as if in the midst of a flaming fire, yet it did harm them not, neither did it take hold upon the walls of the prison; and they were filled with that joy which is unspeakable and full of glory. And behold, the Holy Spirit of God did come down from heaven, and did enter into their hearts, and they

were filled as if with fire, and they could speak forth marvelous words. (Hel 5:43–45)

We can be certain that these marvelous words included words of “praise and thanksgiving unto the Lord Jesus Christ, their Redeemer” (3 Nephi 10:10). When our hearts are filled with gratitude and divine indebtedness, we open ourselves to the promptings of the Holy Ghost. A voice came unto them, “yea, a pleasant voice, as if it were a whisper, saying: Peace, peace be unto you because of your faith in my Well Beloved, who was from the foundation of the world” (Hel 5:46–47). Peace is a gift of the Holy Ghost which comes because of the remission of sins (Mosiah 4:3) and a oneness with our Heavenly Father—a oneness we surely experienced in our premortal home. Through this spirit, we also come to a greater understanding of the promises we made long ago. Like the Savior who was “from the foundation of the world,” we too were “ordained—being called and prepared from the foundation of the world” (Alma 13:3). As we seek to follow Helaman’s admonition that “it is upon the rock of our Redeemer, who is Christ, the Son of God, that ye must build your foundation” (Hel 5:12), we will remember that our foundation is not new, but began in another time and in another place. “Before [we] were born . . . [we] received [our] first lessons in the world of spirits and were prepared to come forth in the due time of the Lord to labor in his vineyard for the salvation of the souls of men” (D&C 138:56).

Elder John A. Widtsoe has written:

In our preexistent state, in the day of the great council, we made a certain agreement with the Almighty. The Lord proposed a plan, conceived by him. We accepted it. Since the plan is intended for all men, we become parties to the salvation of every person under that plan. We agreed, right then and there, to be not only saviors for ourselves but measurably, saviors for the whole human family. We went into a partnership with the Lord. The working out of the plan became then not merely the Father’s work, and the Savior’s work, but also our work. The least of us, the humblest, is in partnership with

the Almighty in achieving the purpose of the eternal plan of salvation. (189)

Even though there is a veil of forgetfulness over the earth, each one of us can have a major impact on the salvation of the human family. Because of the Atonement, the Savior is able to change our hearts and awaken us “out of a deep sleep.” As our souls are “illuminated by the light of the everlasting word” (Alma 5:7), we can share that light, however small, with others.

Consider Aminadab. He had once known the gospel but for some reason had drifted away. Yet he was able to see through the cloud of darkness the “faces of Nephi and Lehi; and behold, they did shine exceedingly, even as the faces of angels” (Hel 5:36). A spiritual light was awakened within him. Notice that he just didn’t tell the people to “repent” and end there, which he could have done. He said, “Repent, and cry unto the voice, even until you shall have faith in Christ, *who was taught unto you by Alma, Amulek, and Zeezrom*” (v 41; emphasis added). He reminded the people that they had been taught before. We too have been taught before. We must never stop trying to help one another for we never know when a spark within us may ignite. President J. Reuben Clark expressed: “It is my hope and my belief that the Lord never permits the light of faith wholly to be extinguished in any human heart, however faint the light may glow. The Lord has provided that there shall still be there a spark which, with teaching, with the spirit of righteousness, with love, with tenderness, with example, with living the Gospel, shall brighten and glow again, however darkened the mind may have been” (114). President Joseph F. Smith said:

All those salient truths which come home so forcibly to the head and heart seem but the awakening of the memories of the spirit. Can we know anything here that we did not know before we came? Are not the means of knowledge in the first estate equal to those of this? I think that the spirit, before and after this probation, possess greater facilities, aye, manifold greater, for the acquisition of knowledge, than while manacled and shut up in the prison-house of mortality. . . . If Christ knew beforehand, so did we. But in coming here, we forgot all, that our agency might be free indeed, to choose good or evil, that

we might merit the reward of our own choice and conduct. But by the power of the Spirit, in the redemption of Christ, through obedience, we often catch a spark from the awakened memories of the immortal soul, which lights up our whole being as with the glory of our former home. (13–14)

As we remember that Christ is our foundation and are willing to take his name upon ourselves, he will enable us to follow him. Yes, that promise may seem staggering as we stumble through mortality, but his promises are sure. He has promised us a “sure foundation, a foundation whereon if men build they cannot fall” (Hel 5:12; see also 3 Nephi 18:7–13; 3 Nephi 27). “For I the Lord thy God will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee, Fear not; I will help thee” (Isa 41:13). “I will strengthen thee . . . yea I will uphold thee” (v 10).

But Christ never intended that we lean on him forever. Yes, he desires that we rely on him, but as means of becoming like him. He wants his foundation literally to become our foundation. He has invited us to join him in his ministry to be “a savior unto my people Israel” (D&C 86:11). Nothing is more sublime than when we minister to one another. To minister is to love, to forgive, to heal, and to reconcile, and in this, we follow most closely in the steps of Jesus Christ. One of the great miracles of heaven is when one ministry begets another. It is absolutely amazing what happened to these three hundred souls who were converted. After angels ministered unto them, they became as angels themselves “and did minister unto the people, declaring throughout all the regions round about all the things which they had heard and seen. . . . And many did preach with exceedingly great power and authority” (Hel 5:50; 6:5).

A soul founded in Christ becomes sanctified in Christ. Remembering our Savior helps us yield our hearts unto him, and then as his will becomes our will, he “make[s] [us] mighty in word and in deed, in faith and in works” and ultimately, because of the bestowal of his grace, we become strong, sanctified, and “holy, without spot” (Hel 10:5; Moroni 10:33). The Book of Mormon is a powerful witness that through Jesus

Christ we become born again into the family of God and partake of his divine nature. We are then able to love and forgive even as the Savior; his ministry becomes our ministry, and his words our words. We too may testify that the “Lord hath anointed *me* to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; . . . to comfort all that mourn; . . . to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, [and] the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness” (Isa 61:1–3; emphasis added). Because of these converted three hundred, many “did lay down their weapons of war, and also their hatred and the tradition of their fathers” (Hel 5:51).

The “more part” of the Lamanites became firm and steady in the faith because Christ had become their sure foundation. Wicked Nephites rejected them. “Nevertheless, the people of the church did have great joy because of the conversion of the Lamanites, yea, because of the church of God, which had been established among them. And they did fellowship one with another, and did rejoice one with another, and did have great joy” (Hel 6:3). As we love our brothers and sisters, and work on their behalf, prisons of bitterness, anger, and frustration will melt away. Joseph Smith taught: “Love is one of the chief characteristics of Deity. . . . A man filled with the love of God, is not content with blessing his family alone, but ranges through the whole world, anxious to bless the whole human race” (*TPJS* 174). Such are the blessings of a foundation built on Christ.

Conclusion

Although a merciful veil separates us from our premortal home, Heavenly Father has provided us means by which we might remember him and return to him. Through the burning testimony of the ancient saints and the living “oracles of God,” our seeds of faith are ignited and we are prompted by the light of Christ to receive the fulness of his light. We are promised

that by coming unto Christ through repentance of our sins and obedience to his commandments, we will receive the Holy Ghost which will teach us all things and bring all things to our remembrance. Remembrance is a divine awakening that leads us to faith, repentance, righteousness, and becoming born again. Light will come from heaven and glorious ministries of healing, forgiveness and love of God's estranged family will occur. If we follow these divine principles, we too will "fellowship one with another, and . . . rejoice one with another, and [will] have great joy" (Hel 6:3).

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Nephi's Ultimate Encounter with Deity: Some Thoughts on Helaman 10 7

Andrew C. Skinner

Our purpose in this paper is to discuss the doctrine of calling and election in relation to the life of one of God's great, but unsung, prophets—Nephi₂, son of Helaman (Nephi₂ is the second man mentioned in the Book of Mormon named Nephi). We are supported in the examination of such a topic by the Prophet Joseph Smith, who in June of 1839 said:

St. Paul exhorts us to make our calling and election sure . . . This principle ought (in its proper place) to be taught, for God hath not revealed anything to Joseph, but what he will make known unto the Twelve, and even the least Saint may know all things as fast as he is able to bear them. (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* 149; hereafter *TPJS*)

One of the most ennobling doctrines taught in ancient scripture is that of election. For people to have their calling and election made sure “means that the Lord seals their exaltation upon them while they are yet in this life” (McConkie 109). Modern prophets have taught that the doctrine and principles of election have their origin in the premortal organizing councils where future inhabitants of this earth were taught and blessed by gods and angels.

Brigham Young and Willard Richards explained that the general principle of election means that God elected or chose certain individuals in our premortal state to receive certain

Andrew C. Skinner is assistant professor of Ancient Scripture at Brigham Young University.

blessings, or to perform certain works, while in mortality (*HC* 4:258). According to the Book of Mormon, one great foreordained appointment or blessing was to receive the Melchizedek priesthood (*Alma* 13:3–9). Since we know that the greatest of all the gifts or blessings which God can bestow is eternal life (*D&C* 14:7), it follows that the greatest foreordained calling or appointment that could be received in the premortal existence was to eternal life.

And yet, the prophets have taught that before any blessing associated with premortal appointments or callings can be realized, the recipients must prove their worthiness by constant, steady righteous living on this earth—by fulfilling the requirements of righteousness imposed by divine laws which operate in mortality. In other words, election is contingent.

Joseph Smith said that the “unconditional election of individuals to eternal life was not taught by the Apostles” nor was the predestination of God’s spirit children to salvation or damnation:

God did elect or predestinate, that all those who would be saved, should be saved in Christ Jesus and through obedience to the Gospel; but He passes over no man’s sins, but visits them with correction, and if His children will not repent of their sins He will discard them. (*TPJS* 189)

Loyalty to God is the grand key by which an individual’s premortal, *conditional* calling and election to eternal life may be made sure and unconditional. Note again the Prophet Joseph’s words:

After a person has faith in Christ, repents of his sins, and is baptized for the remission of his sins and receives the Holy Ghost (by the laying on of hands), which is the first Comforter, then let him continue to humble himself before God, hungering and thirsting after righteousness, and living by every word of God, and the Lord will soon say unto him, Son, thou shalt be exalted. When the Lord has thoroughly proved him, and finds that the man is determined to serve him at all hazards, then the man will find his calling and election made sure, then it will be his privilege to receive the other Comforter which the Lord hath promised the Saints. (*TPJS* 150)

The Apostle Peter also implied the need for a constant, steady course of progressive righteousness when he encouraged all of us to make our calling and election sure.

And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall. (2 Peter 1:5–10)

For every true doctrine and principle, Satan (the great spoiler) has concocted and promoted a counterfeit. The Book of Mormon teaches us much about the *perverted* notion of election which prevailed among the Zoramites, whose beliefs stand in stark contrast to the truths revealed by both the Apostle Peter and the Prophet Joseph Smith. It is significant that the Zoramites' errant views concerning election resulted from their failure to *perform* the actions of all humble and submissive followers of God who have exaltation as a worthy goal:

But they had fallen into great errors, for they would not observe to keep the commandments of God, and his statutes, according to the law of Moses.

Neither would they observe the performances of the church to continue in prayer and supplication to God daily, that they might not enter into temptation.

Yea, in fine, they did pervert the ways of the Lord in very many instances; . . . For they had a place built up in the center of their synagogue, a place for standing, which was high above the head, and the top thereof would only admit one person.

Therefore, whosoever desired to worship must go forth and stand upon the top thereof, and stretch forth his hands towards heaven, and cry with a loud voice, saying: . . . Holy God, we believe that thou hast separated us from our brethren; and we do not believe in the tradition of our brethren, which was handed down to them by the childishness of their fathers; but we believe that thou hast elected us to be thy holy children; and also thou hast made it known unto us that there shall be no Christ.

But thou art the same yesterday, today, and forever; and thou hast elected us that we shall be saved, whilst all around us are elected to be cast by thy wrath down to hell; for the which holiness, O God, we thank thee; and we also thank thee that thou hast elected us, that we may not be led away after the foolish traditions of our brethren, which doth bind them down to a belief of Christ, which doth lead their hearts to wander far from thee, our God. (Alma 31:9–11, 13–17)

Although the Zoramites used the terminology of election, what they really fostered was the idea of elitism, which almost always has at its heart a disdain for others. True election promotes a genuine concern for the welfare of others. Elitism seems to cause people to forget God six out of seven days because it turns them selfishly inward. But the true doctrine of election promotes a daily desire for communion with deity and a search for the divine within us.

As a contrast to the practices of the Zoramites, we look to Helaman's son Nephi². Among those Book of Mormon personages whose lives serve as models of constant, steady righteous service in the face of tremendous opposition, there is none greater than Nephi, son of Helaman. Though not often emphasized or highlighted, his life provides us an opportunity to observe those behavioral patterns and attitudes necessary to have one's calling and election made sure according to the revelations to Peter and Joseph Smith.

We hear little about Nephi before the death of his father only that he was older than his brother Lehi and that the two of them "began to grow up unto the Lord" (Hel 3:21). Whether or not Nephi and Lehi were formally consecrated to God's service as were Jacob and Joseph, we have no way of knowing. However, we can be sure they were among those of the Church of God who fasted, prayed often, increased in humility, and yielded their hearts to God (v 35).

In the 53rd year of the reign of judges, Helaman died and Nephi began to serve as chief judge—at the start of very difficult times, indeed. For the next several years he witnessed contentions, rebellion, bloodshed, aristocratic oppression of the poor and humble, mockery of sacred things, rejection of prophecy

and revelation, murder, lying, stealing, adultery, and treason (Hel 4:12).

Eventually, Nephi, Lehi, and Moronihah got the people to repent for a time. Even though the majority of the population soon returned to their wicked ways, Nephi continued to cry repentance and to testify of the atoning mission of Christ. The pattern of his life was one of constant vigilance and concern for the spiritual welfare of his people in the face of unrelenting iniquity.

Paralleling the situation of Alma² fifty years before, and possibly even influenced by his example, Nephi yielded the judgment seat to another so as to devote his full time and energy to preaching the word of God (compare Alma 4:11–19 and Hel 5:1–4). Because Nephi taught with such great power, eight thousand Lamanites in the land of Zarahemla were converted and baptized (Hel 5:18–19).

But life was not easy for Nephi. He accomplished the Lord's work only at great personal sacrifice, even being cast into prison for the word's sake (Hel 5:21–22). In this he displayed significant parallels to Ammon, Alma, Amulek, Peter, Paul, Joseph Smith, and others—all had to endure physical abuse and psychological hardship (see for example Mosiah 7:7; Alma 14:17; Acts 12:5; and D&C 122:6).

Nephi was imprisoned many days without food while awaiting execution. However, God did not leave him alone and comfortless. During this prison experience Nephi was transfigured, heard the voice of God the Father, and was ministered to by angels, and the greater part of the Lamanites were converted and exceeded the Nephites in righteousness (Hel 5:36, 44–48; 6:1).

Spiritually renewed and fortified, Nephi went into the land northward for six years, but he met with little success for the people there “did reject all of his words” (Hel 7:3). When he returned to the land of his birth, he was appalled and heart-sick over how quickly and thoroughly his people had apostatized. Soon after Nephi returned a secret combination of Gadianton

judges sought to destroy him through a conspiracy (Hel 8:4–7). Faced with another life threatening situation, Nephi did not stop crying repentance and bearing powerful testimony of the mission and meaning of the Messiah. It is important to note that his teachings were grounded in the scriptures and in the words of prophets which testified in plainness of the coming of the son of God (vv 10–22).

Nephi next passed the surest test by which the validity of any prophet's predictions can be measured. According to Deuteronomy the test is simple:

And if thou say in thine heart, How shall we know the word which the Lord hath not spoken? When a prophet speaketh in the name of the Lord, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him. (Deut 18:21–22)

It appears his people were also aware of this principle, for when Nephi told both of the murder and the murderer the people's chief judge, certain curious investigators said, "Behold, now we will know of a surety whether this man be a prophet and God hath commanded him to prophesy . . . if this thing which he has said . . . be true . . . then will we believe that the other words which he has spoken are true" (Hel 9:2).

As Nephi's predictions were verified, controversy and debate over his identity intensified. The corrupt officials of the government tried even harder to instigate a lynching, but Nephi harshly rebuked them in the same manner Jesus would later rebuke his enemies. His words serve as a poignant reminder to people of future dispensations that God does not tolerate disobedience indefinitely:

But Nephi said unto them: O ye fools, ye uncircumcised of heart, ye blind, and ye stiffnecked people, do ye know how long the Lord your God will suffer you that ye shall go on in this your way of sin? (Hel 9:21)

Some of the people began to believe that Nephi was a true prophet. Still others thought he might be a god because, as they

rightly surmised, only God can know the thoughts and intents of the heart! (D&C 6:16). Ultimately, there arose such a division among the people, that in their arguing they forgot the very object of their debate. They left Nephi literally standing by himself as they dispersed. The crisis had passed.

In this series of events, as in the rest of his life, Nephi demonstrated his absolute and uncompromising loyalty to the Savior of whom he prophesied. Indeed, his life at this point models the pattern of behavior of those who have their calling and election made sure as revealed by Joseph Smith. To reiterate: "When the Lord has thoroughly proved him, and finds that the man is determined to serve him at all hazards, then the man will find his calling and election made sure" (TPJS 150).

It becomes apparent from what follows in the scriptural account that Nephi did have his calling and election made sure at that time. As he went on his way toward his own house, dejected, he pondered the things which the Lord had shown him.

Discourses could be written about the importance of pondering and the results which flow therefrom. Great and marvelous are the revelations which have come to those who have pondered the Gospel plan and principles. For example, when Nephi¹, son of Lehi, pondered the words of his father, an unsurpassed vision of the condescension of God was unveiled to him (1 Ne 11:1). Those visions of the Lord led him to ponder *continually* the things he had seen and heard (2 Ne 4:16). As President Joseph F. Smith sat pondering the scriptures and the atonement, an unsurpassed vision of the spirit world was unveiled to him (D&C 138:1). As Joseph Smith Jr. pondered the instruction in James 1:5, he was motivated to pray, and the most sublime of all revelations in this dispensation was unveiled unto him (JS-H 1:12). Pondering is so crucial to the comprehending of eternal truth that the resurrected Savior specifically instructed the people on the American continent to go to their homes and ponder and pray about the things he had told them the first day he was with them, promising that then their minds would be

prepared for what he would teach them on the morrow (3 Ne 17:3).

As Nephi², son of Helaman, walked along pondering, he, too, was given an awe-inspiring revelation as the voice of the Lord spoke to him.

Blessed art thou Nephi, for those things which thou hast done; for I have beheld how thou hast with unweariness declared the word, which I have given unto thee, unto this people. And thou hast not feared them, and hast not sought thine own life, but hast sought my will, and to keep my commandments.

And now, because thou hast done this with *such* unweariness, behold I will bless thee forever; and I will make thee mighty in word and in deed, in faith and in works; yea, even that all things shall be done unto thee according to *thy* word, for thou shalt not ask that which is contrary to my will.

Behold, thou art Nephi, and I am God. Behold, I declare unto thee in the presence of mine angels, that ye shall have power over this people, and shall smite the earth with famine, and with pestilence, and with destruction, according to the wickedness of this people.

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 10:4–7; emphasis added)

Here the Lord declared four important truths which indicate that this complex and sacred experience was the ultimate encounter with deity that both Peter and the Prophet Joseph Smith encouraged all the Saints to strive for.

1. Nephi was blessed forever because of his unwearying loyalty and attention to the Lord's will without regard for personal desires.

2. All things which Nephi desired for himself would be brought to pass.

3. The Lord formally acknowledged His identity in direct relationship to Nephi's.

4. Nephi would receive the sealing powers of the priesthood including control over the elements and power "to bind and loose" on earth and in heaven (power to seal eternal relationships just as Elijah had).

What do these statements mean? First of all, the Lord said he was blessing Nephi eternally because he had served Him with “such unwearyingness” (Hel 10:5). This certainly fits what Joseph Smith taught about the prerequisites for having one’s calling and election made sure. Nephi had been “thoroughly proved” and had served the Lord “at all hazards.”

Second, the Lord promised Nephi that he could do all things according to his word. In other words, the Lord was extending to Nephi an invitation to ask for knowledge, power, and blessings up to and including eternal life as D&C 42:61 makes clear: “If thou shalt ask, thou shalt receive revelation upon revelation, knowledge upon knowledge, that thou mayest know the mysteries and peaceable things—that which bringeth joy, that which bringeth life eternal.”

Third, the Lord explicitly stated: “thou art Nephi, and I am God” (Hel 10:6). Since it is reasonable to assume that Nephi knew who he was, and since we know that of the Lord speaks no words in idleness, such a statement must have profound meaning. It appears to be an acknowledgement, in the presence of divine witnesses (the text says “angels”), of a special relationship of mutual love and respect between the Lord and Nephi. The Lord was claiming him as his servant and part of his spiritual posterity. It was also formal acknowledgement of a special covenant which the Lord was confirming with Nephi.

The Lord’s statements as recorded in this section of the book of Helaman fit perfectly the pattern of formal covenant making in the Old Testament world. The main features or components of covenants (and even treaties) established during Mosaic times include formal mention of the parties involved in the agreement; the stipulations of the covenant; the witnesses to the covenant; the statements of blessings and cursings; and the oaths confirming the promises made (see *Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* 1:719–720).

Scriptural parallels to Nephi’s experience are found in the lives of others who were also promised eternal life by the Lord. To Alma¹ the Lord declared: “Blessed art thou, Alma . . . Thou

art my servant; and I covenant with thee that thou shalt have eternal life . . .”(Mosiah 26:15, 20). To Joseph Smith the Lord said: “I am the Lord thy God, and I gave unto thee, my servant Joseph, an appointment, and restore all things. Ask what ye will, and it shall be given unto you according to my word . . . For I am the Lord thy God . . . for verily I seal upon you your exaltation . . .” (D&C 132:40, 49).

Fourth, Nephi also received the sealing powers of the Holy Priesthood. We know, therefore, that Nephi had entered into a state of sanctification since modern revelation confirms that those who are endowed with power and taught from on high are those who are first sanctified (D&C 43:16). This marvelous promise is made to all the Saints of God who become sanctified:

Therefore, sanctify yourselves that your minds become single to God, and the days will come that you shall see him; for he will unveil his face unto you, and it shall be in his own time, and in his own way, and according to his own will. (D&C 88:68)

This verse undoubtedly has reference to the Second Comforter. It will be remembered that Joseph Smith taught the following concerning the Second Comforter:

Now what is this other Comforter? It is no more nor less than the Lord Jesus Christ Himself; and this is the sum and substance of the whole matter; that when any man obtains this last Comforter, he will have the personage of Jesus Christ to attend him, or appear unto him from time to time, and even He will manifest the Father unto him, and they will take up their abode with him, and the visions of the heavens will be opened unto him, and the Lord will teach him face to face, and he may have a perfect knowledge of the mysteries of the Kingdom of God; and this is the state and place the ancient Saints arrived at when they had such glorious visions—Isaiah, Ezekiel, John upon the Isle of Patmos, St. Paul in the three heavens, and all the Saints who held communion with the general assembly and the Church of the Firstborn. (*TPJS* 150–151)

However, we must note that not every vision of the Savior is associated with his appearance as the Second Comforter. Three illustrations of this point are to be found in the lives of Nephi₁, Joseph Smith, and King Lamoni. Both Nephi and

Joseph, who had seen the Lord in vision, were given their unconditional guarantee of exaltation only *after* long years of devoted service, through hazardous times and life-threatening situations.

What we learn from this seeming paradox is that receiving a glorious vision is not an automatic guarantee of exaltation nor are marvelous manifestations given only to those who have had their calling and election made sure. The revelation of Jesus Christ is *not* synonymous with the seal of exaltation or the unconditional promise of the Second Comforter. Thus a person like King Lamoni could receive a vision of his Redeemer and not necessarily have his calling and election made sure (Alma 19:13).

Guarantees of exaltation along with receiving the Second Comforter are given to those who are proven to be thoroughly loyal to the Lord at all hazards. The nature of those hazards may change from dispensation to dispensation and may even be different from individual to individual. However, according to Joseph Smith hazards must come and one must stand loyal to God in the face of those hazards while continuing to hunger and thirst after righteousness. This statement implies, as do the very lives of Joseph Smith and Nephi, the son of Helaman, that the guarantee of exaltation comes only after a significant period of testing, and that glorious spiritual experiences can come prior to the giving of that guarantee.

We also need to note that people may receive exaltation without having the Savior appear to them in mortality. Many who obtain eternal life will do so by enduring to the end of mortality in faithfulness. In Doctrine and Covenants 50:5 we read: "But blessed are they who are faithful and endure, whether in life or in death, for they shall inherit eternal life" (see also 2 Nephi 31:20; D&C 14:7; 46:14).

Conclusion

Much resulted from Nephi's experience with God as recorded in Helaman 10. It became an anchor to his soul, and he continued his preaching (Hel 10:13–16), sealed and unsealed the heavens (Hel 11), received *many* revelations daily, and finally put an end to strife for a time.

And in the seventy and ninth year there began to be much strife. But it came to pass that Nephi and Lehi, and many of their brethren who knew concerning the true points of doctrine, having many revelations daily, therefore they did preach unto the people, insomuch that they did put an end to their strife in that same year. (Hel 11:23)

Ultimately, however, Nephi's experience seems to have made it impossible for him to remain in mortality for he apparently was translated like Alma, who had also experienced many of the same things.

And Nephi, the son of Helaman, had departed out of the land of Zarahemla, giving charge unto his son Nephi, who was his eldest son, concerning the plates of brass, and all the records which had been kept, and all those things which had been kept sacred from the departure of Lehi out of Jerusalem. Then he departed out of the land, and whither he went, no man knoweth . . . (3 Ne 1:2–3)

The record of Nephi, son of Helaman, is one of the finest examples and most complete renditions of one who “suffered tribulation in [his] Redeemer's name” (D&C 138:12–13). This is a sacrifice required of all who have their calling and election made sure.

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Mormon's Philosophy of History: Helaman 12 in the Perspective of Mormon's Editing Procedure

8

Thomas W. Mackay

Mormon has a providential philosophy of history that greatly influences his selection and interpretation of individuals, events, and society. In composing his monumental summary of Nephite history, Mormon has left, as it were, "DNA fingerprints" that portray his own attitude toward life, toward the consequences of men's faith or disobedience, toward God's blessings or punishment, toward prophecy and its fulfillment, and toward the recurrence of debilitating and destructive social forces. As a prophet, he places his focus more on matters of righteousness than on material manifestations of achievement.

Nowhere does Mormon state this attitude more poignantly or more extensively than in the twelfth chapter of Helaman. He begins:

And thus we can behold how false, and also the unsteadiness of the hearts of the children of men; yea, we can see that the Lord in his great infinite goodness doth bless and prosper those who put their trust in him. Yea, and we may see at the very time when he doth prosper his people, yea, in the increase of their fields, their flocks and their herds, and in gold, and in silver, and in all manner of precious things of every kind and art; sparing their lives, and delivering them out of the hands of their enemies; softening the hearts of

Thomas W. Mackay is professor of Classical and Medieval Studies at Brigham Young University.

their enemies that they should not declare wars against them; yea, and in fine, doing all things for the welfare and happiness of his people; yea, then is the time that they do harden their hearts, and do forget the Lord their God, and do trample under their feet the Holy One—yea, and this because of their ease, and their exceedingly great prosperity. And thus we see that except the Lord doth chasten his people with many afflictions, yea, except he doth visit them with death and with terror, and with famine and with all manner of pestilence, they will not remember him. (Hel 12:1–3)

The inconsistency of mortals to obey God brings natural disasters, wars, etc., while repentance and obedience produce his intervention for their benefit and prosperity. However, failure to acknowledge the divine source of blessings often leads to pride and ultimately to retribution. Referring to the human proclivity to sin rather than to obey, to be lifted up in pride rather than to pay heed to God's counsels, Mormon exclaims: "O how great is the nothingness of the children of men; yea, even they are less than the dust of the earth" (Hel 12:7). With the reference to dust, Mormon echoes Isaiah, Lehi, and king Benjamin, observing that the dust of the earth, as the rest of creation, obeys the voice of God (vv 8–19), while humanity tends to be rebellious, incurring God's condemnation and punishment unless they repent (vv 22–26). He concludes with a scriptural quotation from a non-biblical source: "fulfilling the words which say: They that have done good shall have everlasting life; and they that have done evil shall have everlasting damnation" (v 26; compare John 5:29).

Helaman chapter 12 is situated in the midst of Mormon's description of the growth and strangling power of the robber bands and secret combinations—Gadianton, Inc., directly inspired by Satan (see 3 Nephi 6:27–30). It has the tone of despair, of utter agony, when from his vantage point of about AD 380–384 he conveys to modern readers the anguish he experienced in recounting the origin and development of one of the major forces leading to the dissolution of Nephite civilization. This perspective intensifies as Mormon records the ministry and prophecies of Samuel the Lamanite (Hel 13:1–16:8). For as

Samuel called the Nephites to repentance, he prophetically looked to a time when the Nephites would fall into disobedience, and their iniquity would result in the extinction of the people through robber bands and internal dissention, with the Lamanites merely supplying the final deathblow. So Mormon is constrained to exclaim the words preserved in Helaman 12 as he reviews the many records and surveys his contemporary society. Prophecy has been fulfilled. While earlier prophets—namely Lehi, Nephi, Alma₂, and Samuel—had seen these days, Mormon was required to live through them.

Since Mormon wants to call attention to fulfilled prophecies as part of his historical record—his reason for including certain types of events—he preserves in his abridgement the record of Samuel that the Lord had promised and enjoined upon Nephi (3 Nephi 23:6–13). The account of Samuel is appended to the book of Helaman, where it fits historically, but it appears to have been placed there by Nephi long after the fact.¹ When Mormon includes the material on Samuel, he gives a brief heading (before chapter 7 and again before 13), as he had done for such records as those of Alma₁ and Alma₂.² This slight disjuncture may suggest the haste that propelled Mormon's abridgement of the many records before him. Likewise similar seams in the summary, paraphrase, and quotation style he employs point in all likelihood to the exigencies of time and circumstances as well as to his respect for his historical sources. The end was drawing near.

When Mormon compiled his Nephite history, several thoughts converged to motivate and to direct him. As a young lad, he had been commissioned by a prophet, Ammaron, to

¹ This is a broad interpretation of 3 Nephi 23:6–13. Narrowly viewed in the context of this chapter, it would refer only to noting the historical fulfillment of an prophesied event a few days previous. Other than this chapter, there is no such record in Mormon's abridgement, and so generally it is thought that the Lord referred to recording the prophecies of Samuel. As a Lamanite, his records might not have been included in the Nephite records made by descendants of Nephi.

² The header before Mosiah 23 is for the narrative on the followers of Alma₁ in Mosiah 23 and 24. For Alma₂, note the headers before Alma 1, 5, 7, 9, 36, 38, 39.

continue the sacred record on the (large) plates of Nephi (Mormon 1:2–5). Ammaron's instructions were that when Mormon was twenty-four years old he was to engrave his observations of the people on the plates of Nephi, but he was to leave the other records untouched. In the year AD 345, when Mormon was 34 years old, he and the Nephites fled from the Lamanites toward Jashon, a city

near the land where Ammaron had deposited the records unto the Lord, that they might not be destroyed. And behold I have gone according to the word of Ammaron, and taken the plates of Nephi, and did make a record according to the words of Ammaron. And upon the plates of Nephi I did make a full account of all the wickedness and abominations; but upon these plates I did forbear to make a full account of their wickedness and abominations. (Mormon 2:17–18)

The wording suggests that Mormon not only had fulfilled his commitment to Ammaron but had already begun engraving his abridgement onto what we may call the plates of Mormon (see 3 Nephi 5:10–12; see also Hardy and Parsons 1:200), the plates Joseph Smith translated to give us our account comprising the book of Mosiah until the end of the Book of Mormon, with Moroni engraving the last two books.

From AD 362 to 375, Mormon refused to be the general of the Nephite forces; he was nevertheless an observer of the deterioration and dissolution of their civilization. Then in AD 375, "I, Mormon, seeing that the Lamanites were about to overthrow the land, therefore I did go to the hill Shim, and did take up all the records which Ammaron had hid up unto the Lord" (Mormon 4:23). Presumably it was while examining this large trove of documents and records that Mormon discovered the small plates of Nephi, for in his small historical and literary "bridge" called the Words of Mormon we have this statement probably composed not long before the final great extermination in AD 384:

And now I, Mormon, being about to deliver up the record which I have been making into the hands of my son Moroni, behold I have

witnessed almost all the destruction of my people, the Nephites.
(WofM 1:1)

He had previously clarified his identity, his sources, his purpose, and his inspiration for editing the account on the plates of Mormon, perhaps because he was uncertain whether he would live to complete such an extensive work (see 3 Nephi 5:8–20; Hel 3:13–16).

Despite the horrendous pressure and stress Mormon must have endured as he abridged the Nephite history, we perceive a unifying view pervading his writings. It is also clear in his selection of passages for direct and full quotation or for summary. King Noah fits into the pattern and lesson of history as a striking contrast to king Benjamin and Mosiah. Both Alma₁ and Alma₂ provide notable examples of patience, faith, obedience, and of how to deal with opposition. Moroni, Lehi, and Teancum, as well as the sons of Helaman, and also Gidgiddoni in the book of 3 Nephi are examples of military might blessed by God. In visiting the Nephites, the resurrected Lord himself made mention of the fulfillment of prophecies uttered by Samuel the Lamanite noting that such prophecies (and their fulfillment) should be entered into the record. The appearance of the Lord and subsequent changes in society brought about heavenly blessings because of the following tranquility and obedience of the people. Later, dissensions divided them, and the blessings of the Lord were withdrawn, just as had been prophesied. In the death-throes of civilization, the Nephites were plagued by robber bands and confused in their own actions—losing buried treasures and not understanding the moral and eternal implications of their deeds. But those are the very circumstances Samuel had foreseen and prophesied, and they were a repetition to the same kind of self-destructive forces that had exterminated the Jaredites. Moreover, Mormon applies those same principles to the days when his record (the Book of Mormon) would be read and known. Everything is measured in terms of righteousness and charity, not physical achievements or material

prosperity, and even the historical account has a moral and didactic value for its readers.

Thus, when it comes to analyzing the history of the inhabitants of the Americas from 600 BC to AD 400, we find ourselves in a very advantageous position because of Mormon's summary account; however, that same narrative also leaves us in a rather disadvantageous position. This paradox is created by having Mormon's selection of people, circumstances, events, and social results, and yet at the same time being limited to his perspective on those people and circumstances. While other historians delight in seeking to explain events and to produce new approaches to evidence, Mormon's interpretation is providential. Lacking the enormous array of information at Mormon's disposal, we cannot create substantially new and differing interpretations from evidence he omitted because of his attitude and approach, though we can redeploy his evidence (see Hardy; Bushman "Lamanite"). Certainly we can at least come to appreciate his attitude and approach, his inspired philosophy of history, so as to understand more completely his message.

Mormon's Approach to History

For Mormon, historical analysis and writing have a moral and didactic value. This stance presupposes certain notions:

1. Mormon knows that the Book of Mormon will be preserved, translated, and finally read by people living centuries later in the same lands in which he lived in (we broadly interpret "lands" to be the Americas as a whole, not merely a specific geographical segment corresponding to a modern political entity or nation).

2. Mormon trusts in the existence, honesty, and truthfulness of God.

3. Hence, whether God says something directly to him or indirectly through some prophet, irrespective of when that prophet lived, Mormon believes that statement to be accurate

and true. If it is a prophecy, it will be fulfilled in the course of human events (see 3 Nephi 23:6–13). Such events or motivating causes are major framing structures that determine what Mormon writes in his history and how he views the interactions of people.

4. Divine intervention in human affairs occurs in response to the faithfulness of people—their obedience or disobedience to God and his commandments. Such intervention might be manifest through natural disasters, the actions of people (wars, etc.), or a general state of mind, a societal health.

5. The opposing force, the devil, seeks to subvert all that is good, all that comes from the divine source. He reinstated among the Nephites the secret oaths and combinations that had perverted and destroyed the Jaredites. But God makes clear Satan's efforts through prophecy and through interpretation by a prophet.

6. A prophet can ascertain truth regarding divine intervention and human motivations both directly from God and indirectly by heeding previous prophecies of the future and seeking their fulfillment.

7. There is a pattern to human events that reflects the divine hand of God repeating the same lessons to various generations. This tendency for repetition is all the more acute for the similarity between Nephite society of the third and fourth centuries AD and people living in the Americas in the nineteenth to twenty-first centuries. Moreover, Mormon had seen our days from God's perspective.

8. Writing his abridged narrative at the end of the Nephite civilization, Mormon retrospectively emphasizes the destructive factors and warns his future audience against falling prey to those same forces. Since there is a general cyclical pattern of repetition in human history, and since he knows the future, Mormon's words are direct and of great value.

9. Therefore, Mormon has a structure and purpose to writing history, as well as a deep confidence in the accuracy of his observations (and prophecies) and their value for us, his

audience. Because of his prophetic vision and his absolute certainty in the imminent demise of Nephite civilization, Mormon addresses his audience of today almost as though we were his contemporaries, supposing that we can still respond to the instructions rejected by fourth-century Nephites.

In these matters Mormon differs from modern secular historians. Composing history with a focus on visible achievements distorts assessments because the underlying value system or approach is materialistic and often ignores or minimizes spiritual and religious values. For Mormon, it is obedience to God's commandments and respect for his prophets that matters most. When the people are righteous, blessings follow—though not necessarily immediately.³ Frequently there is a time-lag factor between the righteousness or wickedness of a people and the increases or decreases in economic and material manifestations of God's intervention or blessings. Nor does prosperity act as a reliable indicator of righteousness. Prosperity in and of itself is not a valid measure of society, because it may be the result of wickedness *or* of righteousness. Worldly success *may* occur, but the most important results of righteousness are evident in the hearts and minds of people—their attitudes, responses, and motivations (see Alma 1).

Just as there are fruits of righteous living, there are also tell-tale marks which attend wickedness. Mormon specifies several: pride, the rejection of prophets, lack of miracles due to wickedness or lack of faith, the hiding of treasures, secret combinations and robber bands, bureaucratic government, oppressive taxation, social and economic distinctions and classes,

³ Benjamin at Mosiah 2:24 says that when people obey God, "he doth immediately bless you. . . ." Limhi in Mosiah 7:29–31 quotes some Brass Plates Old Testament passages: "For behold, the Lord hath said: I will not succor my people in the day of their transgression; but I will hedge up their ways that they prosper not; and their doings shall be as a stumbling block before them. And again, he saith: If my people shall sow filthiness they shall reap the chaff thereof in the whirlwind; and the effect thereof is poison. And again he saith: If my people shall sow filthiness they shall reap the east wind, which bringeth immediate destruction." Thus, too, Mormon: ". . . we can see that the Lord in his great infinite goodness doth bless and prosper those who put their trust in him" (Hel 12:1). Joseph Smith (*HC* 5:390) observed that due to their disposition, "God visited them immediately" in ancient America.

open defiance of the doctrines and prophecies of the scriptures, dissention, contention, aggressive and offensive war, boasting of one's own strength or knowledge, anger and the lust for blood or power, the frantic sorrowing of the damned—but not unto repentance, witchcraft and sorcery (under any name), greed, immorality, and reliance on the native wit and intelligence of man.

What, then, was Mormon's view of history? What type of evidence was important to him? What was the eminent factor, from his view-point, in historical causation? What was the nature of his evidence? How does he use it? What do the structure and content of the abridgement convey to the reader? Mormon overtly states his inspired view in chapter 12 of Helaman. As a prophet as well as a man of action, Mormon perceived history from the larger perspective of the eternities. He was clearly in the prophetic tradition. His was not a world-view restricted by a mechanistic notion of causation. Rather, the events of human history demonstrated God's justice and his ultimate control of the affairs of men. Providential causation, in direct fulfillment of prophecy, is the hall-mark of Mormon's portrayal of history. Thus his primary concern is righteousness, for if man, by his behavior, sets himself at the cross-currents to the cosmos, then he will heap upon himself divine retribution. Such a perspective stands in stark contrast to that taken by most modern historians. Their concern is with the more physical and tangible products of a culture.

As expressed in Helaman 12, Mormon's view of history is one of a cycle or repeated pattern that is characterized progressively by repentance, righteousness, prosperity, pride, and greed. That severe condition is followed by a degeneration into such serious manifestations of wickedness as immorality, war, and secret combinations. Then some give heed to prophets and repent, while others are either destroyed or cut off from the true and righteous people who, by following the prophetic tradition, are greatly blessed—until they once more degenerate into evil ways. This perspective taken by Mormon, and his incessant

concern for underlying motivation, whether righteous or iniquitous, singles him out as operating within the framework of the prophetic, not the uninspired natural man. Interestingly, the spiritual indicators, the very indicators of civilization that are of greatest value to the prophet-historian, are disregarded by modern historians, who instead pay attention to the scientifically measurable, tangibly perceptible aspects of a people. But this produces the very time-lag effect I mentioned, whereby to a prophet a particular people is already in a moral decline before its “zenith”—as interpreted by an uninspired secular historian.

This divergence in understanding and historical perspective is very clearly illustrated in Mormon's description of king Noah in Mosiah 11. King Noah's activities are presented as the futile attempts by the “natural man” to develop a paternalistic government and to stimulate the external manifestations of a vibrant civilization. Lacking a prophet's insight and knowledge, a modern historical researcher might mutilate this evidence in a quest for a more “objective” or “scientific” conclusion—a more realistic assessment of king Noah wherein he is given credit for short-term results. In so doing he would greatly err in Mormon's eyes. The difficulty lies in the fundamental approach to history: are the most important facets those discernable in physical culture, GNP, and all the trappings of natural man, or rather, are they to be found in the righteousness of the people? In his interpretation of Nephite history and in his prophetic vision, Mormon is unrelentingly consistent as a prophet-historian, viewing the question of righteousness as *the* question to consider and minimizing accomplishments and “progress” or “growth” in material culture in comparison with obedience. And retrospectively he seeks to bring out the origin, nature, and development of the forces that led to Nephite annihilation.

Hence, the essential difference between Mormon and contemporary historians hinges primarily on the question of revelation—taking a providential perspective on mankind. Mormon's overriding concern is with the righteousness of the people, not the physical display of their civilization. If there are

prophecies, the information can be trusted, for it comes from an infallible, omniscient source—God. Likewise, statements by prophets validate Mormon’s point of view. For example, when the righteous are slain by the wicked, judgment comes against the wicked and the righteous do not lose their reward. So stated Captain Moroni, a military leader whom Mormon extols (Alma 48:11–13, 17) and whose name he gave to his son, but his statement only echoes the words of Alma to Amulek (Alma 14:11) which in turn reflect an utterance of the dying Abinadi (Mosiah 17:10).

Whether the people have an elaborate government is also of interest, for while king Benjamin and king Mosiah keep things simple, king Noah and others develop a great bureaucracy. In Alma 11, Helaman 1–2, 6–9, and 3 Nephi 6–8, we perceive the complex workings of leaders, lawyers, and judges perverting society for their own gain and advantage. When the people “began to be distinguished by ranks, according to their riches and their chances for learning” (3 Nephi 6:12), then pride, oppression, and contention became a way of life. Mormon always gives preference to a society in which everyone has an equal opportunity for salvation and in which there is no greed, contention, class and social rank, no unwieldy bureaucracy, and no secret combinations (see 4 Nephi 1:2–28). The essence of society is peace and civilization, but these are destroyed by war and contention (see Alma 51:22). Prosperity in and of itself is not a valid measure of society, because it may be the result of wickedness or of righteousness.

Though extensively explained in Helaman 12, perhaps the most succinct summary of Mormon’s point of view, is related at Alma 50:18–22:

And they did prosper exceedingly, and they became exceedingly rich; yea, and they did multiply and wax strong in the land. And thus we see how merciful and just are all the dealings of the Lord, to the fulfilling of all his words unto the children of men; yea, we can behold that his words are verified, even at this time, which he spake unto Lehi, saying:

Blessed art thou and thy children; and they shall be blessed, inasmuch as they shall keep my commandments they shall prosper in the land. But remember, inasmuch as they will not keep my commandments they shall be cut off from the presence of the Lord.

And we see that these promises have been verified to the people of Nephi; for it has been their quarrelings and their contentions, yea, their murderings, and their plunderings, their idolatry, their whoredoms, and their abominations, which were among themselves, which brought upon them their wars and their destructions. And those who were faithful in keeping the commandments of the Lord were delivered at all times, whilst thousands of their wicked brethren have been consigned to bondage, or to perish by the sword, or to dwindle in unbelief, and mingle with the Lamanites.

Thus God has given a promise, and that promise will unfailingly be upheld, provided the children of men abide by the conditions of the promise. In this, God is just; it is iniquity that brings upon men divine retribution as well as all the social evils which Mormon is wont to deplore. Again, that divine voice stated "it is because of their iniquity and abominations that they are fallen" (3 Nephi 9:2).

When Alma, in speaking his final thoughts to his son Helaman, prophesies concerning the ultimate destruction of the Nephites, asserting that "because of iniquity, this prophecy shall be fulfilled" (Alma 45:14; compare 37:29–31), Mormon knows it to be true both because it is a prophecy by a man of God and because he himself was an eyewitness to the fulfillment. Furthermore, since Mormon's sources are other prophets, he has no doubt as to the veracity of his work:

I do make my record from the accounts which have been given by those who were before me, until the commencement of my day; And then I do make a record of the things which I have seen with mine own eyes. And I know the record which I make to be a just and a true record. (3 Nephi 5:16–18)

Composition of the Book of Mormon

Mormon received a divine mandate to complete his work for the benefit of future generations (see 3 Nephi 5:14–15 and

Mormon 6:6). Hence, under inspiration he added the small plates of Nephi (W of M 1:7–8). But he felt constrained by God to omit other matters that he wanted to add—such as more of the words of Christ in 3 Nephi (3 Nephi 26:6–12, 18), or the names of the three Nephite disciples who had visited him (3 Nephi 28:25–26), or more information about the Gadianton bands and their oaths (see Hel 2:8; Alma 37:21–32).

How could Mormon best convey his message to his audience? Only by generously quoting and paraphrasing the records he was abridging about Zeniff, Noah, Abinadi, and Alma¹, about the people Anti-Nephi-Lehi, about their young men—the sons of Helaman, about Moroni, and about others, especially the visit of Christ. Also, he singles out personal efforts to serve others; he further points to dissension, rebellion, defection, collusion, lust for power (as Amalickiah), and misguided devotion to the false traditions of the fathers as major causes of war and conflict (Bushman “Lamanites”).

Therefore, in his historical account, Mormon provides a mosaic of people and social circumstances, of events and natural disasters, of cities and armies in conflict. His selection, arrangement, and interpretation of such diverse subjects reinforces his own providential philosophy of history. For instance, as we learn in Mormon 7:4, Mormon has very strong feelings about war (Mackay 8:238–39): it should be avoided; if it is forced, it should only be a defensive effort; God can and will direct defensive actions if sought; death in defending liberty, family, and nation is noble; death for the righteous is no cause for mourning (even when women and children died while being persecuted for religion as in Alma 14:8–13). To Mormon, these were truly laudable and daring deeds (as were those of Lehi and especially Teancum in the later chapters of Alma) done to precipitate a rapid conclusion and to preserve, if possible, lives; people can become hardened in evil and in military action—to the point of rejecting the Spirit.

Frequently Mormon lets his sources state his own sentiments; occasionally he inserts pointed editorial comments.

Richard Bushman has well observed this phenomenon and its result in his book on the beginnings of Mormonism:

By any standard the Book of Mormon is a narrative of unusual complexity. Scores of characters like Ether and Moroni, Jared and the brother of Jared, move through the story. . . . Intricate and shattering events are compressed into a few sentences. Migration, war, and intrigue alternate with prophecy, sermon, and conversion. Mormon, as warrior, historian, and prophet himself, interwove political and military events with the history of salvation.

Besides the intricacy of plot, the narrative perspective is complicated. The first six books are pure source material, written by the original prophets and untouched by later editors. But then with only a slight introduction, Mormon takes up the story himself. In his narrative, derived from the available source materials, he quotes other prophets and sometimes quotes them quoting still others. . . . Mormon moves in and out of the narrative, pointing up a crucial conclusion or addressing readers with a sermon of his own. Almost always two minds are present and sometimes three, all kept account of in the flow of words. (*Joseph Smith* 119)

Sometimes Mormon includes a succinct statement of summary of the cause and effect of the condition described in his narrative. Of the followers of Amalickiah he says:

Now these dissenters, having the same instruction and the same information of the Nephites, yea, having been instructed in the same knowledge of the Lord, nevertheless, it is strange to relate, not long after their dissensions they became more hardened and impenitent, and more wild, wicked and ferocious than the Lamanites—drinking in with the traditions of the Lamanites; giving way to indolence, and all manner of lasciviousness; yea, entirely forgetting the Lord their God. (*Alma* 47:36)

At other times he draws the moral lesson in an openly didactic statement, frequently emphasizing it with “and thus we see.” Of the Amalekites and Amulonites he says:

And thus we can plainly discern, that after a people have been once enlightened by the Spirit of God, and have had great knowledge of things pertaining to righteousness, and then have fallen away into sin and transgression, they become more hardened, and thus their state becomes worse than though they had never known these things. (*Alma* 24:30)

After a fierce battle precipitated by the Lamanites resenting Nephite protection of the people of Ammon, Mormon observes that

many thousands are mourning for the loss of their kindred, because they have reason to fear, according to the promises of the Lord, that they are consigned to a state of endless wo. While many thousands of others truly mourn for the loss of their kindred, yet they rejoice and exult in the hope, and even know, according to the promises of the Lord, that they are raised to dwell at the right hand of God, in a state of never-ending happiness. And thus we see how great the inequality of man is because of sin and transgression, and the power of the devil, which comes by the cunning plans which he hath devised to ensnare the hearts of men. And thus we see the great call of diligence of men to labor in the vineyards of the Lord; and thus we see the great reason of sorrow, and also of rejoicing—sorrow because of death and destruction among men, and joy because of the light of Christ unto life. (Alma 28:11–14)

And Mormon's final statement at the conclusion of the Korihor account is:

And thus we see the end of him who perverteth the ways of the Lord; and thus we see that the devil will not support his children at the last day, but doth speedily drag them down to hell. (Alma 30:60)

Hence, Mormon intertwines his narrative with his philosophy of history, his sense of divine responsibility to his audience, and his method of abridgement. What he values most or what he wishes to illustrate deserves extensive coverage—as Alma₂, Moroni, the sons of Helaman, or the resurrected Christ; other matters can be quickly passed by. But little features indicate a progressive treatment of materials instead of a full synthesis prior to abridging: Mormon quotes extensively or summarizes, and he leaves certain matters as virtually unabsorbed intrusions. For example, the last four chapters of Helaman recount Samuel the Lamanite's teachings and the response of the people, material apparently not originally included in the record Nephi had kept (3 Nephi 23:9–13), as I have noted above. Another example is the historical flashback to Zeniff's resettling in the land of Nephi, followed by Noah,

Abinadi, Alma, and Limhi (Mosiah 8–24), until all the faithful survivors are reunited under Mosiah (Mosiah 25:1–13). Also, the missionary adventures of the sons of Mosiah and their associates in Alma 17–26 are another historical insertion at the point they became known to Alma, who was keeping the records. As editor and historian, Mormon carefully indicates the sources he quotes and paraphrases. In this manner he is able to preserve many important observations and experiences of individuals that reinforce and support his providential perspective on Nephite history.

One salient feature of Mormon's account is to focus on significant leaders, both good and bad. The emphasis, of course, is on the good example. Yet because of his awareness of his future audience and of their own social problems as parallel to his own age, he stresses the negative effect of secret combinations and of lusting for power, wealth, and adulation. His didactic approach to warn his readers of typical cycles or patterns in human behavior—in response to divine or evil forces—directs his historical analysis and summary.

Individuals, righteous and evil, play a large role in the narrative. Nevertheless, the wicked influence of individual apostates and leaders like Noah, Amlici, Nehor, Korihor, and Amalickiah pales in comparison to the social havoc wrought by the Gadianton robbers. So the prophet and historian notes at Mormon 1:18 and 2:8, 28 the persistent presence of the Gadianton bands, answering his comment in Helaman 1–2, when the practice of a secret combination was introduced among the Nephites.⁴ For Mormon observes:

and more of this Gadianton shall be spoken hereafter. . . . And behold, in the end of this book ye shall see that this Gadianton did prove the overthrow, yea, almost the entire destruction of the people of Nephi. Behold I do not mean the end of the book of Helaman, but I

⁴ See also Alma 37:27–32 (about the secret combinations among the Jaredites), Helaman 6:16–32, and 4 Nephi 1:42, 46; also Nibley 378–99. Curiously, simultaneously in the Roman world of the third, fourth and fifth centuries, robber bands were a feature of the crumbling of the Empire, the disintegration of social fabric. For the Jaredites, see Ether 8:13–26.

mean the end of the book of Nephi, from which I have taken all the account which I have written. (Hel 2:12–14)

Again, in Helaman 6, Mormon points to Satan as the direct and immediate instigator of the secret oaths and combinations:

But behold, Satan did stir up the hearts of the more part of the Nephites, insomuch that they did unite with those bands of robbers, and did enter into their covenants and their oaths. . . . Now behold, it is these secret oaths and covenants which Alma commanded his son should not go forth unto the world, lest they should be a means of bringing down the people unto destruction. Now behold, those secret oaths and covenants did not come forth unto Gadianton from the records which were delivered unto Helaman; but behold, they were put into the heart of Gadianton by that same being who did entice our first parents to partake of the forbidden fruit. (vv 21, 25–26)

Thus we comprehend how Mormon had clearly seen from prophecy and from the social ills of his own lifetime the nature and origin of the destructive forces among the Nephites, and he knows that Satan is the ultimate source. This perspective is later echoed by his son Moroni, who laments that “they [secret combinations] have caused the destruction of this people of whom I am now speaking [the Jaredite civilization], and also the destruction of the people of Nephi” (Ether 8:21).

Mormon learned how to evaluate society from experience, from abridging the Nephite records, and from heavenly visitants. So he based his historical judgment on the righteousness of the people, not on manifestations of military, political, economic, or cultural success. We discover this interpretation of history everywhere in Mormon’s writings. His concluding message, recorded in Mormon 7, is poignant and direct. It reflects the maturity of his development as prophet-historian and offers his conclusion to the whole matter: the spiritual and cultural lessons future generations should learn from the disintegration of a once flourishing civilization. These lessons are precisely the recurring major motifs of the lengthy account of Nephite history that today bears Mormon’s name.

Hence, throughout Mormon's abridgement of Nephite history we perceive his unifying editorial view, his philosophy, as expressed concisely in Helaman 12—providential history conveying a sense of how we will ultimately be judged. This perspective pervades Mormon's writings, and it is also clear in passages that he chooses for direct and full quotation. His intellectual fingerprints are on all he has written.

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

9

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

Monte S. Nyman is professor of Ancient Scripture and director of the Book of Mormon area of the Religious Studies Center at Brigham Young University.

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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The Terrifying Book of Helaman

10

Gerald Hansen, Jr.

The book of Helaman is a warning—a frightful warning. It should not be read primarily as a history as it sometimes is. Even though we learn about the ministries of Helaman, Nephi₂, and Samuel the Lamanite, and of the Gadianton robbers, as well as the reaction of the Nephites to all of those in the book of Helaman, to read it primarily as a history is to miss the point (Nephi₂ is the second man named Nephi in the Book of Mormon).

Mormon uses the history of the Nephites to warn us to avoid wickedness that could lead to our destruction. He shows in the book of Helaman that the Nephites condemned themselves to destruction through choosing wickedness and refusing to allow God to prepare them to meet Christ. He shows that when God sent signs, miracles, and prophets, the Nephites rejected them. As they sought the “things of this world and . . . the honors of men” (D&C 121:35), they began to persecute the righteous and reward the wicked, creating in the process a society of crime, intolerance, injustice, immorality, and hypocrisy. As Mormon unfolds this history, he shows how the destruction of the wicked Nephites that occurs in 3 Nephi is just.

We are not supposed to miss this justification. It is part of Mormon’s warning, part of his attempt to prepare us to meet the Lord. To this end, he spends an entire chapter editorializing on the foolishness of humankind’s faith in itself and notes the goodness of God (see Hel 12). He says that God blesses his

Gerald Hansen, Jr., is a professor in the Department of Religion at Ricks College, Rexburg, Idaho.

children in every possible way at the least suggestion of righteousness on their part; but in return, they harden their hearts, forget their great benefactor, and “trample under their feet the Holy One,” all because they “set their hearts upon the vain things of the world” (v 2, 4). Mormon’s language, stern and reproachful, even sarcastic, indicates how serious he feels the situation is when men and women forget their God: if death, terror, famine, and pestilence are the only things that cause people to repent so they can be saved, then that is what they will get (v 3). His strong language is meant to awaken and save.

Mormon’s language, however, is not the only thing that gives his editorial power. Its very location in the book of Helaman dramatically increases the power of its message. The editorial both follows and precedes extraordinary examples of Nephite spiritual blindness. It follows an eleven-chapter description of the Nephites’ self-determined fall to wickedness in spite of the continual preaching of prophets, and precedes four chapters of the same thing—specific warnings and prophecies by Samuel the Lamanite and an account of how the Nephites attempt to rationalize his warnings. If we do not consider Mormon’s editorial within the context of its surrounding chapters, we miss much of his message. Not only does he say that people are “foolish . . . vain . . . evil . . . devilish . . . and quick to do iniquity” (Hel 12:4), he also teaches us that we often bring our own problems upon ourselves, including, on occasion, large scale destructions, by rejecting the countless warnings of God and turning to gross wickedness.

The Nephites had been forewarned for over 500 years. As early as the great vision that Nephi₁ received in the valley of Lemuel in the old world, the Nephites had been warned that there would be great destructions among them some time just before the Savior’s visit to them (see 1 Nephi 12). They also knew from a later prophecy by Nephi that the reason for the destructions would be that they would kill the prophets and the saints (2 Nephi 26:3). They ignored or forgot that warning and many others, and by the time of Nephi₃, the son of Nephi₂ who

was the son of Helaman, the Lord had to destroy the wicked to protect the righteous. He tells the “more righteous” who survived that the cities were destroyed so that, “the blood of the prophets and the saints shall not come any more unto me against them” (3 Nephi 9:5, 7–9, 11).

We do not need to draw the parallels to the second coming of Christ. We know and have known for centuries that there will be great destructions among us when the Savior comes. We also know that the destructions will occur for the same reason: the rejection and killing of the prophets and saints. Moroni warns the wicked of our days that “the time soon cometh that [God] avengeth the blood of the saints upon you, for he will not suffer their cries any longer” (Mormon 8:41); the Doctrine and Covenants prophesies that God will consume the nations “that the cry of the saints, and of the blood of the saints, shall cease to come up into the ears of the Lord” (D&C 87:6–7); and Nephi says that “[God] will preserve the righteous . . . even unto the destruction of their enemies by fire” (1 Nephi 22:17). Obviously, in our case, as in the case of the Nephites, we have had opportunity to know for many years not only that great destructions will occur, but also why. Knowing what we know, is it possible that some in our day who have the truth will dwindle in unbelief, like the Nephites, and become so wicked that they will be destroyed?

A stupid question, yes, but an alarming one just the same, if we study the book of Helaman. As we have seen, Mormon’s point in the book is to show the goodness of God and the foolishness of humankind. As he depicts this foolishness and unmasks the fundamental problems of Nephite society in the book of Helaman, it becomes increasingly easy to see how we are repeating the same mistakes today.

The most frightening aspect of Mormon’s account is the seductive and subtle nature of the temptations that put the Nephites on the path to destruction. The sins that the prophets condemn the most in the book of Helaman, pride and the seeking for wealth, are not the ones that we would first suspect

to be the most dangerous. Satan plays the conman's shell game as well as anyone. He seduces us to neglect critical issues in our lives and soothes our consciences with the careful observance of good but less important things. He tempts us to define righteousness in our own terms rather than God's. As the Savior told the Pharisees, "Ye pay tithes of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith" (Matt 23:23). Like the Pharisees, the Nephites never saw the real issues and were, therefore, easily seduced.

The prophets of the book of Helaman, on the other hand, were not deceived. They understood that the most dangerous sins are pride and the lust for riches. Mormon, for instance, puts these two sins first and sets them apart in his list of sins that he says were responsible for the Nephites' losses in war (Hel 4:12). Nephi chastises the people for the same two sins in his great garden tower speech (7:21). And, of all the sins Samuel the Lamanite could have chosen to chastise the Nephites for as he cried from the walls of Zarahemla, pride and the lust for wealth, are the ones he bears down on (13:17–39). These prophets of the book of Helaman recognize the generative nature of these sins. They recognize that seeking wealth causes or leads to most other sins, while pride allows people to feel justified in their wickedness (see vv 22, 26–28).

The prophets recognize that the sins of the great and spacious building—pride and seeking wealth—are more perilous than the sins implied by the mists of darkness—immorality and drunkenness—because they are not as obvious. Everyone knows that drunkenness and immorality are wrong; having wealth and the manifestations of pride that go with it are, on the other hand, seen as virtuous in most societies. After all, people who work long hours, look nice, and have big homes are generally privileged and well-respected. Seeing the respect they command, we naturally assume that it is good to seek wealth, and it becomes quite easy for us to ignore the scripture's counsel to keep our eyes single to the glory of God (D&C

88:67), preferring instead the philosophies of TV talk shows because they justify us in the lifestyles we are seeking.

In this frame of mind, we reject as “old fashioned” Brigham Young’s counsel:

Our artificial wants, and not our real wants, and the following of senseless customs subject our sisters to an excess of labor. . . . Work less, wear less, eat less, and we shall be a great deal wiser, healthier, and wealthier people than by taking the course we now do. (JD 12:122)

And we would skip over Spencer Kimball’s counsel:

Our success, individually and as a church, will largely be determined by how faithfully we focus on living the gospel in the home. . . . We will move faster if we hurry less. We will make more real progress if we focus on the fundamentals. (83)

We certainly would also be willing to ignore President Ezra Taft Benson’s counsel that mothers, with working husbands, should not leave their families to go make money: “[Mothers], be there at the crossroads whether your children are six or sixteen” (Mothers in Zion 8). And again because of the pressures of society, we would also tend to ignore his counsel that fathers invest heavily in their families with their time and energies:

Mothers play an important role as the heart of the home, but this in no way lessens the equally important role fathers should play, as head of the home, in nurturing, training, and loving their children. (“Fathers in Israel” 50; emphasis added)

Turning to the subtleties of society makes it very easy to forget the Savior’s counsel: “Wherefore seek not the things of this world but seek ye first to build up the kingdom of God, and to establish his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (JST Matt 6:38; see also Matt 6:33).

A careful reading of the book of Helaman helps us see through the subtle deceits of society. It forces us to think through the issue of pursuing wealth and causes us to reconsider where we are as individuals and as a society. It shows how the temptation to seek the pride and wealth of the world can lead to

the wickedness that brings destruction (1 Nephi 11:36). It does so by repetitively stating that the problem is the search for wealth and pride and then by exploring the problems engendered in a society inflicted with such mania. There are three problems, in particular that stand out in Mormon's account and therefore deserve closer examination—crime, pseudo-patriotism, and injustice.

Crime

Mormon seems especially concerned with crime. As he describes in the book of Helaman, crime among the people was epidemic and mostly the product of a secret combination, the Gadianton robbers. This band of criminals was responsible for everything from political assassinations to theft. But if we are to appreciate Mormon's warning in the book of Helaman, we must remember that the Gadianton robbers could flourish only in a society that wanted what they offered. In contrast, he tells us that the Lamanites eradicated the Gadianton robbers from their society by the preaching of the gospel to them (Hel 6:37). Apparently the Lamanites became so righteous that they eliminated any market for the services of the Gadianton robbers. In other words, there would be no drug dealers if no one used drugs, no prostitutes if people were chaste. But the Nephites built up the robbers, being seduced "until they had come to believe in their works and partake of their spoils, and to join with them in their secret murders and combinations" (v 38). The more part of the Nephites began to accept the type of false philosophies, like the respectability of seeking great wealth, which allowed crime to expand. As Professor Hugh Nibley has said concerning this verse,

We must remember that we are dealing here not with a small and peculiar band of professional or congenital criminals, but with the general public gone mad after money—people not really criminal at heart, but unable to resist the appeal of wealth and the things it could buy. (*Approach* 321)

A major danger in assuming that the accumulation of wealth is necessarily virtuous is that soon the end of achieving riches justifies the means of obtaining them. Often, people who are normally good begin to see gaining riches as a justifiable end and become tempted to do uncharitable or shady things, while rationalizing their actions with comments like, “I want to be rich so I can give more money to my church or to charity.” Attitudes like this allow us to ignore the people we have hurt and the seeping corruption we have let into our lives because we convince ourselves that we are doing so much good. No wonder the Savior said to “seek not the things of this world” (JST Matt 6:38). In essence he seems to be saying that we should work hard, keep our eyes single to God’s glory, and let God give us wealth when and if he feels we can handle it. Abraham is the great example of this principle. He refused to accept even the smallest amount of money from a wicked source, the king of Sodom, but received and used wisely the wealth promised to him by God in a blessing given by Melchizedek (Gen 14:22–24; see also JST Gen 14:39–40). There is wisdom in this approach. Time and again the Nephites show that those who “set their hearts upon their riches . . . [who seek] to get gain that they might be lifted up one above another . . . [begin] to dwindle in unbelief, and grow in wickedness and abominations” (Hel 6:17, 34).

The Nephites’ dwindling in unbelief permitted the establishment and growth of the most insidious type of Gadianton robber, the white collar criminal. By 23 BC the entire Nephite government had come under the control of the Gadiantons (Hel 6:39). Again, the reason the white collar criminal is the worst type is that they seduce ordinarily good people into participating in wicked things. For instance, most good people do not have any aspirations to join organizations that are universally considered to be evil. But they can dwindle into believing seemingly proper, yet false, philosophies taught to them by respectable people and naively participate in hurtful practices and attitudes without fully realizing what they are doing. It is

far too easy to charge high rents, to mark up merchandise that is selling, to pay low salaries, to make fraudulent claims in advertising, or to exploit personal relationships or church positions in business dealings. Too often these practices are accompanied by dangerous attitudes such as the belief that poor people live in poverty out of choice and deserve what they get. Such attitudes and practices make us part of the problem just as the Nephites in the book of Helaman were part of theirs. The Nephite's problem with the Gadianton robbers began with a mafia-type criminal—with their secret oaths and covenants—but it ended up with most of their society believing in false principles, which allowed the trampling and smiting and rending and turning of backs upon the poor and the meek and the humble followers of God (Hel 6:39). How else could the Gadianton robbers “obtain the sole management of the government” and fill the judgment seats with their people (6:39; 7:4) if it weren't for the fact that the people at large were blind to what they, themselves, were doing? And how else could the people be blind to criminal and wicked activity by government leaders if it weren't for the fact that what the leaders were doing seemed normal? Few free societies knowingly elect criminals to high office and allow them to govern in wickedness. But the Nephites, blinded by prevalent and popular philosophies, allowed the entire government to be managed by the Gadianton robbers. I believe the greatest evidence of their ignorance and apathy is that they mourned and fasted, apparently deeply saddened, at the death of their chief judge—who was, after all, a Gadianton robber (8:28; 9:10).

Pseudo-Patriotism

The blindness and ignorance of the Nephites caused by the seduction of wealth produced another problem in their society, a pseudo-patriotism that threatened personal liberties. When Nephi began to criticize the status quo, those with status sought to silence him. They did it in the name of what we see some

today call patriotism, which amounts to hype and cheerleading for those that follow and condemnation for anyone that opposes. The normal tactic is to portray ourselves as stalwart, loyal, good guys (even if we are not) and to cast doubt and aspersion on the morals and motives of those with different ideas. The corrupt government officials employed this very tactic when Nephi spoke out against their practices. The dishonest judges made it appear that he was the one who was disloyal, charging him with reviling against the people, the law, and the judges (Hel 8:2, 5). In reality, the whole thing was merely the corrupt judges' way of trying to get rid of, or at least to discredit, a man who was calling them on their wickedness. Mormon says the "judges were angry with [Nephi] because he spoke plainly unto them concerning their secret works of darkness" (v 4).

What they were doing is perhaps best summed up by Professor Hugh Nibley, "You can get away with anything if you just wave the flag" (Zion 54). Shouting down opponents with labels and innuendo, and playing up your own loyalty and patriotism, may be effective in silencing the opposition, but it could be disastrous to republics and democracies, since the genius of free societies is the wisdom that comes from compromise and discussion. We often forget that our own constitution—a document we consider inspired—was hammered out in just this way. Free societies need differing viewpoints. For all the boasting we do about the freedoms that exist in our society, we tend to forget that history shows that we are capable, during a crisis, of intolerance and frenzy as described by historian William E. Leuchtenburg:

In the year 1919, Senator McKellar of Tennessee advocated sending native-born American citizens with radical beliefs to a penal colony in Guam. South Carolina's James F. Byrnes asked for the intervention of the federal government to balk an uprising of Negroes that he declared Reds were planning in the South. Some New York school teachers were dismissed after a campaign to determine "Who's Red and Who's True Blue." General Leonard Wood, the army chief of Staff, noted his approval of a minister's call for the deportation of Bolsheviks "in ships of stone with sails of lead, with the wrath of

God for a breeze and with hell for their first port.” “If I had my way with these ornery wild-eyed Socialists and I.W.W.’s,” shouted the evangelist Billy Sunday, “I would stand them up before a firing squad and save space on our ships.” In Indiana a jury deliberated two minutes before acquitting Frank Petroni, who had shot and killed a man for yelling, “To hell with the United States!” The great Red Scare of 1919 was underway. (66)

When we consider these kinds of fanatic acts done in the name of patriotism, we are shocked into realizing that when we shout down our opponents, whether we do it with labels like liberal or conservative or unpatriotic or atheist or communist, or with imprisonment, as we did with the Sedition Act of 1798, or simply by physical or social intimidation—when we silence divergent voices, we eliminate discussion and inhibit our ability to correct our problems.

Injustice

What should be apparent from discussing the problems of crime and intolerance is a third problem, actually the real problem, in any society that has gone mad over money—injustice. Crime is wrong, particularly white collar crime, as is intolerance, precisely because they create injustice. God hates injustice. The scriptures condemn this evil perhaps more harshly than any other sin. In Isaiah 1:10–17, for example, God tells the Israelites, who are practicing their religious devotions, that he will not hear their prayers because their hands are full of blood: they did not do justly to the downtrodden. In Micah 6:6–9 he again says that thousands of rams used in religious ceremonies will count for nothing unless the offerer is just and merciful. The Nephites in the book of Helaman were guilty of such religious hypocrisy. They had religion but chose to ignore obvious examples of injustice in their society. For instance, rampant crime, of the type Nephi accused the Nephites of doing—murder, plunder, theft, and bearing false witness (Hel 7:21)—is a clear indication that things are dreadfully wrong in a society. Yet the Nephites scarcely paid attention to what their

prophet was saying. They did not seem to care. It did not seem to matter to them that the righteous and presumably the poor could not obtain justice under the law while the guilty who were wealthy went free because of their power and influence (Hel 7:5). It did not seem to bother them that the poor were oppressed through the withholding of food and clothing or that the humble were smitten (4:12). More shameful than these injustices are the persecutions that occurred within the church of God. One would hope that God's church would be free of such atrocities. But it was not. Those who said they were members but did not act as though they were, were lifted up in pride because of their wealth and persecuted the more humble followers of the Lord (3:33).

This persecution of poorer members by those who professed to belong to the church may be one of the best indicators of the spiritual sickness of the Nephites. It may be hard for some to understand how it came about that Church members could persecute other members. A statement by Vance Packard, a modern sociologist, gives us some insight as to how it could occur:

In the study of Elmtown's youth, it was found that religion was remote from the lives of the great majority of them. . . . To most students, Hollingshead concluded, "the church is a community facility like the school, the drug store, the city government, and the bowling alley." And this is in the heart of the Bible Belt. Many of the youngsters attend church functions regularly, but carry their status feelings with them, often in a most un-Christian manner. He said that a socially select gang of girls attending the Sunday night "Fellowship" meetings at the most elite church "deliberately make any girl of whom they do not approve feel so uncomfortable" that she will not attend again. . . .

For the majority of American Christians . . . going to church is the nice thing that proper people do on Sundays. It advertises their respectability, gives them a warm feeling that they are behaving in a way their God-fearing ancestors would approve, and adds (they hope) a few cubits to their social stature by throwing them with a social group with which they wish to be identified. (174)

In other words, when people go to church for status or out of habit, then the teachings of Christ to treat everyone with respect, to have mercy and to do justly, have little or no effect

in the lives of those who profess righteousness. In reality, church-going can be part of the spiritual problem. The intolerant and unjust who have religion have often convinced themselves that God loves them because they do religious things. They are spiritually oblivious, or as God says to the wealthy, lukewarm members of the church in Laodicea, “[thou] knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked” (Rev 3:17). The Nephites in the book of Helaman are a great example of this phenomenon. When Nephi severely chastised them, they marveled. In spite of their gross wickedness, they were shocked that he thought they were wicked (Hel 7:14–15).

This attitude of the people is perhaps the most frightening aspect of this terrifying book of Helaman. We read of a people who were so caught up in the vain things of the world that they were blind and mostly unaffected by Nephi’s great call to repentance. It was not that the people did not have religion; it was that their religion was one of the facades of their respectable lifestyle. The deceit did not fool the prophets; they warned them of their ways. Nephi called down a great famine, while Samuel prophesied great signs and could not be killed. Both preached plainly with the power of God and with courage. Both were mostly rejected because the people hardened their hearts, preferring to believe instead the philosophies and excuses of men (see Hel 16:15–23). The outcome of this blindness is well known to readers of the Book of Mormon. The Nephites continued in the same pattern of wickedness in spite of receiving great signs and having momentary periods of righteousness until all but the more righteous were destroyed at the Savior’s coming (3 Nephi 9:12–13).

All this Mormon gives us in an attempt to warn us that seeking wealth is a seductive mistress. She does not mind if we spend some time in religious devotion. As far as she is concerned we can choose to worship “our golden calves” in the name of Jehovah (see Ex 32:5–6), if by so doing we convince ourselves we are right with God.

Just before recounting the terrible destructions in 3 Nephi, Mormon describes the Nephites as being “lifted up unto pride and boastings because of their exceedingly great riches, . . . even unto persecutions” . . . (3 Nephi 6:10), as being “distinguished by ranks, according to their riches and their chances for learning” (v 12). Satan tempted them “to seek for power, and authority, and riches, and the vain things of the world” (v 15), and “they did not sin ignorantly, for they knew the will of God concerning them, for it had been taught unto them” (v 18). Perhaps there is no greater commentary on the foolishness of the Nephites than what is detailed in these verses. The same sins decried by the prophets in the book of Helaman were later on widespread among the Nephites in spite of the many opportunities God gave them to repent. God was, therefore, justified in destroying the wicked. And fortunately for us, the pattern of seduction, wickedness, and destruction is recorded for all to read.

The poignancy with which Mormon writes his grim account reveals his compassion for us. He means to move us to action. The book of Helaman, containing Mormon’s centralizing editorial on the foolishness of humankind’s vanity, is his warning to us of the last days to repent, to come to Christ, to seek God’s kingdom so that we can avoid the destruction that came upon the Nephites. The message of the book of Helaman is both terrifying and reassuring at the same time—terrifying because we see patterns of wickedness that are being repeated in our day, and reassuring because it testifies and manifests that for “whosoever will may lay hold upon the word of God, . . . [it] shall divide asunder all the snares and the wiles of the devil, and lead the [men and women] of Christ in a strait and narrow course . . . and land their souls, at the right hand of God in the kingdom of heaven” (Hel 3:29–30).

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Prophets and Perplexity: The Book of Helaman as a Case Study

11

R. Wayne Shute and Wayne E. Brickey

Through their words, prophets stimulate perplexity (the state of being in doubt, confusion or bewilderment), either inadvertently (by the nature of their message) or by design. This perplexity in turn causes people to search for understanding and personal meaning—the faithful inquire of God and find truth, while the critics only find fault. There are no better illustrations of how prophets stimulate perplexity than in the book of Helaman generally and through the utterances of Nephi and Samuel particularly.

We begin by asserting that perplexity is an essential precursor to inquiry and, therefore, learning. We turn first to J. T. Dillon's analysis of what he calls "moments of inquiry." The inquiry cycle begins, he says, with our first encounter with some indecipherable perception that enters our view. The cycle advances through various phases until our perplexity has been resolved by making sense of that initial perception. As we consider Dillon's "moments," please note that genuine personal learning requires personal inquiry, and that sincere inquiry simply can't be launched without a beginning condition of

R. Wayne Shute is a professor in the Department of Educational Leadership at Brigham Young University.

Wayne E. Brickey is an instructor at the Utah Valley Community College Institute of Religion in Orem, Utah.

perplexity. Dillon's "moments" (which can take mere nano-seconds or can stretch into decades) go something like this:

1. A percept enters our mind, but does not fit coherently with the pattern or picture of things we have in our mind.
2. A sense of healthy perplexity emerges, a bafflement that admits ignorance.
3. Driven by perplexity, we begin a search for the question that fits our ignorance.
4. On finding the question which truly expresses our specific perplexity, we frame or pose it accurately, either to ourselves or to others.
5. Then begins the search for the answer which truly fits our question.
6. The answer now is joined with the question—the two fuse into knowledge.
7. The conjunction of question and answer now constitutes a new percept. Potentially, the process of inquiry driven by perplexity begins all over again (18–23).

So, these "moments" are simply the proceedings by which the mind moves from a state of equilibrium to a state of perplexity and then through inquiry to a resumed but elevated equilibrium—a finer and more realistic grasp of things. Dillon's dissection of inquiry may be self-evident, but there are important implications.

One implication is that personal learning is not a mere gathering of information, for a piece of information that does not resolve a bewilderment isn't yet of value—it doesn't fit into any puzzle we were trying to piece together. An "answer" not looked for—by that part of us that seeks to find meaning—*isn't* an answer at all.

A second insight from Dillon's model is that meaningful inquiry requires perplexity; the phases of inquiry carry from one moment to the next in a critical chain, as natural events in the mind, and perplexity is the vital beginning. Without it, inquiry cannot occur.

Thirdly, the moments don't have to progress through a complete cycle. The cycle can be aborted by an inadequate love of truth or by a lack of integrity.

So, healthy perplexity kindles inquiry in people and often jars them out of grogginess into seeing meaning and even making decisions. It is our purpose here to examine the way in which prophets use perplexity to prompt personal inquiry on the part of God's children.

Jesus and His Prophets Stimulate Perplexity

If we look for this pattern in the ministry of Jesus, we are not disappointed. During his mortal sojourn and most vividly during the last stage of his ministry, Jesus puzzles and awakens his otherwise equivocating "admirers"; he backs them into cognitive corners and gives them a mental need to sort things out and take a stand.

One case is his prophecy concerning the destruction of the temple. This foretold a strange and incoherent future as noted in Matthew 24:2: "See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down." They must now, with questions, answers, and searching minds, sort out that future until it makes sense.

Or, there were the Herodians who, at first only pretending to be inquirers, asked the question about paying tribute to Caesar. Jesus directs their attention to the money itself: "Whose is this image and superscription?" And then, "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's." How did Jesus' response affect their minds? "They marvelled" (Matt 22:16-22). They were filled with astonishment and wonder; their perplexity equipped them to become real inquirers if their integrity would only permit.

We remind you of this provocative statement in Matthew 20:27-28: "Whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto,

but to minister,” added to which is the ponderous but puzzling assurance, “and to give his life a ransom for many.”

There is also the parable of the servant who lived prior to the Lord’s coming. Guilty of being unwatchful and of not feeding the members of the Lord’s household with their needed meat, the servant is classed as a hypocrite, to be cut asunder (Matt 24:42–51). Our astonishment at this harsh and startling penalty begs us inquire into the real nature of our stewardship from the Lord of the household. The penalty only makes sense when the stewardship does.

Other examples of perplexity from Jesus’ ministry no doubt come to your mind. They are everywhere. In each case, Jesus creates a healthy perplexity which gets us off neutral ground, whereupon we stand to either gain or lose our soul. The need to inquire carries with it both a grave jeopardy and a glorious opportunity. In either event, inquiry is necessary. Jesus and his prophets are determined that we take the playing field, if you will, and not remain passive spectators in the grandstand.

Another illustration of how God favors perplexity in his children is the story surrounding the first vision of Joseph Smith. When Joseph was just a lad, his family was proselyted by a number of religious faiths which led Joseph to serious reflection and “great uneasiness.” He was greatly confused and bewildered. His feelings were “deep” and “poignant,” his mind was “greatly excited” because of the “cry and the tumult” which arose from the religious scene about him (JS-H 1:8–9).

While his mind labored under these “extreme difficulties” (JS-H 1:11), perplexity drove him deep into the cycle of inquiry; his questions grew more clear and Joseph grew more intent. “What is to be done?” he often asked himself. “Who of all these parties are right; or, are they all wrong together?” and finally, “If any one of them be right, which is it, and how shall I know it?” (v 10).

It was in this condition of mind—a condition of highly defined perplexity resulting in focused, white-hot, personal inquiry—that this invitation leaped from the writings of James:

“If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him” (James 1:5). We see here the impact that a divine invitation can have on the mind which has deeply committed itself to resolving perplexity. Of that experience, Joseph wrote:

Never did any passage of scripture come with more power to the heart of man than this did at this time to mine. It seemed to enter with great force into every feeling of my heart. I reflected on it again and again, knowing that if any person needed wisdom from God, I did; for how to act I did not know, and unless I could get more wisdom than I then had, I would never know. (JS-H 1:12)

Joseph’s persistence as an inquirer is especially evident in the grove, kneeling before the Father and Son, for even there he “no sooner [gets possession of himself], so as to be able to speak” (JS-H 1:18), than, in accordance with his “determination to ‘ask of God’” (v 13), he asks the question which had driven him there. The answer resolved perplexity, but it generated yet more perplexities. Thus, there were to be many more cycles of inquiry by this probing prophet (D&C 6:14), resulting in a grand coherent picture—a plan of salvation—revealed line upon line, inquiry after inquiry, each inquiry having its own pathos of “moments” and each beginning with that disequilibrium, that bewilderment, which we have been calling perplexity.

As students and disciples of that plan and its author, we, like Joseph, have things to sort out. We may say, with Moses, “I will not cease to call upon God, I have other things to inquire of him” (Moses 1:18). We too, as James said it, “lack wisdom.” We cannot borrow someone else’s cycle, though we may sometimes benefit therefrom. We will need our own focused, important questions, stemming from personal perplexity, without which answers will not really be answers at all. All this is so if we really care and if we are really honest. And the prophets can be depended upon to prime us by surprising our minds with messages from the mind of God.

President Ezra Taft Benson prods the Church and the world not only with testimony and doctrine, but also with perplexing

issues such as working mothers, liberal politics, pride, unchastity, consumer debt. Thoughtful Latter-day Saints have raised many prayers to heaven seeking answers to the perplexity generated by President Benson. To puzzles and questions which prepare the mind for meaning, a loving Heavenly Father can give answers—such as assurances, understanding, perspective, and hope—to his inquiring children.

The Book of Helaman: A Study in Perplexity

In the book of Helaman, we find prophets perplexing ancient peoples, and giving us plenty to be puzzled about if we are willing. Through miraculous events and utterances, Nephi and Samuel the Lamanite certainly baffled the people they spoke to and thereby pressed them to wonder about the things of God, to probe after the mind of God, or to make inquiry at the feet of prophets who already knew that divine mind. Depending on their desire to know the truth, the people were given answers to their inquiries. If they inquired honestly, they learned the truth; if the perplexity deteriorated into anger or arrogance, they gained no cognition and suffered the consequences.

The Case of Nephi, Son of Helaman

The world of Nephi, son of Helaman, was one of evil, contention, intrigue, war, and murder on the one hand. But on the other hand, it was also one of splendid elements in which the humble followers of Christ enjoyed peace and joy; the Church had, at times, a vast saving influence upon society; there was even a time of widespread repentance; there were wonderful prophetic utterances; there were times of stunning prosperity.

But in sum, the Nephite world of that period was decidedly evil. It was a world, as ours is, “filled . . . with confusion,” to use the words of D&C 123:7. Nothing went well, nothing could

go well, under this “iron yoke,” the very “fettters of hell” (D&C 123:8) created by people’s determined but false view of things.

Nephi and his brother Lehi finally became “weary” of the iniquity (Hel 5:4), for, as verse 3 tells us, it came to the point where the people “could not be governed by the law nor justice, save it were to their destruction.” Seeing only one hope, Nephi and Lehi discontinued all attempts at political solutions in order “to preach the word of God all the remainder of [their] days” (v 4). This was just the right approach, for the evil of their time was driven by a smug but grossly mistaken view of things.

Nephi and Lehi conducted their ministry in various lands, even among the “dissenters,” a word that denotes people who see things (or endeavor to see things) differently. So powerful were their words that the dissenters were often “confounded,” a word that suggests perplexed or puzzled (Hel 5:14–17). The minds of many others were affected similarly. For example, the Lamanites were struck with great “astonishment,” a word that means sudden wonder, or amazement. Eight thousand of these astonished Lamanites, in the course of resolving their perplexity, were converted, being convinced that their former views had been all wrong (v 19). In other words, the general effect of the early ministry of Nephi and Lehi was to disturb the picture which the hearer held in mind and to improve that picture if only the hearer were honest and interested in truth.

Later, this dramatic instance took place in a Lamanite prison in the land of Nephi.

And it came to pass that Nephi and Lehi were encircled about as if by fire, even insomuch that they durst not lay their hands upon them for fear lest they should be burned. Nevertheless, Nephi and Lehi were not burned; and they were as standing in the midst of fire and were not burned. (Hel 5:23)

The Lamanites could not lay their hands on Nephi and Lehi and “stood as if they were struck dumb with amazement” (v 25). Nephi and Lehi said, “Fear not, for behold, it is God that has shown unto you this marvelous thing, in the which is shown unto you that ye cannot lay your hands on us to slay us” (v 26).

The earth shook as did the walls of the prison. A great cloud appeared and overshadowed the people and an “awful solemn fear came upon them” (Hel 5:28). And, if these events were not perplexing enough, a voice spoke from heaven, calling on the people three times to repent and not destroy Nephi and Lehi.

Finally, one among them named Aminadab saw the shining faces of Nephi and Lehi through the cloud of darkness. The onlookers, now fully engaged but entirely baffled, asked Aminadab, “What shall we do, that this cloud of darkness may be removed from overshadowing us?” (Hel 5:40). We see again the predictable cycle of meeting with an astounding disruption of one’s picture of reality and in honest perplexity asking and searching. Of course, the question they ask here does not have the power to clear things up much: “How can we get rid of this darkness?” But it was a question. To Aminadab’s answer, which only repeated what Nephi and Lehi and a heavenly voice had already declared, the Lamanites were all ears. Their wonder was now sincere and open. Aminadab said: “You must repent, and cry unto the voice, even until ye shall have faith in Christ” (v 41). They were now seeking to resolve something more than physical darkness, even more than quaking earth and shaking walls. They now understood that darkness of mind and precarious, shaky lives were at the root of their trauma. Joining their honest confusion with trust in Christ and with heart-broken repentance, they cried unto the Lord. Immediately two kinds of light were introduced to them. A new kind of stability began to surround them (vv 42–44).

We speculate that their freshly bewildered minds were entirely childlike at the hands of the angels who now came down and ministered unto them (Hel 5:48). The inquiry cycle later spread to “the more part” of their countrymen who, hearing of these and other astonishing events, also inquired and “were convinced” (v 50). With new hearts and changed lives, they laid down not only weapons, but old ways of looking at things (v 51).

However, Nephi's greater challenges lay yet ahead, for the remaining population of Nephites was hardened, "impenitent and grossly wicked" (Hel 6:2). Satan had gotten "great hold upon the hearts of the Nephites" (v 31). This hardness demanded that Nephi be at his prophetic, perplexing best. Surprising insights, along with abrupt, incisive accusations introduced mental alarm to the otherwise impenetrable minds of his audiences.

You will recall the chain of perplexing events that developed out of Nephi's prayer upon his tower:

Event 1: Witnessed by astonished passers-by, Nephi prayed in sorrow over the wickedness of his people. "The people came together in multitudes that they might know the cause of so great mourning for the wickedness of the people" (Hel 7:11).

Event 2: Following his prayer, Nephi spoke to the throng in startling accusations, only a few of which were these:

How could you have given way to the enticing of him who is seeking to hurl away your souls down to everlasting misery and endless wo? . . .

It is because you have hardened your hearts; yea, ye will not hearken unto the voice of the good shepherd; yea, ye have provoked him to anger against you. . . .

Yea, wo be unto you because of that great abomination which has come among you; and ye have united yourselves unto it, yea, to that secret band which was established by Gadianton! . . .

Yea, wo be unto you because of your wickedness and abominations!

And except ye repent ye shall perish; yea, even your lands shall be taken from you, and ye shall be destroyed from off the face of the earth. (Hel 7:16, 18, 25, 27-28)

Event 3: The always dependable Gadianton judges sought to stir up anger in the crowd toward Nephi. Interestingly, many in the group were too honestly pricked in their hearts for such cheap stuff, and said, "Let this man alone, for he is a good man, and those things which he saith will surely come to pass except we repent" (Hel 8:7). The attempt to destroy Nephi was thus countered (v 10). Just as important, a false picture of things,

always trusted before, was beginning to break down in the more honest minds.

Event 4: Nephi's address culminated in a prophetic statement about the murder of their chief judge, an episode even then in progress (Hel 8:27). Consider how utterly bewildering this must have been to the people, for not only was the subject abruptly changed from repentance to murder (though not a very great change after one thinks about it), but grisly news of the normally sensational sort was being sent by heavenly channels through a solemn prophet, and all this just minutes before the fact.

Event 5: Attempts to pin the blame on Nephi were answered by even more remarkable evidences of Nephi's credibility, as he predicted the very manner of the murderer's shocked and trembling confession (Hel 9:26–31).

Most of Nephi's perplexed investigators, even with solid reasons to admit his testimony, even with every need to reexamine their false traditions, apparently walked away in a dishonest, self-blinding huff (Hel 10:1). A few—such as the five who came to see the truth even while being punished in prison for their honesty of heart (9:39)—resolved the perplexity Nephi cast up for them by inquiring after righteousness and, as a result, we must suppose that they became new creatures through baptism.

The Case of Samuel, the Lamanite Prophet

Few prophets have been called upon to be more baffling than Samuel the Lamanite. His abrupt appearance and departure but suggest the mysterious, arresting content of his teachings and prophecies. In 6 BC, the prosperous and militarily strong Nephites were not able to grasp Samuel's descriptions of impending doom. His teachings didn't make sense to them because of their misunderstanding of, or their ignorance of, or their disinterest in simple moral principles and doctrines. Of course, the people would understand his accusations of wickedness. They might even see the justice in a punishment of some kind.

But the linking of unrighteousness with eminent doom, or even with tottering solvency, was perplexing, shocking, nonsensical. Consider these examples from Helaman chapter 13.

Verse 5: Samuel says “the sword of justice hangeth over this people.”

Verse 6: He describes their fate as “heavy destruction,” warning that “nothing can save this people save it be repentance and faith on the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Verse 10: The term is “utter destruction” which “shall surely come except ye repent.”

Verses 13–14: Samuel says that only the presence of the righteous has preserved their great city from destruction by fire from heaven, so that driving the righteous out of their midst would make them “ripe for destruction.”

Verses 18–21: Samuel describes an especially perplexing curse upon their riches, which, because of an insane greed, would become illusive, “slippery” (v 31), and unretainable even if hidden up in the earth.

Verses 33–37: He predicts the future script which will eventually be their bitter cry of regret. Though they cannot feature it yet, these self-assured people will not many years hence glimpse the big picture too late. “Behold, we are surrounded by demons,” they will say.

Yea, we are encircled about by the angels of him who hath sought to destroy our souls. Behold, our iniquities are great. O Lord, canst thou not turn away thine anger from us? And this shall be your language in those days. (Helaman 13:37)

Of course, the ministry of Samuel was jarring in other ways too. Imagine the people shaking their incredulous heads at predictions of a night without darkness, a new star with many accompanying “signs and wonders in heaven,” a day without light, and topographical trauma beyond anything in the memory of humankind (Hel 14:3–6, 20–24, 27). And how could these stylish folks have reacted to what we read in Helaman 14:7? “And it shall come to pass that ye shall all be amazed, and wonder, insomuch that ye shall fall to the earth.” Even the

sophisticated—especially the self-sophisticated—lose their composure when an abrupt, incompatible, unexpected, unreasonable reality bursts upon them. How much better that they should permit honest wonder, inquiry and rethinking now than that they should have to fall to the ground in unhappy perplexity when it is everlastingly too late.

But the most striking thread running through the perplexing ministry of Samuel is the constant reminder of a Redeemer. Those cosmic signs just summarized were, after all, aimed at authenticating the testimony of Jesus in one way or another. Not only must the Nephite minds be jarred into an openness regarding the miraculous birth, the redemptive death, and the victorious resurrection of Christ, but there is more.

For one thing there is the startling concept of a superior being “who surely shall come into the world, and shall suffer many things and shall be slain for his people” (Hel 13:6). Though people often conclude with natural minds that there is a God, the idea of a Redeemer, especially a suffering and slain Redeemer, requires an unearthly perspective, an outright revelation. It is a perplexing idea that takes some getting used to, though once accommodated lends new power and grasp to the mind.

Perhaps the *coup de grace* is the theme of our faith in this Christ, this Messiah-friend (see Hel 13:6; 14:12–13; 15:7). Trusting him, making faith in him the first principle of our lives, is something we just wouldn’t have thought of without the intrusion of prophetic testimonies like that of Samuel. To this add the prospect that “faith and repentance bringeth a change of heart” (15:7). Our hearts may be changed from something rather too down-to-earth to something more fit for the presence of our Lord. Who would have thought that we could, by a mighty change, become His eternal companions? And yet what soul cannot see this—and would not seek for it—after honest inquiry?

We have all noticed that prophets are types of Christ. In the words of Alma 13:2, the ministers of God “were ordained after

the order of his Son, in a manner that thereby the people might know in what manner to look forward to his Son for redemption." Neither Samuel nor Nephi are exceptions to this pattern of typology. The characteristics most perplexing in these prophets are the very items which reveal anticipatory hints about the Holy One himself: Nephi's unnerving power over the elements and climate, his incisive foreknowledge of human affairs; Samuel's mysterious advent and disappearance, his immunity to hostile arrows; the teachings, testimonies, and prophecies of both of these messengers. These men of perplexity invite our search after their even more perplexing Lord.

Implications for Us

The book of Helaman describes how perplexing ministries affected ancient people, but the book is aimed primarily at modern readers. The greater influence of Nephi and Samuel will increasingly be their influence upon us. That is, what is now important is not the impact of these prophets on ancient people, but the impact that the account has on us. A saving perplexity awaits the honest and searching mind encountering those ancient prophetic labors. Will we give it quarter? And will we give quarter to other perplexity, and hence, inquiry, that await us in other holy books as well? Again the determination of Moses comes to mind: "I will not cease to call upon God, [for] I have other things to inquire of him" (Moses 1:18).

Mind-enlarging, soul-saving inquiry is fostered by perplexity, just as it is hampered by self-sufficient, mindless disinterest. The mists of darkness—passive, misguided traditions of mind—are best countered by the iron rod, but only if that rod is held actively, only if the word of God is considered closely.

We refer again to the prophets, especially the living prophets who live in our world and yet belong to another. Prophets naturally perplex us because they speak from a perspective transcending the natural mind. Though their

wisdom isn't mortal, without them we could never make sense of mortality. To borrow from Isaiah, "[Our] thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways [our] ways, saith the [prophets]" (Isa 55:8).

So, when prophets speak, we are bound to have a great deal of perplexity, especially if our view of things is still under construction. But if we are disposed toward eternal things, what prophets say will be a *sweet* perplexity, a refreshment to the hungry mind, a stimulant to inquiry. However, if we are not so disposed, if we do not delight in the truth of all things, if eternal verity is not our aim, the prophetic message will be not only bewildering, but distasteful to us.

The invitation stands ever open to us:

Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. (Matt 7:7-8)

And we remember this cordial promise: "Therefore, go ye unto your homes, and ponder upon the things which I have said, and ask of the Father, in my name, that ye may understand" (3 Nephi 17:3). Or,

If thou shalt ask, thou shalt receive revelation upon revelation, knowledge upon knowledge, that thou mayest know the mysteries and peaceable things—that which bringeth joy, that which bringeth life eternal. (D&C 42:61)

We don't suggest that prophets go around intentionally trying to perplex people per se; we suppose that this is largely inadvertent. But planned or not, perplexity can prompt sacred investigations. Confusion and bewilderment can lead to clarity and certainty if we, ourselves, will inquire of God.

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Days of Wickedness and Vengeance: Analysis of 3 Nephi 6 and 7

12

Chauncey C. Riddle

In the Doctrine and Covenants the Lord comments upon the conditions of the world in these last days and his reaction to those conditions as follows:

And it shall come to pass, because of the wickedness of the world, that I will take vengeance upon the wicked, for they will not repent; for the cup of mine indignation is full; for behold, my blood will not cleanse them if they hear me not. (D&C 29:17)

We learn from this passage that there are times when the patience of the Lord comes to an end. Though he often endures the typical wickedness of the world with great longsuffering, there are times when he will not so endure. These times are marked by three factors: (1) human wickedness is great; (2) the Gospel of Jesus Christ has been preached to the wicked persons and they deliberately reject it; (3) the Lord invokes a temporal punishment upon these wicked people which destroys them off the face of the earth.

The Lord also specifically designates two time periods as “days of wickedness and vengeance” (Moses 7:46, 60). One such designated time is the meridian of time, as we see in the response to Enoch’s plea to know when the Savior will perform the Atonement:

And it came to pass that Enoch looked; and from Noah, he beheld all the families of the earth; and he cried unto the Lord, saying: When

shall the day of the Lord come? When shall the blood of the Righteous be shed, that all they that mourn may be sanctified and have eternal life? And the Lord said: It shall be in the meridian of time, in the days of wickedness and vengeance. And behold, Enoch saw the day of the coming of the Son of Man, even in the flesh; and his soul rejoiced, saying: The Righteous is lifted up, and the Lamb is slain from the foundation of the world; and through faith I am in the bosom of the Father, and behold, Zion is with me. (Moses 7:45-47)

Wickedness of those to whom the Gospel had been preached characterized the meridian of time both at Jerusalem and in the new world, and in both cases was followed by the temporal vengeance of God.

The other days of wickedness and vengeance specifically denominated by the Lord are the latter days:

And Enoch beheld the Son of Man ascend up unto the Father; and he called unto the Lord, saying: Wilt thou not come again upon the earth? Forasmuch as thou art God, and I know thee, and thou has sworn unto me, and commanded me that I should ask in the name of thine Only Begotten; thou hast made me, and given unto me a right to thy throne, and not of myself, but through thine own grace; wherefore, I ask thee if thou wilt not come again on the earth. And the Lord said unto Enoch: As I live, even so will I come in the last days, in the days of wickedness and vengeance, to fulfil the oath which I have made unto you concerning the children of Noah; and the day shall come that the earth shall rest, but before that day the heavens shall be darkened, and a veil of darkness shall cover the earth; and heavens shall shake, and also the earth; and great tribulations shall be upon the children of men, but my people will I preserve. (Moses 7:59-61)

With these two times as “days of wickedness and vengeance” in mind, let us now turn to a close inspection of 3 Nephi 6 and 7.

Analysis of 3 Nephi 6 and 7

The Nephite “days of wickedness and vengeance” came at the end of a prolonged war with the Gadianton robbers. To defeat their enemies the Nephites had gathered into one city,

taking all their possessions and their flocks and herds and their stores of provisions. This forced the Gadianton robbers to attack the gathered forces of the Nephites since the robbers could not exist without being parasitic on someone who would work hard to produce food and other goods (3 Nephi 3–6). The Gadianton robbers attacked the main stronghold of the Nephites and were defeated. The crucial factor in this victory was the hand of God:

And it came to pass that the armies of the Nephites, when they saw the appearance of the army of Giddianhi, had all fallen to the earth, and did lift their cries to the Lord their God, that he would spare them and deliver them out of the hands of their enemies. And it came to pass that when the armies of Giddianhi saw this they began to shout with a loud voice, because of their joy, for they had supposed that the Nephites had fallen with fear because of the terror of their armies. But in this thing they were disappointed, for the Nephites did not fear them; but they did fear their God and did supplicate him for protection; therefore, when the armies of Giddianhi did rush upon them they were prepared to meet them; yea, in the strength of the Lord they did receive them. (3 Nephi 4:8–10)

After the victory, the Nephites recognized the source of their strength:

And it came to pass that they did break forth, all as one, in singing, and praising their God for the great thing which he had done for them, in preserving them from falling into the hands of their enemies. Yea, they did cry: Hosanna to the Most High God. And they did cry: Blessed be the name of the Lord God Almighty, the Most High God. And their hearts were swollen with joy, unto the gushing out of many tears, because of the great goodness of God in delivering them out of the hands of their enemies; and they knew it was because of their repentance and their humility that they had been delivered from an everlasting destruction. (3 Nephi 4:31–33)

That recognition on the part of the Nephites is important because it is plain that they knew what they were doing and what God had done. The record further reports:

And now behold, there was not a living soul among all the people of the Nephites who did doubt in the least the words of all the holy prophets who had spoken; for they knew that it must needs be that they must be fulfilled. And they knew that it must be expedient that Christ had come, because of the many signs which had been given,

according to the words of the prophets; and because of the things which had come to pass already they knew that it must needs be that all things should come to pass according to that which had been spoken. Therefore they did forsake all their sins, and their abominations, and their whoredoms, and did serve God with all diligence day and night. (3 Nephi 5:1-3)

The record continues to note the blessings of God upon the Nephites:

And they began again to prosper and to wax great; and the twenty and sixth and seventh years passed away, and there was great order in the land; and they had formed their laws according to equity and justice. And now there was nothing in all the land to hinder the people from prospering continually, except they should fall into transgression. (3 Nephi 6:4-5)

Unfortunately, they did fall into transgression, notwithstanding the great deliverance and blessings which the Lord had poured out upon them in the very recent past:

But it came to pass in the twenty and ninth year there began to be some disputings among the people; and some were lifted up unto pride and boastings because of their exceeding great riches, yea, even unto great persecutions;

For there were many merchants in the land, and also many lawyers, and many officers.

And the people began to be distinguished by ranks, according to their riches and their chances for learning; yea, some were ignorant because of their poverty, and others did receive great learning because of their riches.

Some were lifted up in pride, and others were exceedingly humble; some did return railing for railing, while others would receive railing and persecution and all manner of afflictions, and would not turn and revile again, but were humble and penitent before God.

And thus there became a great inequality in all the land, insomuch that the church began to be broken up; yea, insomuch that in the thirtieth year the church was broken up in all the land save it were among a few of the Lamanites who were converted unto the true faith; and they would not depart from it, for they were firm, and steadfast, and immovable, willing with all diligence to keep the commandments of the Lord. (3 Nephi 6:10-14)

We note that the beginning of the trouble among the Nephites was disputation; they ceased to see eye to eye because

some became lifted up in pride and arrogated to themselves a self-rightness that was a rejection of the ways of the Lord. Rejecting the Lord is the beginning of pride; pride is enmity towards God. Having pride leads to boasting and glorying in the greatness of some persons, in their riches, in their stations in society, and in their learning. Boasting and pride lead to putting many others down and elevating the few, which is the basis of persecution.

Mormon notes that the people began to be distinguished by ranks according to their riches and their chances for learning. When the Nephites were righteous, even the kings labored with their own hands to provide for the temporal support of their own households so as not to bring unnecessary burdens upon the people and to be equal with those over whom they reigned. (Mosiah 2:14; 6:7) When the priests and teachers of the Church were righteous they labored with their own hands for their own support and taught for nothing; teacher and hearers would leave their labors, savor the word of God together, and return to their labors rejoicing:

And there was a strict command throughout all the churches that there should be no persecutions among them, that there should be an equality among all men; that they should let no pride nor haughtiness disturb their peace; that every man should esteem his neighbor as himself, laboring with their own hands for their support. Yea, and all their priests and teachers should labor with their own hands for their support, in all cases save it were in sickness, or in much want; and doing these things, they did abound in the grace of God. (Mosiah 27:3-5)

In Alma we read:

And when the priests left their labor to impart the word of God unto the people, the people also left their labors to hear the word of God. And when the priest had imparted unto them the word of God they all returned again diligently unto their labors; and the priest, not esteeming himself above his hearers, for the preacher was no better than the hearer, neither was the teacher any better than the learner; and thus they were all equal, and they did all labor, every man according to his strength. And they did impart of their substance, every man according to that which he had, to the poor, and the needy,

and the sick, and the afflicted; and they did not wear costly apparel, yet they were neat and comely. (Alma 1:26–27)

We observe in Nephite history the typical pattern in the societies of “natural men.” Society is stable and prosperous when there is a religious piety and humility among a people. But when pride enters, people reject God and morality and begin to fashion their own designs to foster their personal interests. Those who are proud forget that every person is a beggar before God, dependent upon him for life, breath, and prosperity. They begin to think that their good fortune in being richer or more learned or more refined than other people is due to their intelligence, or their hard work, or their superior genes. They begin to say of the poor, in the words of King Benjamin: “The man has brought upon himself his misery; therefore I will stay my hand, and will not give unto him of my food, nor impart unto him of my substance that he may not suffer, for his punishments are just” (Mosiah 4:17).

King Benjamin then comments upon this foolish thinking: “But I say unto you, O man, whosoever doeth this the same hath great cause to repent; and except he repenteth of that which he hath done he perisheth forever, and hath no interest in the kingdom of God” (Mosiah 4:18). No interest in the kingdom of God? Surely, some will say, if a people are moral and upright and attend church faithfully, God will find a celestial abode for them. But King Benjamin makes it clear that taking care of the poor, even making ourselves equal with them is a necessity and not a nicety for discipleship unto Christ:

For behold, are we not all beggars? Do we not all depend upon the same Being, even God, for all the substance which we have, for both food and raiment, and for gold, and for silver, and for all the riches which we have of every kind?

And behold, even at this time, ye have been calling on his name and begging for a remission of your sins. And has he suffered that ye have begged in vain? Nay; he has poured out his spirit upon you, and has caused that your hearts should be filled with joy, and has caused that your mouths should be stopped that ye could not find utterance, so exceedingly great was your joy.

And now, if God, who has created you, on whom you are dependent for your lives and for all that ye have and are, doth grant unto you whatsoever ye ask that is right, in faith, believing that ye shall receive, O then, how ye ought to impart of the substance that ye have one to another.

And if ye judge the man who putteth up his petition to you for your substance that he perish not, and condemn him, how much more just will be your condemnation for withholding your substance, which doth not belong to you but to God, to whom also your life belongeth; and yet ye put up no petition, nor repent of the thing which thou hast done.

I say unto you, wo be unto that man, for his substance shall perish with him; and now, I say these things unto those who are rich as pertaining to the things of this world. . . .

And now, for the sake of these things which I have spoken unto you—that is, for the sake of retaining a remission of your sins from day to day, that ye may walk guiltless before God—I would that ye should impart of your substance to the poor, every man according to that which he hath, such as feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and administering to their relief, both spiritually and temporally, according to their wants. (Mosiah 4:19–23, 26)

Now it is clear that the Book of Mormon peoples, the Nephites in particular, had a very clear understanding of this necessity to impart to the poor and to be humble before God. The generation that we have been examining had been rescued from an everlasting destruction only four years before they again began to wallow in the mire of sin and selfishness, caring neither about their less fortunate neighbors nor about the eternal welfare of their own souls.

What could cause so great and so quick a lapse from faith in Christ and bring total rejection of discipleship? Mormon provides the answer to this question:

Now the cause of this iniquity of the people was this—Satan had great power, unto the stirring up of the people to do all manner of iniquity, and to the puffing them up with pride, tempting them to seek for power, and authority, and riches, and the vain things of the world. And thus Satan did lead away the hearts of the people to do all manner of iniquity; therefore they had enjoyed peace but a few years. . . . Now they did not sin ignorantly, for they knew the will of God concerning them, for it had been taught unto them; therefore they did wilfully rebel against God. (3 Nephi 6:15–16, 18)

The next stage of this drama was that another opportunity for repentance was given to these people who had been greatly blessed by God and knew it and yet did wilfully rebel against him. For he sent prophets unto them who plainly spoke of their transgressions and rebellions:

And there began to be men inspired from heaven and sent forth, standing among the people in all the land, preaching and testifying boldly of the sins and iniquities of the people, and testifying unto them concerning the redemption which the Lord would make for his people, or in other words, the resurrection of Christ; and they did testify boldly of his death and sufferings. (3 Nephi 6:20)

At this point the wickedness of the wayward Nephites increased, for some in leadership positions murdered those prophets, thus shedding innocent blood and giving the ultimate rejection of the Savior:

Now there were many of those who testified of the things pertaining to Christ who testified boldly, who were taken and put to death secretly by the judges, that the knowledge of their death came not unto the governor of the land until after their death. Now behold, this was contrary to the laws of the land, that any man should be put to death except they had power from the governor of the land. (3 Nephi 6:23–24)

The final episode in this saga of evil-doing was that those who murdered the prophets also conspired to murder the governor and to set up their own kingdom. They preferred the rule of evil dictators to a government of good laws and just rulers, a further rejection of all that the Savior stands for: “And they did set at defiance the law and the rights of their country; and they did covenant one with another to destroy the governor, and to establish a king over the land, that the land should no more be at liberty but should be subject unto kings” (3 Nephi 6:30).

The result of all of this wickedness was the destruction of the government and the Church and the division of the people into tribes or kinship groups:

And it came to pass in the thirty and first year that they were divided into tribes, every man according to his family, kindred and friends;

nevertheless they had come to an agreement that they would not go to war one with another; but they were not united as to their laws, and their manner of government, for they were established according to the minds of those who were their chiefs and their leaders. But they did establish very strict laws that one tribe should not trespass against another, insomuch that in some degree they had peace in the land; nevertheless, their hearts were turned from the Lord their God, and they did stone the prophets and did cast them out from among them. (3 Nephi 7:14)

In this final state of wickedness the Lord sought yet a third time to recover his people, the Nephites. He sent his faithful servant Nephi, and others, to bear a final witness before the day of wrath and vengeance:

Thus passed away the thirty and second year also. And Nephi did cry unto the people in the commencement of the thirty and third year; and he did preach unto them repentance and remission of sins . . . And there were many in the commencement of this year that were baptized unto repentance; and thus the more part of the year did pass away. (3 Nephi 7:23, 26)

Thus the human part of the drama had come to an end. The Lord in his kindness had blessed the people when they called upon him and his name. But when they became worldly and wicked in the peace and prosperity with which the Lord blessed them, he sent prophets to them, whom they slew. Finally, the Lord sent his most faithful servant unto them. Through all of this came a final separation of the righteous from the wicked. The few who were righteous hearkened to the words of the prophets and Nephi; the many who were wicked stonily rejected both them and God, ultimately rejecting their own redemption. Now it was time for the Lord to do his great work of vengeance.

In the beginning of the thirty and fourth year, at the time of the crucifixion of the Savior in Judea, there arose a great storm in the land of the Nephites, worse than had ever before been experienced. By fire and tempest, by the opening and closing of the earth, by the sinking and rising of parts of the land, all but the more righteous part of all of the people of the Nephites were destroyed. And these included the humble fol-

lowers of Christ, who had already repented (3 Nephi 8). The day of vengeance came as the Lord destroyed of the more wicked among the Nephites, thus fulfilling the days of wickedness and vengeance among this people.

Of course, that is not the end of the story. After the visitation of the Savior among them, the Nephites entered into that blessed era of Zion, an era of such faithfulness as had never been before seen among so many. They lived in righteousness and peace for the full lifetimes of two generations (4 Nephi 1:22–23). The days of wickedness and vengeance were thus designed for a purpose: to cleanse the earth in preparation for ushering in a special era of righteousness.

The Last Days: Also Days of Wickedness and Vengeance

It remains for us now to trace the parallels and differences between the former and the latter days of wickedness and vengeance:

1. Key participants in both occasions are segments of the house of Israel. The house of Israel is the “chosen” people, those who have been commissioned by the Savior for a special mission in the history of the world. The mission of Israel is to bear witness of Christ in both word and deed, that all the world might know to come unto him and through him partake of life and salvation. But most of the time in the history of the world, Israel has not been able to get itself into any great faithfulness, let alone perform its mission to the remainder of humanity. In the meridian of time in Jerusalem, John the Baptist was sent as a special messenger to prepare the Jews for the advent of the Messiah. John did his work well, for all of Judah knew of him and of the Messiah about whom he taught. To those who accepted John’s message, the Savior came in glory and with blessings. To those who rejected John, the Savior was a stumbling block. Their rejection of John was a rejection of Jesus. When they demanded Jesus’ blood, they sealed their own fate

and brought upon themselves the destruction of Jerusalem and of the last vestige of the kingdom of Judah, vengeance following upon wickedness.

Among the Nephites in the meridian of time, the wickedness and vengeance came before the Savior appeared to them. The Nephites were blessed to have prophets. And as they hearkened to God under the instructions of those prophets, they were blessed. But when they deliberately rejected God, knowing his goodness, they too reaped just vengeance as a consequence of their choosing wickedness.

In the last days, Israel is again front stage in the Lord's great drama. Again the mission is the same, to bear witness of Christ in word and deed that all the world might know how to come to Christ and find rest in him. But in these last days there is a special warning which necessarily accompanies the invitation. Not many days hence the world will be cleansed by fire, and every corruptible thing, of man or of nature, will be swept from the earth. The invitation to come unto Christ is also the invitation to become pure, to be able to pass through the fire unscathed. The fire is the Lord's vengeance in these latter days. If Israel were not to do its work in these latter days, then neither the world nor Israel would be prepared for the Second Coming of Christ, and the world would then be "utterly wasted" at his coming (D&C 2).

2. A second parallel between the meridian of time and the last days is the increased fury of Satan. It seems to be a general principle that before great blessings come strong temptations and trials. We see this in the attack of Satan on the boy prophet Joseph Smith in the grove (JS-H 1:15–17); had he yielded in fear to being possessed of Satan, he would not have received the blessing of the vision. Satan worked mightily with the Jews of Jerusalem to blind them to the gifts and signs from heaven, both spiritual and temporal, which led the majority of the blood of Israel to reject both John and Christ, notwithstanding the fact that they came in explicit fulfillment of plain prophecy which the children of Israel themselves also accepted.

Among the Nephites, it is a marvel to see that in the space of three years the majority of the people could turn from universal gratitude to God for preserving their lives to gross immersion in worldliness and the abandonment of Christ and his teaching. Such can only be accounted for by extraordinary pressure from the adversary, and the prophets acknowledge Satan's success.

In the last days, Satan will also be unleashed in devastating fury. We are told that people will be as bad as they were in the days of Noah, when the thought of every man's heart was only to do evil continually. In Noah's time the people "were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage; and knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be" (JS-M 1:42-43). Because they knew not the Lord in the time of Noah, they lived according to their own will and pleasure, rejecting righteousness. The call of Israel to the world in these last days is that everyone should seek the Lord and his righteousness to know that all things must be done in the Savior's way to be good or righteous and that to do otherwise is to reap the whirlwind of vengeance and destruction. The world today, as it moves toward the Second Coming, is full of gross wickedness and selfishness in abusing others, particularly children and spouses, committing abortions, taking drugs, wantonly destroying, and the flaunting of all that is holy and sacred. This great success by Satan is to be expected, for it is the spiritual fire through which all of the righteous must pass; they deliberately reject and refuse to participate in the evil which is all around them. That rejection enables them to be worthy to pass through the temporal or physical fire which will come to cleanse the earth of all wickedness at the Second Coming. Those who successfully pass through both of these fires will then be able to endure the joy of the Savior's presence and blessings during the millennium.

3. A third major parallel of these two times of "wickedness and vengeance" is the coming of the Savior following each of them.

When the Savior came to Judea in the meridian of time, his mission was to complete his atonement, to fulfill our Father's plan by which every human being might be reconciled to him. The Savior had volunteered to come and do our Father's will in all things, by which obedience he might show all of us the way back to Father's presence. Our Savior accomplished three of the four requisites which comprise the Atonement.

The Savior came to Judea first to descend from his exaltation to go below all things, that he might then again rise above all things and be the judge of all things. To fulfill this part of his mission, our Savior was born of Mary but fathered by our Heavenly Father, that in his mortal life he might have the dual heritage of mortality and immortality. Then, commanding and controlling both of these opportunities, he molded them together in perfect obedience to Father, thus showing the ultimate pattern which all people must seek to attain. This living a perfect life in mortality qualified him to become the perfect and pure sacrifice for the sins of all humanity. Thus in living a perfect life every day, our Savior wrought the Atonement.

Having lived a perfect mortal life enabled our Savior to do the suffering which was necessary for atonement, to pay for all sins so he might forgive each human being who will sincerely repent. Without being forgiven of our sins, none of us could again stand in our Heavenly Father's presence, for in him there is not the least degree of allowance for sin (Alma 45:16). All who enjoy his presence must be pure, free both from sin and from all trace of sin. Thus our Savior took upon him the sins of every man, woman, and child, suffering for each of us individually in Gethsemane and upon the cross. By doing so, he fulfilled Father's will and completed the Atonement.

In his death, our Savior worked out a third aspect of his great atonement, the sacrifice of a mortal life which was pure, without spot or blemish. By offering this sacrifice, our Savior seized the keys of death and hell from Satan. This makes it possible for every human being to be resurrected to an unending physical existence after this mortal probation is over, after the

temporary body we have in mortality has been returned to the earth.

The fourth aspect of the Atonement which our Savior wrought was fulfilled not only in time but also in eternity, in the eternality of existence which was the envelope of his moral sojourn. As the premortal Jehovah, as the mortal Jesus of Nazareth, and as the resurrected Christ, our Savior presides over the process by which the Holy Spirit labors to eventually witness to every human being of the righteousness of God, the atoning mission of Christ, and the opportunity and means by which each one may come personally unto the fulness of the measure of the stature of Christ, thus to share with him all that he and Father have in eternity. This is the fourth and final aspect of the Savior's atonement.

Thus the coming of the Savior to the Jews was to make possible the eternal blessings for all humankind. Our Savior wrought his work well, and prepared the way, but most of the Jews rejected him in his sojourn to earth. That rejection was great wickedness, which was visited on their heads with vengeance, the righteous and just vengeance, recompense of a just God.

The coming of our Savior to the Nephites was part of his eternal rather than his temporal assignment. He came to the Nephites not to atone, but to bless. For the days of wickedness and vengeance had already passed for them, and he came to reward those who had passed through the fire of vengeance spiritually unscathed because of their righteous faithfulness in him. And he did bless them. In time, they were all converted to him and came to have one heart, one mind, to dwell in righteousness, without having any poor person among them (4 Nephi 1:1–22). This period of Zion was indeed the precursor and pattern of the Second Coming in which his presence will bless the whole world with this same opportunity to partake of the heavenly gift and to dwell in Zion.

Our Savior's mission at his Second Coming in the last days is to do just as he did with the Nephites: He will bless all of us

who manage to pass through the fire of the days of wickedness and vengeance and the fire of his temporal destruction with the joy of his presence and the opportunity to dwell safely in Zion forever. But instead of coming only to Israel to offer them such a delight as he did with the Nephites, in these last days every nation, kindred, tongue, and people is being invited to the wedding feast. Admission to the feast comes in having the good sense to listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit as the Restored Gospel of Jesus Christ is preached in these last days and to come into the fold of the Good Shepherd and partake of the fulness of the New and Everlasting Covenant. By hearkening to the Holy Spirit, we will receive safe passage through the fires of wickedness and vengeance to enter into the joy of the Lord.

The conclusion to this whole matter is to see that the days of wickedness and vengeance are in reality the days of righteousness and blessing. The wickedness through which each of us must pass is but the fire which proves our love for the Lord and his righteousness; it is the special opportunity to be especially righteous in these last days. The vengeance is itself a blessing, a cleansing of the earth that greater blessings may follow, even as being in hell is a blessing which makes possible the greater blessing of inheriting glory afterwards. All that God does is a blessing to those who will receive a blessing at his hand. To live in the days of wickedness and vengeance is thus to live in the very days of the greatest faith, righteousness, and blessing which the world has ever seen, albeit on the part of but a few. Each of us individually chooses for himself or herself whether these will be days of wickedness and vengeance or days of righteousness and blessing.

“Yield Your Heart to God”—the Process of Sanctification

13

W. Ralph Pew

On 6 April 1861, the Prophet Brigham Young instructed the Saints concerning their preparation for the events of the latter days:

Let our anxiety be centered upon one thing, the sanctification of our own hearts, the purifying of our own affections, the preparing of ourselves for the approach of the events that are hastening upon us. This should be our concern, this should be our study, this should be our daily prayer, and not to be in a hurry to see the overthrow of the wicked. (*Journal of Discourses* 9:3)

The objective of this paper is to consider the process of sanctification and provide us with the hope and the encouragement to apply doctrinal concepts into the practical reality of sanctifying our hearts.

Sanctification is a lifetime process of refinement whereby the naturally occurring tendencies of mortality are preferentially purged from our soul through the atoning blood of Christ and by our voluntarily yielding our agency to God. Consistent submission to the will of God increases faith, strengthens humility, and develops meekness. Through this process we experience a newness of heart and are directed to the spiritual refreshment known as sanctification.

Although divine in nature and potential, humanity is, after all, carnal. As a consequence of the Fall, mortality carries with it the baggage of natural, carnal inclinations. Just as metals are refined of impurities through heat, water, and various chemical processes, the natural man, as an enemy to God (Mosiah 3:19), must be purified and cleansed through the process of sanctification.

Metallurgy

Metals are produced by extracting them from ores, then refining and purifying them until impurities are ultimately removed as scum. The final product is a metal that has been cleansed and purged of undesirable impurities that occur naturally in the elements. Scriptural references to the refiner's fire create distinct imagery of the physical refinement process that must occur with natural elements to produce precious metals. The Lamanites and Nephites were clearly aware of metallurgical refinement procedures:

And behold, there was all manner of gold in both these lands, and of silver, and of precious ore of every kind; and there were also curious workmen, who did work all kinds of ore and did refine it; and thus they did become rich. (Hel 6:11)

They knew and understood the fact that they could produce metals only by separating them from ores through refining and purifying. Because of this understanding, the concept of spiritualizing the natural man through a refining process was an idea that they could readily relate to and apply in their lives. As is recorded in the book of Ether, large heaps of earth were piled up on the ground, and from this, only small portions were actually purified into precious metals (Ether 10:23). So it is with the natural man: we are encumbered with the carnal proclivities of mortality that must be removed through the process of sanctification in order to become as spiritually pure in our heart's desires as platinum is metallically pure in its element content.

Purification Under the Law of Moses

Focusing the thoughts and intents of the children of Israel on Christ was accomplished in many ways. The rituals and ceremonies under the law of Moses associated with cleansing and purifying are symbolic of the process of spiritual sanctification. The physical purification ritual for one cleansed of leprosy is particularly characteristic of the sanctification that occurs through spiritual refinement and cleansing. Physical leprosy represents spiritual infection: banishment from camp is the separation from God; being presented to a priest satisfies the requirement of confession to the bishop; the death of the bird is the conquering of the natural man; freeing the live bird can represent newness of life; and the blood and water are similitudes of the Atonement and purification (McConkie 95–96). Just as the one cleansed of leprosy was admitted back into the society of the camp of Israel, mortals that attain a change of heart and are reconciled to God are purified through the combination of blood, water, and spirit (Moses 6:59).

Doctrine of Sanctification

The efficacy of the doctrine of sanctification in our lives is singular. Its fulfillment requires the supportive and sequential contributions of the atoning blood of Christ, the influence of the Holy Ghost, and the proper exercise of our agency. To be sanctified requires that we be cleansed from sin. This washing away of sins can occur only through the blood of Christ, which was shed for us.

At the time of baptism, the truly repentant individual who has exercised faith in the Lord Jesus Christ will experience the first phase of sanctification or cleansing through the blood of the Lamb. Baptism is unto a remission of sins and ultimately those that remain faithful after baptism and exercise faith unto repentance throughout their lives will receive forgiveness of sins. This forgiveness of sins comes through the blood of Christ and sanctifies the individual.

At the conclusion of king Benjamin's address in Zarahemla, the people fell to the earth and cried: "O have mercy, and apply the atoning blood of Christ that we may receive forgiveness of our sins, and our hearts may be purified . . ." (Mosiah 4:2).

Moroni, in his concluding admonition taught: "And again, if ye by the grace of God are perfect in Christ, and deny not his power, then are ye sanctified in Christ by the grace of God, through the shedding of the blood of Christ, which is in the covenant of the Father unto the remission of your sins, that ye become holy, without spot" (Moroni 10:33).

To remain faithful throughout our mortal lives demands that we challenge the natural man within us and declare spiritual war on the physical elements of mortality. The struggle to put off or purge the natural man from our hearts and souls is the second phase of the process of sanctification and can be characterized as spiritualizing our temporal body. The Holy Ghost as the sanctifier (3 Nephi 27:20) is endowed with the divine capacity to engage our souls in this spirit of reformation. Through the righteous exercise of our agency and the purifying power of the Holy Ghost, we learn to yield to the will of the Father voluntarily and without compulsion. Learning this process of submission through a lifetime of choices and actions harmonious with the will of God leads to our spiritual purification.

Understanding with our finite mortal minds how the Holy Ghost accomplishes this sanctifying work is as difficult as comprehending how the Savior atoned for our sins. What we do understand is the fact that the Holy Ghost, as a member of the Godhead, functions in a manner calculated to refine and purify the human soul.

The Holy Ghost as Sanctifier

When we open our hearts to the promptings of the Spirit, its divine manifestations, "distill upon [our] soul[s] as the dews

from heaven” (D&C 121:45). Three specific ways in which the Holy Ghost facilitates the sanctification process within our hearts include: (1) directing us in making correct choices; (2) motivating us to repentance; and (3) testifying of the divinity of God the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ.

Making Correct Choices

Our mortal probation, where we keep our second estate (Abr 3:26), is a time to prepare to meet God (Alma 34:32). This life is made up of a series of situations in which we must make decisions and choices. Each day we face new and different challenges in our personal religious behavior, our relationship with our families, our work, and in our associations with other men and women in the world. To make the correct choices in all things both temporal and spiritual requires the direction of the Holy Ghost, and making them will contribute to our cleansing and purification.

The Lord taught Oliver Cowdery concerning the Holy Ghost as a revelator of knowledge and truth:

Yea, behold, I will tell you in your mind and in your heart, by the Holy Ghost, which shall come upon you and which shall dwell in your heart. Now, behold, this is the spirit of revelation. (D&C 8:3)

Later, Oliver Cowdery was again instructed on this topic:

But, behold, I say unto you, that you must study it out in your mind; then you must ask me if it be right, and if it is right I will cause that your bosom shall burn within you; therefore, you shall feel that it is right. (D&C 9:8)

The Holy Ghost dwells in our hearts (D&C 8:3). We can overcome the struggles, temptations, and challenges of this second estate only by allowing the Holy Ghost permanent residency in our hearts rather than granting it merely a temporary transit visa for an occasional visit. Recognizing that the Holy Ghost wants clean, pure, and comfortable accommodations, we should endeavor to live each day by making decisions in all aspects of mortality that invite the Spirit to reside in our

hearts. In our daily effort to make correct decisions and to walk blameless before God, the Holy Ghost will direct our path and teach us the peaceable things of the kingdom (D&C 39:6).

Motivating to Repentance

Alma, preaching to the people of Gideon, taught that the Spirit inspires repentance:

But behold, the Spirit hath said this much unto me, saying: Cry unto this people, saying—repent ye, and prepare the way of the Lord, and walk in his paths, which are straight; for behold, the kingdom of heaven is at hand, and the Son of God cometh upon the face of the earth. . . . Now I say unto you that ye must repent, and be born again; for the Spirit saith if ye are not born again ye cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven; therefore come and be baptized unto repentance, that ye may be washed from your sins, that ye may have faith on the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sins of the world, who is mighty to save and to cleanse from all unrighteousness. (Alma 7:9, 14)

When we begin to follow a path that will lead us to ultimate destruction and a wider spiritual separation from the Father, if we yield to the power and influence of the Holy Ghost, it will work on our hearts and souls to motivate and direct us to return to the path of the Father, to repent and cleanse our lives before the Lord. The essence of the purifying attributes of the Holy Ghost reside within us and entice us to cleanse our natural selves through repentance. The spirit of the Lord will not dwell in us when our thoughts and actions are unclean (Alma 34:36; Hel 4:24). Yielding to the Holy Ghost and its influence will provide us the strength we need to bring true repentance into our lives.

Mormon, in an epistle to Moroni, lamented the pride of the Nephite nation and decried the prophesy of their resulting destruction "except they would repent" (Moroni 8:27). Recognizing that the Nephites had lost the Spirit, Mormon urged his son: "Pray for them, my son, that repentance may come unto them. But behold, I fear lest the Spirit hath ceased striving with them; and in this part of the land they are also seeking to put

down all power and authority which cometh from God; and they are denying the Holy Ghost” (Moroni 8:28).

Having lost the Spirit or, in the Apostle Paul’s words, having grieved the Spirit (Eph 4:30–32), the Nephites would not come unto repentance. Only through the spirit of the Lord dwelling in humble and meek tabernacles could they be brought to a recognition of their sins and weaknesses and thereby be inspired to repent. Mormon taught Moroni that the remission of sins brings meekness and lowliness of heart, and in this contrite condition the visitation of the Holy Ghost follows, bringing a divine presence of hope and perfect love (Moroni 8:26).

The Holy Ghost as Special Witness

The sometimes difficult and challenging pathways of mortality are wearisome and dreary without a light and knowledge of God the Father and Jesus Christ. As children of God, each one of us has the duty and obligation to obtain knowledge relative to the divinity of the Godhead and the truthfulness of the Lord’s work. This knowledge is not found in the world’s greatest libraries or in its institutions of higher learning. The philosophies of humanity and the technology of the times will not produce this most significant understanding. Only the gift of the Holy Ghost as a testifier and a witness can penetrate our hearts with the unspeakable assurance that God the Eternal Father is the great Elohim, the Father of our spirits and that his Son, Jesus Christ, is the Only Begotten Son in the flesh and that “by Him and . . . of Him the worlds are and were created and the inhabitants thereof are begotten sons and daughters unto God” (D&C 76:24). This personal witness that must come to each of us is quietly nurtured in the softened heart of the believer and continues to grow and be strengthened each day as we develop a more profound appreciation for the solemnities of eternity (43:34). The whisperings of the Spirit compound in our hearts until the full crescendo of truth is revealed to our souls. This then is the witness born of the Holy Ghost in the capacity

of testifier. Such a testimony imbued in the heart of the saint is immovable and more vivid to our spirit than knowledge produced or experienced by any of our earthly senses. The testimony that permeates our heart through this divine influence is the firm foundation from which all light and truth emerge. The witness of the Father and the Son imparted to us by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:3; 3 Nephi 11:32) will provide us with the light and knowledge necessary to approach the difficulties and trials of this earthly probation with confidence and eternal assurance.

Yield Your Heart to God

Recognizing the comparison between metallurgical refinement and spiritual purification, combined with understanding the fundamental role of the Holy Ghost in the sanctification process, provides us the background for consideration of the practical reality of refining our lives by surrendering the desires of our hearts to God. Mormon's abridgement of the decade from the forty-third year to the fifty-third year of the reign of the judges is insightful concerning the antithetical notions of pride and sanctification. Although the outward indications of peace existed in the land during the fifty-first year of the reign of the judges, the insidious encroachment of pride began to enter into the hearts of those professing to belong to the Church of God (Hel 3:33). The contagious effects of this pride became evident as those afflicted by it began to persecute the humble followers of Christ (v 34). In referring to those that had been persecuted for their faithfulness to Christ, Mormon provides us with a practical approach to the doctrine of sanctification and the keynote of this presentation:

Nevertheless they did fast and pray oft, and did wax stronger and stronger in their humility, and firmer and firmer in the faith of Christ, unto the filling their souls with joy and consolation, yea, even to the purifying and the sanctification of their hearts, which sanctification cometh because of their yielding their hearts unto God. (Hel 3:35)

The key to obtaining the blessings of sanctification is to yield our hearts unto God. We give our hearts to God so that our desires and intentions will be made pure. By so yielding the desires of our hearts, we conform to the will of God and emulate his attributes, thereby becoming spiritualized beings manifesting Godlike characteristics. We cannot effectively yield to Christ a partial portion of our souls. To make sanctification complete we must offer a full and unconditional surrender of our wills to him. C. S. Lewis has explained this commitment as follows:

Christ says, "Give me All. I don't want so much of your time and so much of your money and so much of your work: I want You. I have not come to torment your natural self, but to kill it. No half-measures are any good. I don't want to cut off a branch here and a branch there, I want to have the whole tree down. I don't want to drill the tooth, or crown it, or stop it, but to have it out. Hand over the whole natural self, all the desires which you think innocent as well as the ones you think wicked—the whole outfit. I will give you a new self instead. In fact, I will give you Myself: My own will shall become yours." (153)

Mormon uses the word "wax" in the description of this sanctification process. In this context, one of Webster's definitions of *wax* has particular significance: "to grow toward full development." As the humble followers of Christ prayed and fasted, they grew toward a full development of humility and faith, filling their souls with joy and consolation. As a result of making righteous choices and subordinating their will to the will of God, their hearts were sanctified and made pure.

Prayer, fasting, humility, and faith contribute to the process of sanctification. Meaningful and consistent private prayer serves to remind us that we are indeed children of God and on his errand. Fasting is a tangible physical experience, subordinating the appetites of the flesh to the still small voice of the Spirit. Humility nurtures within our souls the critical recognition of and appreciation for the truth that God has created us, and from the beginning has preserved us from day to day, and lends us breath to live, move and act according to our own wills

(Mosiah 2:21). Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is power; this vital source of divine energy operates among the children of humankind to move mountains, render charitable service, and soften hearts. Each of these key words and principles mentioned by Mormon in Helaman 3:35 focuses the mortal mind on the fact that as the heavens are higher than the earth so God, in his exalted sphere, is elevated above humanity (Isa 55:8–9) and that to return to his presence in a clean and sanctified condition requires that we yield our wills to his will and our desires to his desire.

Nephi, the son of Helaman, yielded his will to the will of God and was given divine power. This great prophet labored unceasingly in his ministry. He prayed, bowing himself upon his tower and pouring out his soul unto God (Hel 7:10–11). Then, after exposing to the crowd the murderous scheme of Seantum, Nephi pondered in his heart the things which the Lord had shown unto him (10:2). As he journeyed to his home, a voice came unto him saying:

Blessed art thou, Nephi, for those things which thou has done; for I have beheld how thou hast with unwearyingness declared the word, which I have given unto thee, unto this people. And thou hast not feared them, and hast not sought thine own life, *but hast sought my will*, and to keep my commandments.

And now, because thou hast done this with such unwearyingness, behold, I will bless thee forever; and I will make thee mighty in word and in deed, in faith and in works; yea, even that all things shall be done unto thee according to thy word, for thou shalt not ask that which is contrary to *my will*.

Behold, thou art Nephi, and I am God. . . . (Hel 10:4–6; emphasis added)

Nephi's commitment to seek out the will of God in his life and to yield his own desires to that higher source of direction resulted in his being endowed with the sealing power and the capacity to command all the elements of the earth. The Lord trusted Nephi enough to give him this authority, because from Nephi's past obedience God knew that he would not ask anything contrary to His will. At the conclusion of this heavenly

manifestation, Nephi was commanded to declare repentance to the people (Hel 10:11). And characteristic of his complete submission to the will of God, Nephi did not go to his house to relax and experiment with his new power; rather, he immediately stopped his journey home and returned to preach repentance to the multitudes.

Gospel Principles Facilitate Sanctification

The Sabbath Day

The Lord has promised great blessing and cleansing to those who worship him and honor the Sabbath day: “And that thou mayest more fully keep thyself unspotted from the world, thou shalt go to the house of prayer and offer up thy sacraments upon my holy day” (D&C 59:9). Honest and faithful adherence to the spirit of the Sabbath day will assist us in the process of sanctification. As we use our time on the Sabbath in a manner that will draw us and our families closer to the Lord, we will combat those elements of society that can soil and canker our hearts and souls. On this holy day we should direct our energies to doing good and learning about our true relationship with deity. The Sabbath gives us an opportunity to rest from our labors and inculcate principles of virtue and personal religious behavior in our own lives and the lives of our families. Training and instruction given on this day, combined with the witness from the Holy Ghost concerning the divine nature of this work, will reap the blessing promised by the Lord and our actions during the other days of the week will be directed in such a way as to keep us unspotted from the world and thereby be a catalyst in the process of sanctification.

Sacrament

Each week we may partake of the sacrament. The Lord has specified the words to use in the sacramental prayers. As the

priest kneels at the altar of the sacrament table, he petitions the Father in prayer, "O God, the Eternal Father, we ask thee in the name of thy Son, Jesus Christ, to bless and sanctify this bread to the souls of all those who partake of it" (D&C 20:77). The water is also blessed and sanctified in the same way. We partake of the bread and water as symbols in remembrance of the body and blood of the Son of God. In a spiritual sense the partaking of bread and water, physical elements, sanctifies or cleanses us. In the prayer the emblems are blessed and sanctified to the souls of all those that partake. The sacrament is not intended to be physically nourishing or satisfying; the sanctified elements are meant for our souls and act as tangible reminders that our spiritual lives must be cleansed and sanctified before the Lord. We should partake of the sacrament worthily; and if we approach each sabbath day with the thought of sanctifying our hearts, we will learn to appreciate the sacred nature of the sacrament and use it as a weekly reminder and covenant opportunity to cleanse our souls.

The Priesthood

The promised blessings of sanctification attend those who obtain the priesthood and magnify their callings.

For whoso is faithful unto the obtaining these two priesthoods of which I have spoken, and the magnifying their calling, are sanctified by the Spirit unto the renewing of their bodies. They become the sons of Moses and of Aaron and the seed of Abraham, and the church and kingdom, and the elect of God. (D&C 84:33–34)

The Temple

The endowment received in the house of the Lord provides the culminating earthly symbolism of sanctification. The Prophet Joseph Smith's prayer at the dedication of the temple in Kirtland, Ohio, reminds us that the temple is the house of the Lord and that it has been sanctified as a place of holy worship for those with clean hands and pure hearts:

That thy glory may rest down upon thy people, and upon this thy house, which we now dedicate to thee, that it may be sanctified and consecrated to be holy, and that thy holy presence may be continually in this house. And that all people who shall enter upon the threshold of the Lord's house may feel thy power, and feel constrained to acknowledge that thou hast sanctified it, and that it is thy house, a place of thy holiness. (D&C 109:12–13)

Every aspect of the temple is inspiring, uplifting, and sanctifying. The covenants and ordinances of the temple, including washings, anointings, endowments, and sealings, are given to us for the sanctification and purification of the natural man. Referring to the Melchizedek Priesthood and the ordinances that are performed in the temple, the Lord said, “. . . in the ordinances thereof, the power of godliness is manifest” (D&C 84:20).

Through the Grace of Jesus Christ

The life and mission of Jesus Christ is the consummate example of sanctification that comes through yielding to the will of the Father. Prior to his crucifixion, Christ offered an intercessory prayer on behalf of his disciples:

I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from evil. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth. As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I sent them into the world. And for their sakes *I sanctify myself*, that they also might be sanctified through truth. (John 17:15–19; emphasis added)

There may be an explanation of how and why Christ sanctified himself that is not readily apparent to most of us. Sufficient for our purposes here is the fact that he sanctified himself finally and completely in a very practical way when he yielded his will to the will of the Father and offered himself a ransom for our sins and partook of the bitter cup. There is no greater example of surrendering one's will to the will of the Father than that shown by his Son in the hour of greatest trial and inward temptation while pleading with the Father to let the cup pass. Christ gave his all. Prior to the physical suffering of

the atonement, Christ must have yielded his will to the Father in preparation of completing the mission he was entrusted to accomplish. When the resurrected Savior appeared to the Nephites, he said:

Behold, I am Jesus Christ, whom the prophets testified shall come into the world. And behold, I am the light and the life of the world; and I have drunk out of that bitter cup which the Father hath given me, and have glorified the Father in taking upon me the sins of the world, in the which I have suffered the will of the Father in all things from the beginning. (3 Nephi 11:10, 11)

Referring to this sacred propitiation for sin, the Lord in commanding Martin Harris said:

For behold, I, God, have suffered these things for all, that they might not suffer if they would repent; but if they would not repent they must suffer even as I; which suffering caused myself, even God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of pain, and to bleed at every pore, and to suffer both body and spirit—and would that I might not drink the bitter cup, and shrink—Nevertheless, glory be to the Father, and I partook and finished my preparations unto the children of men. . . . I am Jesus Christ; I came by the will of the Father, and I do his will. (D&C 19:16–19, 24)

At the dedication of the Kirtland temple, the prophet prayed unto the Father pleading for the Spirit and attitude necessary for one to diligently pursue the course of sanctification when he said, "Help thy servants to say, with thy grace assisting them: thy will be done, O Lord, and not ours" (D&C 109:44).

In contrast to the free and peaceful nature of Jesus Christ is the eternally miserable condition of Satan. Why is Satan miserable? His misery comes in part from the fact that he is deceitful, full of lies, cunning, and that he stirs men to anger; after all, wickedness never was happiness (Alma 41:10). The source of Satan's misery emanates from one central cause: he did not yield to the will of the Father and in so doing he sought to destroy the agency of humankind (Moses 4:3). Following his own will and desires and being forever incarcerated in an eternal captivity with his selfishness makes Satan miserable. The wicked acts committed by Satan and his apprentice devils are

threatening to the peace and tranquility of all of God's children; however, the acts themselves, as reprehensible as they may be, are not, in an eternal perspective, as damning to the soul of the perpetrator as is the premeditated and calculated determination to ignore the will of God. Because Satan refused to yield his heart to God, he was cast down, and he now attempts to entice us away from coming unto Christ with his counterfeit proposition that we can pursue our own wills and desires and therein find happiness. True happiness in the form of liberty and eternal life (2 Nephi 2:27) is only found in yielding to the enticings of the spirit and saying as the Father's Beloved Son did from the beginning, "Father, thy will be done, and the glory be thine forever" (Moses 4:2).

The sacrament hymn, "How Great the Wisdom and the Love," illustrates in poetic form the marvelous surrender of will by the Savior to the plan of the Father:

By strict obedience Jesus won
The prize with glory rife:
"Thy will, O God, not mine be done,"
Adorned his mortal life.
He marked the path and led the way,
And every point defines
To light and life and endless day
Where God's full presence shines.
(*Hymns* 195)

Conclusion

King Benjamin described the process of sanctification when he said:

For the natural man is an enemy to God, and has been from the fall of Adam, and will be, forever and ever, unless he yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, and putteth off the natural man and becometh a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord, and becometh as a child, submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon him, even as a child doth submit to his father. (Mosiah 3:19)

Mormon's account in Helaman chapter 3 clarifies that sanctification is a distinct process and that through prayer and fasting we wax strong in humility and firm in our faith in Christ. Sanctification occurs in our lives as we purge from the natural man carnal tendencies and proclivities by yielding our heart unto God. Developing the ability to allow our personal desires to be subordinated to the will of the Father creates a transformation and softening of our hearts.

The Holy Ghost is the sanctifier. The spirit of the Holy Ghost dwells in our hearts (D&C 8:2). Our hearts must be changed (Alma 5:14) and cleansed through the purification process to become a pure abode of the Holy Ghost and thereby allow his influence to dwell in us (D&C 8:2). Recognizing that sanctification is required of all those who will enter into the kingdom of God, we should focus our lives each day on how we can use the sensitive feelings of our hearts to guide our actions as moved upon by the enticings and promptings of the Holy Ghost. Through the atonement and grace of Jesus Christ, sanctification is made available to all of us who receive the baptism of fire, press forward in life with a steadfastness in Christ, yield our hearts unto God, and purify ourselves from all unrighteousness (2 Nephi 31:19–20; see also Alma 5:26–35; Hel 12:23–26).

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Nephite Trade Networks and the Dangers of a Class Society

14

Allen J. Christenson

The first century before the birth of Christ witnessed a turning point in ancient Nephite society. Remarkable social and economic changes took place which transformed the people's way of life. The book of Helaman and the first chapters of 3 Nephi describe it as a time in which pride and the desire for riches brought the Nephites to the very brink of disaster. One of the significant causes of this sad state of affairs was the establishment of elaborate trade networks with the express purpose of accumulating wealth and power. This in turn stimulated the rise of a class society and the desire among those of noble lineages to reinstitute kingship to control international trade. Many of the social and religious crises described in the Book of Mormon during this period were connected with the sudden increase in wealth made possible by these new long-distance trade relationships.

Nephite prophets opposed this emphasis on wealth among the newly-rich upper classes. As a result, the Church came under attack because of its opposition to the economic privileges of the wealthy. The Gadianton Society was founded about the same time and took advantage of these developments to usurp power and material gain. The profound danger inherent in these events was recognized by the prophet Mormon, who identified

Allen J. Christenson is a dentist and a part-time instructor in the Department of Humanities at Brigham Young University.

the Gadianton Robbers as the primary cause for the eventual overthrow of the Nephite people (Hel 2:13).

The Establishment of Trade Networks

Few communities are blessed with all the resources and skills necessary to be successful in isolation from their neighbors. Trade with other areas is therefore often necessary to obtain goods not available locally. Many valued resources, particularly rare and exotic ones, can be obtained often only over great distances, thus stimulating the creation of a network of communities in close economic cooperation. Communities participating in such trade networks are also presented with unprecedented opportunities for obtaining wealth.

There is nothing inherently wrong with international trade. During the two centuries of righteousness following the visit of the resurrected Jesus Christ to the Americas, the people once known as Nephites and Lamanites grew and prospered together, becoming “exceedingly rich, because of their prosperity in Christ” (4 Nephi 1:23). As outlined in the books of Helaman and 3 Nephi, the problem was not that the Nephites engaged in long-distance trade relationships, but that they used the profits to create a new elite class which placed itself above those with less wealth and sought to deprive them of their liberty (Hel 3:36; 6:17, 39; 3 Nephi 6:11–14).

The establishment of long-distance trade networks appeared among the Lamanites under the influence of such Nephite dissenters as Amulon, who encouraged the establishment of trade to increase his own prestige and wealth:

And thus the Lamanites began to increase in riches, and began to trade one with another and wax great, and began to be a cunning and a wise people, as to the wisdom of the world, yea, a very cunning people. (Mosiah 24:7)

The sixth chapter of the book of Helaman describes this same trend beginning among the Nephites as the trade networks grew to include both the Nephite and Lamanite nations:

And behold, there was peace in all the land, insomuch that the Nephites did go into whatsoever part of the land they would, whether among the Nephites or the Lamanites. And it came to pass that the Lamanites did also go withersoever they would, whether it were among the Lamanites or among the Nephites; and thus they did have free intercourse one with another, to buy and to sell, and to get gain, according to their desire. (Hel 6:7-8)

International trade on this scale requires that free trade alliances be set up, not only between communities engaged directly in the exchange system, but also with those which happen to occupy strategic positions along the trade routes. With trade routes opening up throughout Book of Mormon lands, the Nephites would have been under a tremendous amount of pressure to participate.

Such a complicated system of foreign trade involving large populations which had only recently been mortal enemies would also tend to stimulate the growth of a bureaucracy to negotiate alliances and administer laws governing the peaceful exchange of goods. Such a system is described by the Book of Mormon in the years just prior to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ: "For there were many merchants in the land, and also many lawyers, and many officers" (3 Nephi 6:11).

Development of a Socially Stratified Society

International trade requires an efficient organization to ensure the reliable flow of goods over long-distance trade routes. As a result, communities which participate in international trade tend to build comparatively large, centralized city-states with a bureaucracy of wealthy and powerful merchants and officials. Those who oversee these lucrative trade activities rapidly form a new elite class, and this leads to a gap in wealth between those who participate in the trade of expensive items and those who do not (Sanders and Price 131).

The majority of ancient trade agreements undoubtedly involved such necessary items as improved grains, regional foods, wood and other building materials, or specialized stone

for tools. Certain trade items called sumptuaries, however, were exchanged only between those in charge of the international exchange network. For the most part they were small objects of great value which were easily transportable over long distances (Price 240). Sumptuaries served as the elite person's reward for organizing and overseeing the exchange. In general, sumptuary goods such as gold, silver, jade, or fine cloth had little inherent use other than to emphasize the owner's high status and power. The exchange of status items contributed to the ever-increasing wealth and prestige of the elite merchants. Sumptuary goods are found almost exclusively in palace-type residences or royal tombs, places that are clearly elite. They are seldom, if ever, found within the simpler dwellings or graves of peasant farmers.

As is characteristic of ancient cultures, the accumulation of wealth through foreign trade within Nephite society also stimulated the rise of an elite class based on wealth:

And the people began to be distinguished by ranks, according to their riches and their chances for learning, yea, some were ignorant because of their poverty, and others did receive great learning, because of their riches. (3 Nephi 6:12)

This Nephite elite class may be compared to the later Aztec Indian *pochtecas*, or merchant nobles. Those *pochtecas* enjoyed the opportunity for similar special status within their communities, having exclusive control over valuable trade resources (Adams 34). Like members of the Nephite upper class, the children of the *pochtecas* were better educated, having their own private schools. Rulers and state-supported priests were chosen exclusively from the nobility and were allowed to worship in temples which were otherwise prohibited to the lower classes (Adams 40). Each noble rank in Aztec society carried with it certain items of dress and jewelry which outwardly displayed the rank's wealth and prestige. Sahagún, a priest serving in Mexico during the early sixteenth century, related the speech of one such Aztec merchant who listed the exclusive items of dress and adornment enjoyed by his fellow *pochtecas*:

And behold the property which we shall have merited . . . these amber lip plugs, and curved, green ear pendants with bells, and black staves, and crested guan feather fans. And behold our netted capes and our netted breech clouts, all our possessions, our goods, which will be witnesses of our valor. None . . . who did not suffer with us, may take them. It will be our exclusive privilege. (4)

The Institution of Monarchy

At the top of the social hierarchy in ancient societies was a king, or other titled ruler, who administered the movement of goods along trade networks. Investing power in a single individual greatly facilitated the operation of intergroup exchanges. Unless a state was ruled by an individual powerful enough to strictly control trade relationships, negotiate international economic and social alliances, and enforce impartial justice in the flow of goods from place to place, foreign merchants could not function effectively (McVicker 188).

To rule also implied the opportunity to obtain a degree of wealth inconceivable in a closed society without such international contacts. The rarest and most prized sumptuary goods were exchanged only between rulers as payment for their participation in the exchange network. The greater the extent of the network and the volume of goods traded, the greater the accumulation of valuable sumptuary goods in the hands of the king.

Considering the opportunity for wealth, it is not surprising that the traditional nobility of Nephite society would desire to control it so as to enhance their own prestige. The book of Helaman makes it clear that the position of head of government implied the opportunity to obtain “gain and glory of the world” (Hel 7:4–5). Therefore, at the very time that the trade networks began to spread in Nephite and Lamanite lands, there arose within the ranks of the nobility a strong desire to set up a king.

Those who supported the establishment of a king in Nephite lands called themselves “king-men” and repeatedly sought to bring down the system of judges in the land (Alma

51:5–8; Alma 61:8; Hel 7:4–5; 3 Nephi 3:10; 3 Nephi 6:30; 7:1, 12). The king-men claimed noble descent and thus elite privileges. They were eager to seize the government in order to control the lucrative trade system with other elite groups. As a result, they often sought alliances with the kingdom of the Lamanites, with whom they undoubtedly wished to establish profitable economic ties (Alma 35:2–11; 48:2; 61:8).

Contemporary New World Trade Systems

It is important to understand such developments in their proper historical context. Although it is not known where specific Book of Mormon events took place, it is profitable to study the cultures of ancient America which would have been contemporary with the Nephites and Lamanites to determine how similar trade networks developed and affected their societies.

Parallel to Book of Mormon history, the first century before Christ was a crucial time in the economic and social development of ancient American societies. During that century the relatively simple farming communities of Mexico and Central America began to develop new and powerful elite merchant classes which accumulated expensive luxury goods through a complicated system of long-distance trade networks. To control the delicate economic relationships among foreign powers effectively, these communities instituted the practice of kingship. This astonishingly sudden change in Mesoamerican society appeared almost simultaneously over a large area of thousands of square miles of territory, forming a vast network of developing states engaged in economic cooperation and competition on an unprecedented scale.

Kaminaljuyu, Guatemala

The importance of trade as the economic basis for these changes in Mesoamerican society can be seen in the dramatic

rise in the wealth and status of Kaminaljuyu, located in the highlands of Guatemala. In the period just prior to the birth of Christ, contemporary with the books of Alma and Helaman, Kaminaljuyu became for the first time a true regional power controlling a far-flung network of international trade relations. The relatively simple farming community which had previously occupied the site was displaced by increasingly wealthy elite groups. Most houses belonging to the lower classes were destroyed and rebuilt outside the central precinct to make room for the needs of the expanding upper class (Michels 151). These elite households were significantly richer in construction and were supported by low-lying platforms to artificially elevate them above the surrounding courts. The few lower class houses found in the city apparently belonged to servants and laborers of the wealthy.

The importance of Kaminaljuyu as a trade center may be explained both by its fortunate position at the cross-roads of several major trade routes and by its control of important local commodities. Many areas of southern Mesoamerica lack certain essential resources, such as hard stones and obsidian for making grinding and cutting tools, mineral salt, and fine clay for making pottery. These items were necessary to maintain the agricultural way of life led by most of the area's ancient inhabitants. As a result, they had to be obtained through trade, sometimes over great distances. Kaminaljuyu was blessed with plentiful sources of all these items and was situated in a commanding position to control the movement of goods from the Pacific Coast and other potential sources for desirable trade goods (Parsons 5).

The status and power of Kaminaljuyu's upper class was based on their control over the area's resources and trade contacts. All elite households were engaged in the production of sumptuary goods for trade during this period, whereas no non-elite dwelling was used for that purpose (Michels 151, 161, 163). Workshops have been identified which were engaged in the production of ritual and luxury pottery, jade, steatite, colorful mineral pigments, quartz crystal, mica sheets, and cacao

beans (chocolate). The exclusive nature of such valuable items emphasized the prestige of the elite household.

As mentioned above, a characteristic of developing international trade centers is the appearance of a powerful king to administer the complexities of foreign trade negotiations. At Kaminaljuyu the expansion of trade was accompanied by a corresponding rise in the power of its ruler. Carved stone monuments, called stelae, progressively emphasized a single standing king dressed in elaborate royal regalia which visually displayed his wealth and status (Parsons 96).

A good example of such a monument at Kaminaljuyu is Stela 11. This stone carving depicts a ruler standing beneath the image of a feathered serpent deity, the most important god of the Guatemalan highlands. The royal status of the individual is marked by his jade ear ornaments and by the tree growing from his headdress, representing the great "Tree of Life" which was believed to stand at the center of the cosmos (Schele and Miller 108-09). By wearing this tree, the ruler declared himself to be the axis around which the universe revolved. He also wears the head of the serpent-bird as a mask, indicating his power as representative of that god on earth.

The kings at Kaminaljuyu attained unprecedented levels of wealth and prestige during this period as demonstrated by their tombs. Structure 5 seems to have been the preferred royal burial site during the first century BC. It was the largest structure at Kaminaljuyu, originally measuring over 20 meters in height, and approximately 70 meters by 90 meters at its base. Its importance is evident not only by its tremendous size, but also by its position at the center of a cluster of smaller temples and elite platform dwellings (Michels 145).

The royal burial designated as Tomb 1 was dug into the top floor of this temple-pyramid in a series of terraces to form a rectangular chamber. The king buried within this tomb was surrounded by a wealth of offerings and gifts, including finely carved imported stone vessels. These were heaped all around the body and against the tomb walls until no further space was

available. The importance of the king's foreign trade contacts is evident in the numerous offering vessels which are of foreign origin or inspiration (Kidder, Jennings, and Shook 68–69). Also found within the chamber was the skeleton of an adult male, apparently sacrificed to attend the king on his long journey to the hereafter. The practice of human sacrifice further emphasized the ruler's prestigious status.

Lowland Maya

The Maya Indians of the lowland forest region of Guatemala and Belize were on the opposite end of this system of international trade. Their lands lacked such fundamentally important resources as stone for grinding grain, obsidian for making cutting tools and weapons, and mineral salt for preserving meat and fish. As a result, the inhabitants of the region were forced to obtain these necessary items from foreign sources through long-distance trade. The very survival of the expanding population of the lowland Maya area depended on an efficient system of obtaining these goods.

In the first century BC, when the international trade network was spreading at a rapid rate throughout Mesoamerica, the lowland Maya enthusiastically joined in. In fact, they may have been one of the principal groups which fostered its remarkable success, providing an outlet for the exportation of goods from such communities as Kaminaljuyu (Jones 11; see also Parsons 5). Emphasis on long-distance trade led to the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few merchants and rulers, and this soon led to the development of economically divided classes. Eighty-nine percent of elite burials in the central Maya area contained valuable imported goods, while only eighteen percent of commoner burials showed evidence of foreign items of any kind, none of which could be considered sumptuaries (Rathje, Gregory, and Wiseman 166). Because of the ritual nature of most elite items, their use was restricted to Maya royal families, as well as those members of the upper class which entered into a supportive, covenant relationship with the king.

Approximately a dozen kingdoms developed in the lowland Maya area in the first century before Christ. At each of these sites, simple village populations that had been stable for hundreds of years were moved into new lower class slum areas. The abandoned dwellings of the poor were then levelled and replaced with huge temple and palace structures. This massive building program transformed the economic and social fabric of the region for the next thousand years. As new kingdoms grew and proliferated, free territories either joined the growing network of economically-interconnected states or were swallowed up by it (Schele and Friedel 59–60).

These new kingdoms emphasized their power not only through the impressive size of their architecture, but also in the use of temple façades adorned with images of royal authority. Linda Schele and Mary Ellen Miller note: “These huge architectural projects and the strategies of political control they embody must have been created to defend an elite class in a ranked, complex social structure” (105). The royal symbols associated with the images decorating Maya temples appear to have been borrowed to some extent from Kaminaljuyu, an important trade partner (Parsons 5, 77). As at Kaminaljuyu, Maya art began to depict kings wearing clothing indicating their elite rank, wealth, and prestige. One of the earliest dated Maya monuments is the Hauberg Stela, portraying the accession of an early king. He stands beneath a huge serpent god, similar to the feathered-serpent deity depicted in the art of Kaminaljuyu. A symbolic tree arches from his right shoulder toward the ground, identifying the king as a manifestation of the sacred “Tree of Life,” the divine center of the cosmos.

Cerros, Belize

The Maya community of Cerros, located in northern Belize, was one of the first to join this growing network of Mesoamerican trade centers and to adopt a stratified society headed by a king. Cerros’ experiment in kingship and interna-

tional economic trade was brief, lasting perhaps only a century, from 50 BC to approximately AD 50. As a result, the effects of new wealth from international trade may be studied here without the imposition of later developments obscuring the archaeological record.

Prior to the first century BC, Cerros was a typical Maya fishing and farming community, consisting of a small group of simple adobe and thatch dwellings. Its location on the tip of a peninsula on Chetumal Bay made it an attractive site as an international trade center. It had ready access to coastal traffic from the Yucatan Peninsula to the north as well as other Maya coastal communities to the south. It also stood at the mouth of a major river leading inland to the Maya heartland. As the Mesoamerican trade network expanded, Cerros rapidly grew into an important way-station for the movement of goods by boat between the coast and the interior. One of the first constructions evident at the site was a docking facility (Weaver 146).

When Cerros began to rise to an important position within the international exchange network, its tiny rude huts were demolished to make room for a more impressive ceremonial and civic center. Peasant families moved away to rebuild their homes in an area ringing what had been the village center. David Freidel, who excavated the site, was impressed by the abrupt appearance of a class society during this phase:

The amount of wealth and rank a family possessed suddenly became strikingly apparent in the type of new home they could afford to construct. Some individuals were able to build their new houses on raised platforms of considerable size, while other families lived on small platforms, and still others had homes at ground level. (Schele and Friedel 119–20)

After the site was leveled, a layer of clean white earth mixed with imported jade jewelry, as well as offerings of water lilies and other flowers was spread over the ruins. A foundation of flat hard stones was then placed on the site to support an impressive new temple, Structure 5C-2nd, built in a style typical

of the period in other newly-founded Maya royal centers. The temple had a broad stairway leading to a small sanctuary on top supported by four wooden columns representing the World Trees which the Maya believed stood at the cardinal points of the universe, spanning the heavens (Schele and Friedel 107, 109). Flanking the stairway were four huge stucco masks which had identical royal ear ornaments as those adorning the feathered serpent deity on Altar 10 at Kaminaljuyu (Parsons 77). The masks to the left of the stairway represented the rising sun and Venus and those to the right the setting sun and Venus, both symbols of kingship in Maya theology. A platform was built on the stairway located between these masks where a ruler could stand or conduct public ceremonies surrounded by the celestial symbols of his divine rule. It was a dramatic visual declaration of the king's position as the overseer of cosmic order.

An even larger pyramid temple was built to the east of Structure 5C-2nd which supported a royal tomb chamber. No king was ever buried here, however. Soon after the tomb was constructed, the institution of kingship, class differentiation, and monumental architecture ceased at Cerros. Great fires were lit around the masks decorating the temples and layers of white clay were spread over the ashes. Valuable imported jade ornaments, undoubtedly belonging to the nobility, were smashed and mixed with the clay. The ceremonial center was then abandoned and its inhabitants resumed their lives as simple fishermen and farmers.

The failure of Cerros' kingship and class differentiation was apparently economic, just as was its inception. Not long after Cerros became a kingdom, the inland Maya trade centers began a campaign to dominate the overland trade routes to the north, thus bypassing the necessity of transporting goods upriver from its port (Weaver 147). As a result, the position of Cerros as an intermediate trade center came to an abrupt end. Without the need to administer the complexities of international trade and without access to the wealth it had briefly provided,

the elite hierarchy quickly collapsed. This dramatically demonstrates the link between the rise and fall of elite classes and long-distance trade profits.

Struggle for Power of Elite Classes Within Nephite Society

It is not known what the poorer classes of ancient America thought of these economic trends. Within Nephite society, however, prophets counselled against class-based societies, the institution of kingship, the establishment of priestcraft, and the accumulation of wealth. Consequently, the Church constituted a threat to the new economic order.

Religion and commerce were not independent concepts in ancient trading societies. Not only were the peasant classes denied access to lucrative foreign trade, they were also banned in most communities from participating in elite religious rituals and institutions. It has already been shown that in ancient America, temple precincts were established in central areas set aside for the exclusive use of the elite classes. This brings to mind the Zoramites, who discriminated against their poor forbidding them to worship on their temple towers:

Behold, what shall these my brethren do, for they are despised by all men because of their poverty, yea, and more especially by our priests; for they have cast us out of our synagogues which we have labored abundantly to build with our own hands; and they have cast us out because of our exceeding poverty; and we have no place to worship our God. (Alma 32:5)

The king-men under Amalickiah specifically attacked the Church as a threat to their plans for power (Alma 46:10). This situation only worsened with time. Shortly before the appearance of the resurrected Savior in the New World, apostate high priests attempted to set up a king in alliance with officials who were in a position to administer the government's economic policies (3 Nephi 6:27, 30). As a result, the Church as a moderating social influence was effectively destroyed:

And thus there became a great inequality in all the land, insomuch that the church began to be broken up; yea, insomuch that in the thirtieth year the church was broken up in all the land save it were among a few of the Lamanites who were converted unto the true faith. (3 Nephi 6:14)

Rise of Secret Societies

The establishment of international trade was not always a peaceful process. In addition to a system of mutually-cooperative trade alliances, a number of ancient American societies found it desirable to engage in plunder and warfare as an instrument of state economic policy. Trade served in many cases as a pretext to conquest. An example of such a warlike state in the first century BC was Monte Albán, a fortified mountain sanctuary in the state of Oaxaca, Mexico. In addition to far-reaching trade contacts, including Kaminaljuyu, Monte Albán practiced a systematic campaign of conquest to control its trade routes and ensure its economic strength through forced tribute collection.

Building J, constructed on the Main Plaza of Monte Albán, served as a monument to the city's military victories. It was decorated with over 50 carved stones depicting towns and villages defeated by its armies. From 100 BC to AD 100, Monte Albán was able to conquer an area of some 30,000 square kilometers (Marcus 137).

As described in the Book of Mormon, the formation of trade networks for the accumulation of wealth was also accompanied by the rise of violent groups such as the Gadianton Robbers who sought control for personal gain. The Gadianton Society was a far more powerful and complex group than their description as robbers implies. They often commanded huge armies capable of defying the armed forces of both the Nephite and Lamanite nations (Hel 11:32; 3 Nephi 2:11–13; 4:1). They laid entire cities to waste (3 Nephi 2:11). Despite a military alliance with the Lamanites, the Nephites were threatened with total destruction by Gadianton forces (3 Nephi 2:13).

The motivation of the Gadiantons was primarily economic and tied to the new-found wealth flowing into Nephite society through international trade. They therefore operated both among the Nephites and the Lamanite kingdoms to the south:

Therefore they began to set their hearts upon their riches; yea, they began to seek to get gain that they might be lifted up one above another; therefore they began to commit secret murders, and to rob and to plunder, that they might get gain. . . . And now it had come to pass that there were many, even among the Nephites, of Gadianton's band. But behold, they were more numerous among the more wicked part of the Lamanites. And they were called Gadianton's robbers and murderers. (Hel 6:17–18)

The establishment of an elitist society led by a powerful king is characteristic of ancient communities participating in foreign trade networks. Seizure of the reigns of government was thus an essential part of Gadianton strategy in controlling wealth (Hel 7:5). From the first appearance of the Gadianton Society in the Book of Mormon record, the chief aim of their founders, such as Gadianton and Kishkumen, was to obtain power and wealth by political control (Hel 1:9, 2:8; 6:15,18–19; 9:6). When they succeeded in usurping the leadership of the Nephite nation, they quickly moved to adopt a class-differentiated society based on wealth and priestcraft:

And thus they did obtain the sole management of the government, insomuch that they did trample under their feet and smite and rend and turn their backs upon the poor and the meek, and the humble followers of God. (Hel 6:39)

The Book of Mormon specifically describes the Gadiantons themselves as engaging in the trade networks so as to more directly control the source of obtaining power and riches:

And it came to pass that the robbers of Gadianton did spread over all the face of the land. . . . And gold and silver did they lay up in store in abundance, and did traffic in all manner of traffic. (4 Nephi 1:46)

So great was the appeal of this system of accumulating wealth that the majority of the Nephite people at various times chose

to participate in their system of trade, murder, and political intrigue (Hel 6:21, 38).

Conclusion

The century prior to the arrival of Jesus Christ in the New World was a time of great economic and social changes among the Nephites and Lamanites. One of the most significant motivating factors for these changes was the establishment of far-reaching international trade which provided the means of amassing an unprecedented amount of wealth. This desire for gain resulted in the progressive rise of new elite classes and a renewed interest in setting up kings to oversee the conduct of foreign trade. Although this trend was vigorously opposed by the prophets of the Church the opportunity for gain often proved too great a temptation for the Nephite nation. The rapid rise to prominence of "robber" societies such as the Gadiantons serves to emphasize the powerful lure of the profitable trade system. As a result, the Nephite people were under tremendous pressure to alter their society to conform with the new economic realities of their homeland, to abandon the economically inefficient system of rule by judges, and to allow the rise of an elite class enriched by the spoils of imported wealth. Only the destruction of the wicked prior to the visit of the resurrected Jesus Christ to the Americas ended this dangerous trend. His visit created a society which "had all things common among them; therefore there were not rich and poor, bond and free, but they were all made free, and partakers of the heavenly gift" (4 Nephi 1:3).

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Leitwörter in Helaman and 3 Nephi

15

Ronald D. Anderson

Introduction

According to Robert Alter, repetition of a word or phrase is one of the most common literary devices used in the narrative of the Bible (92). Martin Buber noted this stylistic element and called it *Leitwörter*, a German word meaning “leading words,” “guide words,” or “theme words.” The *Leitwort* theory is that when a word, word-root, or phrase recurs significantly in a text, the reader is able to decipher or grasp the meaning of the text by noting these repetitions and thus can determine its theme as well (Buber 284; Alter 93–95; Fishbane xii). Alter further explained this repetition of key words or key phrases in a text, stating:

The repetition of single words or brief phrases often exhibits a frequency, a saliency, and a thematic significance. . . . The one most prominent device involving the repetition of single words is the use of the *Leitwort*, the thematic key-word, as a way of enunciating and developing the moral, historical, psychological, or theological meanings of the story. (179–180; emphasis added)

Michael Fishbane discusses the phenomenon of *Leitwörter* as follows:

One particular recurrent and transparent technique is the *Leitwort* (theme-word). Because Hebrew words are essentially built around triliteral stems, the same stem may recur in one and the same text in different nominal, verbal, and adjectival forms. Such repetition,

Ronald D. Anderson is a part-time instructor in Ancient Scripture at Brigham Young University; he is on leave from the Church seminary and institute program.

where it occurs, give a text special texture; and it also serves to highlight major and minor features of content. A reader may thus be guided or provoked towards certain interpretations on the basis of theme-words recurrent in one or several texts which are thereby brought into association. And what applies to words is equally pertinent with respect to larger themes or motifs. Through such stylistic means, latent networks of intra- and inter- textual meaning may be perceived by an interpreter. (xii)

The main function of such *Leitwörter* seems to be to express the principal theme of a story. The narrative thus provides its own interpretation by repetition of what is essential to its understanding (Watson 288; Buber 52).

Leitwörter in the Book of Helaman

In Helaman 5:1–5, Mormon explains that Helaman's sons, Nephi and Lehi, gave up the judgment-seat to preach the word of God for "they *remembered* the words which their father Helaman spake unto them." Mormon then cites a direct quotation from Helaman in which he repeats the word *remember* 13 times in seven verses, thus identifying the theme of his counsel to them.

Behold, my sons, I desire that ye should *remember* to keep the commandments of God. . . . Behold, I have given unto you the names of our first parents . . . that when you *remember* your names ye may *remember* them; and when ye *remember* them ye may *remember* their works; and when ye *remember* their works ye may know how that it is said, and also written, that they were good. . . . O *remember, remember, my sons . . . remember* that there is no other way nor means whereby man can be saved, only through the atoning blood of Jesus Christ . . . *remember* that he cometh to redeem the world . . . and *remember* also the words which Amulek spake . . . that the Lord surely should come to redeem his people . . . 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. . . . (Hel 5:6–12; emphasis added)

Helaman wanted his sons to remember to keep the commandments of God, to remember that Lehi and Nephi, their first parents, were good people and did good works, and he wanted

them to remember Jesus Christ. By naming his sons after their ancestors, he hoped to instill in their lives a memory device that would trigger their remembrance to keep the commandments and to build upon the foundation of Jesus Christ, just as their first parents had.

Stressing the importance of remembering, President Spencer W. Kimball, while speaking to a group of seminary and institute personnel in 1968, stated:

When you look in the dictionary for the most important word, do you know what it is? It could be “remember.” Because all of you have made covenants—you know what to do and you know how to do it—Our greatest need is to remember. That is why everyone goes to sacrament meeting every Sabbath day—to take the sacrament and listen to the priests pray that they . . . may always remember him and keep his commandments which he has given them. . . . Nobody should ever forget to go to sacrament meeting. “Remember” is the word. “Remember” is the program (8).

The root-word *remember* appears over 240 times in the Book of Mormon including expressions such as *remembrance* and *forget not*. That is almost once every other page. Viewing it as a *Leitwort*, *remember* could very well be the word that identifies and summarizes the vital message of the Book of Mormon. It certainly is frequently used in the book of Helaman.

Another example of a *Leitwort* in the book of Helaman is the word *pondering* in chapter 10:

And it came to pass that Nephi went his way towards his own house, *pondering* upon the things which the Lord had shown unto him. And it came to pass as he was thus *pondering*—being much cast down because of the wickedness of the people of the Nephites, their secret works of darkness, and their murderings, and their plunderings, and all manner of iniquities—and it came to pass as he was thus *pondering* in his heart, behold a voice came unto him saying. (vv 2–3; emphasis added)

The repetition of the word *pondering* in these two verses points out the importance of thinking deeply about Jesus Christ and listening to the quiet voice of the Lord.

Another example involves eight verses of scripture within Helaman chapter 11. They contain ten repetitions of the *Leitwörter O Lord*:

O Lord, do not suffer that this people shall be destroyed by the sword; but *O Lord*, rather let there be a famine in the land. . . . *O Lord*, behold this people repenteth. . . . Now, *O Lord*, because of this their humility wilt thou turn away thine anger. . . . *O Lord*, wilt thou turn away thine anger.

O Lord, wilt thou hearken unto me. *O Lord*, thou didst hearken unto my words. Yea, *O Lord* and thou seest that they have repented. . . . And now, *O Lord*, wilt thou turn away thine anger, and try again if they will serve thee? And if so, *O Lord*, thou canst bless them according to thy words which thou hast said. (v 4, 10–16; emphasis added)

Repetition of the phrase *O Lord* reminds the reader that Nephi is praying to the Lord, even pleading with him for his people. The importance and the greatness of God and his mercy are the theme of these verses. The idea that a prophet pleads for and prays on behalf of his people is also emphasized by the use of these *Leitwörter*.

Another example involves several *Leitwörter* spread through the whole of chapter 13 of the book of Helaman. Among the several *Leitwörter* repeated here are the following: *I, saith the Lord, a curse, riches, remember, and your destruction is made sure*. Samuel the Lamanite had received his message of the Lord from an angel:

Therefore, thus *saith the Lord*: Because of the hardness of the hearts of the people of the Nephites, except they repent *I* will take away my word from them, and *I* will withdraw my Spirit from them, and *I* will suffer them no longer, and *I* will turn the hearts of their brethren against them. And four hundred years shall not pass away before *I* will cause that they shall be smitten; yea, *I* will visit them with the sword and with famine and with pestilence. Yea, *I* will visit them in my fierce anger . . . *saith the Lord*. . . . But if ye will repent and return unto the Lord your God *I* will turn away mine anger, *saith the Lord*; yea, thus *saith the Lord* . . . yea, wo unto this great city of Zarahemla; for behold, it is because of those who are righteous that it is saved; yea wo unto this great city, for *I* perceive, *saith the Lord*,

that there are many . . . that will harden their hearts against me, *saith the Lord*. But blessed are they who will repent, for them will *I* spare. But behold, if it were not for the righteous who are in this great city, behold, *I* would cause that fire should come down out of heaven and destroy it. . . . But behold, the time cometh, *saith the Lord*. . . . And behold, a *curse* shall come upon the land, *saith the Lord*. . . . And it shall come to pass, *saith the Lord* . . . because of the great curse of the land. . . . For *I* will, *saith the Lord*. . . . *Cursed* be they who hide not up their treasures unto me. . . . *Cursed* is he because of the *curse* of the land. . . . Because they have set their hearts upon *riches*; and because they have set their hearts upon *riches* . . . *cursed* be they *saith the Lord*. . . . hearken unto the words which *the Lord* *saith*; for behold, he *saith* that ye are *cursed* because of your *riches*, and also are your *riches* *cursed* because ye have set your hearts upon them. . . . Ye do not *remember* the Lord your God in the things with which he hath blessed you, but ye do always *remember* your *riches* . . . for this cause hath the Lord God caused that a *curse* should come upon the land, and also upon your *riches*. . . . Behold, he hath *cursed* the land . . . and behold the time . . . cometh that he *curseth* your *riches* . . . and *your destruction is made sure* . . . *saith the Lord*. . . . O that we had *remembered* the Lord our God in the day that he gave us our *riches* . . . for behold, our *riches* are gone from us . . . because of the curse of the land. . . . For behold the land is *cursed* . . . *your destruction is made sure*. (emphasis added)

The *Leitworte* *I* and *saith the Lord* appear 25 times in this chapter. This emphasizes the theme of the power of God and Jesus Christ. The reader cannot miss the idea that this message was not Samuel the Lamanite's; it was the Lord's.

The other *Leitworte*, *a curse*, *riches*, and *your destruction is made sure*, are all related to each other. The reader is instructed that when people set their hearts on being rich, they will be *cursed*; and unless they repent and return unto Christ, their destruction is made sure. When the *Leitwort* *remember* is used again in Helaman 13:22, the reader is reminded of chapter 5 wherein Helaman wanted his sons to *remember* to keep the commandments of God, to *remember* Lehi and Nephi, their first parents, that they were good people and did good works, and to *remember* that Jesus Christ is the foundation upon which they should build. In chapter 13, Samuel the Lamanite tells the people:

Ye do not *remember* the Lord your God in the things with which he hath blessed you, but ye do always *remember* your riches, not to thank the Lord your God for them; yea your hearts are not drawn out unto the Lord, but they do swell with great pride, unto boasting, and unto great swelling, envyings, strifes, malice, persecutions, and murders, and all manner of iniquities. (v 22; emphasis added)

The result was that their destruction was made sure (vv 23–38). Certainly the *Leitwörter* found in Helaman 13, along with the messages that they accompany, ring loud and clear to us today. They focus our attention on Jesus Christ and emphasize the fact that we are to *remember* to keep the commandments of God, to *remember* to be good and do good works, and to *remember* that Jesus Christ is the foundation upon which we should build.

Leitwörter in 3 Nephi

Similar to his editing in the book of Helaman, Mormon includes *Leitwörter* in 3 Nephi as well to guide his reader to his themes. He notes “that there was a day set apart by the unbelievers, that all those who believed in those traditions [that Christ would soon be born], should be put to death except the sign should come to pass, which had been given by Samuel the prophet” (1:9). Nephi, the son of Nephi, “bowed himself down upon the earth, and cried mightily to his God in behalf of his people” (v 11). It was the day before Christ would be born. Notice the *Leitwort I* again in verses 13 and 14 as the Lord talks to Nephi:

Lift up your head and be of good cheer; for behold the time is at hand, and on this night shall the sign be given, and on the morrow come *I* into the world, to show unto the world that *I* will fulfill all that which *I* have caused to be spoken by the mouth of my holy prophets. Behold, *I* come unto my own, to fulfill all things which *I* have made known unto the children of men from the foundation of the world. (emphasis added)

The effect of the pronoun *I* being used five times in these two verses is to focus the reader’s attention on Jesus Christ and his mission.

In 3 Nephi 9 the Leitwort *I* is also found used in much the same way. Note the similarity beginning with verse three:

Behold, that great city Zarahemla have *I* burned with fire. . . . And behold, that great city Moroni have *I* caused to be sunk in the depths of the sea . . . that great city Moronihah have *I* covered with earth . . . the city of Gilgal have *I* caused to be sunk . . . the city of Onihah . . . Mocom . . . Jerusalem. . . . And waters have *I* caused to come up in the stead thereof . . . the city of Gadiandi . . . Gadiomnah . . . Jacob . . . Gimginno, all these have *I* caused to be sunk . . . And the inhabitants thereof have *I* buried up in the depths of the earth . . . that great city Jacobugath . . . have *I* caused to be burned with fire . . . therefore *I* did cause them to be burned . . . the city of Laman . . . Josh . . . Gad . . . Kishkumen, have *I* caused to be burned with fire. . . . And stoning those whom *I* did send . . . there were none righteous among them, *I* did send down fire and destroy them . . . that the blood of the prophets and the saints whom *I* sent among them. . . . And many great destructions have *I* caused to come upon this land . . . be converted, that *I* may heal you. . . . Yea, verily *I* say unto you . . . whosoever will come, him will *I* receive. . . . Behold, *I* am Jesus Christ the Son of God. *I* created the heavens and the earth, and all things that in them are. *I* was with the Father from the beginning. *I* am in the Father. . . . *I* came unto my own. . . . And as many as have received me, to them have *I* given to become the sons of God; and even so will *I* to as many as shall believe on my name. . . . *I* am the light and the life of the world. *I* am Alpha and Omega . . . yea, your sacrifices and your burnt offerings shall be done away, for *I* will accept none of your sacrifices and your burnt offerings. . . . And whoso cometh unto me with a broken heart and a contrite spirit, him will *I* baptize with fire and with the Holy Ghost. . . . Behold, *I* have come unto the world to bring redemption unto the world, to save the world from sin. Therefore, whoso repenteth and cometh unto me as a little child, him will *I* receive for of such is the kingdom of God. Behold, for such *I* have laid down my life, and have taken it up again; therefore repent, and come unto me ye ends of the earth, and be saved. (emphasis added)

The first-person pronoun *I* is used 31 times in chapter 9. The effect for the reader is the same as it was in 3 Nephi 1 and Helaman 13. The repetition of *I* emphasizes the power of Jesus Christ, that he created the heavens and the earth and that he is in control of this earth. It also focuses the reader's attention on Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

Leitwort as a literary device is used not only in the Ancient East, the Bible, and the Book of Mormon, but it is still used today. In the October 1988 General Conference, President Ezra Taft Benson repeatedly used two phrases that identified his theme and helped him convey his message of flooding the earth with the Book of Mormon:

I challenge the members of the church to participate in the family to family Book of Mormon Program. . . . *I challenge* our mission leaders to show their missionaries how to *challenge* their contacts to read the Book of Mormon and pray about it. . . . *I challenge* our church writers, teachers, and leaders to tell us more Book of Mormon conversion stories that will strengthen our faith and prepare great missionaries. *I challenge* those who are in business and other professions to see that there are copies of the Book of Mormon in their reception rooms. *I challenge* owners of cassette players to play Book of Mormon cassettes from time to time and to listen to them at home and while walking, jogging, or driving. *I challenge* the homes of Israel to display on their walls great quotations and scenes from the Book of Mormon. *I challenge* all of us to prayerfully consider steps that we can personally take to bring this new witness for Christ more fully into our own lives and into a world that so desperately needs it. *I have a vision* of homes alerted. . . . *I have a vision* of home teachers and visiting teachers. . . . *I have a vision* of artists putting into film. . . . *I have a vision* of thousands of missionaries going into the mission field. . . . *I have a vision* of the whole church getting nearer to God by abiding by the precepts of the Book of Mormon. Indeed, *I have a vision* of flooding the earth with the Book of Mormon (5–6; emphasis added).

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The Lamanites—A More Accurate Image

16

Richard O. Cowan

The Book of Mormon is sometimes perceived as portraying the Lamanites only as a cursed and loathsome people—the “bad guys.” This inaccurate perception may actually discourage some Latter-day Saints from wanting to share the Book of Mormon with Lamanites today. In reality, however, the book shows that at times the Lamanites were the more righteous people and predicts that their latter-day descendants have a glorious destiny.

The Great Division

Almost from the beginning of the Book of Mormon record, there was a clear distinction between the righteousness of Nephi and Sam, and the rebellion of their older brothers Laman and Lemuel. For example, Lehi, their father, was concerned about “the stiffneckedness of Laman and Lemuel; for behold they did murmur in many things against their father, because he was a visionary man . . . [and] because they knew not the dealings of that God who had created them” (1 Nephi 2:11–12). Nephi, on the other hand, recorded that he had “great desires to know of the mysteries of God, wherefore, I did cry unto the Lord; and behold he did visit me, and did soften my heart that I did believe all the words which had been spoken by my father; wherefore,

Richard O. Cowan is professor of Church History and Doctrine and director of the Doctrine and Covenants area of the Religious Studies Center at Brigham Young University.

I did not rebel against him like unto my brothers” (1 Nephi 2:16).

When Lehi assigned his sons to return to Jerusalem to obtain the scriptural record on the brass plates, he lamented the continuing rebellion of Laman and Lemuel. Speaking to Nephi, he said: “Thy brothers murmur, saying it is a hard thing which I have required of them; but behold I have not required it of them, but it is a commandment of the Lord” (1 Nephi 3:5). Nephi’s response to this assignment was quite different: “I will go and do the things which the Lord hath commanded, for I know that the Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth them” (v 7). After Laman had failed in his attempt to obtain the plates, he was ready to return empty-handed to his father in the wilderness. Nephi, on the other hand, declared with an oath that he would not return until he had accomplished their assigned mission (vv 11–15). Similarly, about eight years later when Nephi announced that he had been commanded to build a ship to cross the ocean, Laman and Lemuel called him a fool for thinking that he could accomplish such a thing. Here again Nephi demonstrated his faith, testifying that God, who had led the Israelites out of Egypt, could instruct him on how to build a ship (17:17–29, 51).

Both Lehi and Nephi foresaw a bleak future for Laman and his followers. In his dream of the tree of life, Lehi was gratified to note that his wife Sariah, together with his sons Sam and Nephi, responded favorably to his invitation to partake of the precious fruit, which grew on the tree. He was sorrowed, however, when he saw that Laman and Lemuel, “would not come unto me and partake of the fruit” (1 Nephi 8:14–18). Nephi was privileged to receive by revelation an interpretation of his father’s dream and also to see in vision events that would later transpire. Speaking of the descendants of Nephi’s brethren, an angel declared, “Behold these shall dwindle in unbelief” (1 Nephi 12:22). Nephi then comments, “I beheld . . . they

became a dark, and loathsome, and a filthy people, full of idleness, and all manner of abominations” (v 23).

Near the end of Lehi’s life, he blessed his sons and prophesied the consequences of their differing ways of life. Speaking to Laman and Lemuel, he regretted that, because of the hardness of their hearts, they would be “cut off and destroyed forever,” and that a curse would come upon them because they would be “led according to the will and captivity of the devil” (2 Nephi 1:17–18). To Jacob, his first son born in the wilderness while they were on their way to the promised land, he lamented: “In thy childhood thou hast suffered afflictions and much sorrow, because of the rudeness of thy brethren.” Nevertheless, Lehi promised this righteous son, “Thy soul shall be blessed, and thou shalt dwell safely with thy brother, Nephi” (2:1, 3).

The actual division of Lehi’s descendants into two contending groups occurred nearly three decades after they had left Jerusalem. Sometime after their father died, Laman and Lemuel sought to kill Nephi, but he was warned by the Lord to flee from them. As a result, Nephi led his family, Zoram and Sam, and their families, his younger brothers Jacob and Joseph, his sisters, and all others who “believed in the warnings and the revelations of God” and fled into a new land which they named the Land of Nephi. They came to be known as “the people of Nephi” or “Nephites,” and they kept God’s commandments, worked industriously to construct a temple and other buildings, and prospered in their agricultural pursuits (2 Nephi 5:10–17; compare Alma 3:11).

The people who followed Laman and Lemuel “hardened their hearts against [God], that they had become like unto a flint” (2 Nephi 5:21). The Lord, therefore, caused a “sore cursing” to come upon them “because of their iniquity.” They suffered spiritual death as they were cut off from his presence and “because of their cursing which was upon them they did become an idle people, full of mischief and subtlety, and did seek in the

wilderness for beasts of prey” (2 Nephi 5:21, 24). This group became known as “Lamanites.”

The Lord also placed upon these Lamanites the mark of a dark skin. Nephi recorded: “. . . that they might not be enticing unto my people the Lord God did cause a skin of blackness [Hebrew uses the same word for “blackness” and “darkness”] to come upon them” and promised that “they shall be loathsome unto thy people, save they shall repent of their iniquities.” The Lord warned that anyone who mingled with the wicked would also become subject to their curse (2 Nephi 5:21–23). The Lord wanted to protect the righteous “that they might not mix and believe in incorrect traditions which would prove their destruction.” In fact, any Nephite who did mingle with the Lamanites “did bring the same curse upon his seed” (Alma 3:8–9).

The Lamanite “Dark Ages”

Throughout the next five centuries the image of the Lamanites as portrayed in the Book of Mormon was almost entirely negative. Jacob, for example, reported that all efforts to reclaim them were in vain, “for they delighted in wars and bloodshed” (Jacob 7:24). Enos likewise recorded that the Nephites’ efforts to convert the Lamanites to the gospel failed because the latter had become

wild, and ferocious, and a blood-thirsty people, full of idolatry and filthiness; feeding upon beasts of prey; dwelling in tents, and wandering about in the wilderness with a short skin girdle about their loins and their heads shaven; and their skill was in the bow, and in the cimeter, and the ax. And many of them did eat nothing save it was raw meat; and they were continually seeking to destroy us. (Enos 1:20)

Jarom contrasted the Nephites, whose kings “were mighty men in the faith of the Lord,” with the Lamanites, who “loved murder and would drink the blood of beasts” (Jarom 1:6–7).

One exception to this otherwise negative image occurred when Jacob had to point out to some unrighteous Nephites:

The Lamanites your brethren, whom ye hate because of their filthiness and the cursing which hath come upon their skins, are more righteous than you. . . . Behold, their husbands love their wives, and their wives love their husbands; and their husbands and their wives love their children; and their unbelief and their hatred towards you is because of the iniquity of their fathers; wherefore, how much better are you than they, in the sight of your great Creator? (Jacob 3:5, 7)

The Division Begins to Break Down

For centuries the Nephites and Lamanites had remained essentially separate groups. After 150 BC, however, the Book of Mormon records that increasing numbers defected from one group to the other.

A group of King Noah's wicked priests, who were Nephites led by Amulon, abducted and married Lamanite women and eventually joined that people (Mosiah 20:4–5; 23:30–35). The followers of Amlici, who had sought to become king of the Nephites, joined forces with the Lamanites (Alma 2). Later, Amalikhiah, who also had failed in his attempt to become the Nephites' king, led his followers over to the Lamanites and through murder and treachery became their king (Alma 46–47).

Other groups of Nephite dissenters included the Zoramites and Amalekites, who had been influenced by the anti-Christ Nehor. Often such apostate groups were even more hardened against the Nephites and their beliefs than were the Lamanites and typically brought evil among them (Alma 21:3). "And thus we can plainly discern," historian Mormon later observed, "that after a people have been once enlightened by the Spirit of God, and have had great knowledge of things pertaining to righteousness, and then have fallen away into sin and transgression, they become more hardened, and thus their state becomes worse than though they had never known these things" (24:30).

On the other side, however, between 90–77 BC, Ammon and his three brothers, sons of king Mosiah, went on a very successful mission among the Lamanites. Many among king Lamoni's people declared that "their hearts had been changed;

that they had no more desire to do evil. . . . And as many as did believe were baptized; and they became a righteous people, and they did establish a church among them” (Alma 19:33–35). “And thousands were brought to the knowledge of the Lord, yea, thousands were brought to believe in the traditions of the Nephites. . . . As many of the Lamanites as believed in their preaching, and were converted unto the Lord, never did fall away. For they became a righteous people; they did lay down the weapons of their rebellion, that they did not fight against God any more, neither against any of their brethren” (23:5–7). The record points out that the converts were “actual descendants of Laman and Lemuel,” while those who rejected the gospel generally came from groups that had dissented from the Nephites (24:29).

When the converted Lamanites were persecuted by the unconverted majority, Ammon led them to a refuge in the land of the Nephites. These converts came to be “distinguished for their zeal towards God, and also towards men; for they were perfectly honest and upright in all things; and they were firm in the faith of Christ, even unto the end” (Alma 27:27).

Two thousand of their sons later became a most outstanding example of faithful youth. The prophet Helaman led these young Lamanites into battle in defense of their new homeland. “They were exceedingly valiant for courage, and also for strength and activity; but behold, this was not all—they were men who were true at all times in whatsoever thing they were entrusted. Yea, they were men of truth and soberness, for they had been taught to keep the commandments of God and to walk uprightly before him” (Alma 53:20–21). As they entered battle, “they did not fear death; and they did think more upon the liberty of their fathers than they did upon their lives; yea, they had been taught by their mothers, that if they did not doubt, God would deliver them” (56:47).

A particularly dangerous situation developed for the Nephites in about 35 BC when many of their numbers defected to the Lamanites who were preparing an attack (Hel 4:4, 11–13).

With the help of these dissenters, the Lamanites were able to capture even the Nephite homeland of Zarahemla. Recognizing that iniquity was the true cause of the Nephite crisis, Nephi and Lehi, the sons of Helaman, launched an effort to convert their own people to the gospel. Beginning in the land Bountiful at the north, they preached among all the Nephites and eventually to the Lamanites who were still occupying Zarahemla. As the people responded and repented, prosperity returned (Hel 4:14–15).

In 30 BC, Nephi and Lehi next turned their attention to the main body of Lamanites in the land of Nephi, and thousands were converted. Even Nephite dissenters who had joined the Lamanites were converted back to their own people “to repair unto them the wrongs which they had done” (Hel 5:16–19). As both the Nephites and the Lamanites began living the gospel more fully, peace prevailed and barriers to communication between the two peoples disappeared (6:7). These conditions undoubtedly allowed an even further mixing of the Nephites and Lamanites.

Nephites and Lamanites Swap Roles

Following the preaching of Nephi and Lehi, most of the Lamanites had become converted, “insomuch that their righteousness did exceed that of the Nephites” (Hel 6:1). In fact, “there were many of the Nephites who had become hardened and impenitent and grossly wicked, insomuch that they did reject the word of God” (v 2). Significantly, Lamanites went down to the Nephite homeland in Zarahemla “and did declare unto the people of the Nephites the manner of their conversion, and did exhort them to faith and repentance. . . . And many did preach with exceedingly great power and authority, unto the bringing down many of them into the depths of humility, to be the humble followers of God and the Lamb” (vv 4–5).

In the midst of the prosperity which followed this period, many of the people became so attached to worldly things that

they were even willing to kill for material gain. Consequently, the murderous band established by Kishkumen and Gadianton flourished among both the Nephites and Lamanites.

When the Lamanites found that there were robbers among them they were exceedingly sorrowful; and they did use every means in their power to destroy them off the face of the earth . . . the Lamanites did hunt the band of robbers of Gadianton; and they did preach the word of God among the more wicked part of them, insomuch that this band of robbers was utterly destroyed from among the Lamanites. (Hel 6:20, 37)

The Nephites, on the other hand, tolerated the robbers and “did build them up and support them” allowing them to spread their influence throughout the land, and even to “obtain the sole management of the government” (Hel 6:38–39).

The record states that in 6 BC “the Nephites did still remain in wickedness, yea, in great wickedness, while the Lamanites did observe strictly to keep the commandments of God, according to the law of Moses” (Hel 13:1). It was in this setting that the Lord sent Samuel, a Lamanite, to call the Nephites in the land of Zarahemla to repentance. Although he expounded gospel principles and even prophesied the imminent advent of Jesus Christ into mortality, the Nephites rejected Samuel and he barely escaped with his life. While some casual readers of the Book of Mormon may assume that Samuel was an exception, it is clear from what Samuel says in his prophecy to the Nephites that he was just one of many examples of reversed roles among the Nephites and Lamanites. Samuel had declared that “the more part of them [the Lamanites] are in the path of their duty, and they do walk circumspectly before God . . . and they are striving with unwearied diligence that they may bring the remainder of their brethren to the knowledge of the truth.” Samuel then testified that as many as had been brought to repentance were “firm and steadfast in the faith” (15:5–8).

The Nephites and Lamanites Join Forces

Even following the sign of Christ's birth, wickedness increased among the Nephites and the Gadianton band expanded their power. In response to the robbers' threat, those who were righteous both among the Nephites and the Lamanites found it necessary to unite in AD 13 "for the safety of their lives" (3 Nephi 2:12). The righteous Lamanites came to be numbered among the Nephites: "And their curse was taken from them, and their skin became white like unto the Nephites" (vv 14–15). Thus, there was an even further erosion of the distinction between the descendants of Laman and Nephi.

As materialism increased, however, there continued to be evidence that the righteousness of the Lamanites exceeded that of the Nephites. As a result of class distinctions based on wealth and opportunities for learning, by AD 30 "the church was broken up in all the land *save it were among a few of the Lamanites* who converted unto the true faith" (3 Nephi 6:12–14; emphasis added). Hence, the righteous who were preserved during the three days of darkness at the time of the Savior's crucifixion would have included many of the righteous descendants of Laman and Lemuel as well as of Nephi and Sam.

Following the Savior's marvelous visit to his "other sheep" in America, the people lived in peace and harmony for nearly two centuries. During this "golden age," any remaining distinctions between the former Nephites and Lamanites vanished. "The people were all converted unto the Lord, upon all the face of the land, *both Nephites and Lamanites*, and there were no contentions and disputations among them. . . . And they had all things common among them; therefore there were not rich and poor, bond and free, but they were all made free. . . . *Neither were there Lamanites, nor any manner of -ites*; but they were . . . one" (4 Nephi 1:2–3, 17).

“Lamanites” and “Nephites” Reappear

Unfortunately, this period of peace and unity lasted less than two hundred years after the visit of Christ. At that time “a small part of the people . . . revolted from the church and [*took upon them*] the name of Lamanites; therefore there began to be Lamanites again in the land” (4 Nephi 1:20; emphasis added). By AD 231 there arose a people “*who were called the Nephites, and they were true believers in Christ . . . [and] they who rejected the gospel were called Lamanites.*” Those who rejected the gospel “did not dwindle in unbelief, but they did wilfully rebel against the gospel of Christ” (vv 36–38; emphasis added). Note that the record does not say the descendants of Laman once again rebelled, but rather that those who revolted from the church *chose* to call themselves “Lamanites.” Thus we see that the new “Nephites” and “Lamanites” were distinguished not by pedigree or genealogy, but rather according to whether or not they accepted and lived the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

By AD 367, Mormon recorded: “It is impossible for the tongue to describe, or for man to write a perfect description of the horrible scene of the blood and carnage which was among the people, both of the Nephites and of the Lamanites; and every heart was hardened, so that they delighted in the shedding of blood continually.” He was appalled to report that the Lamanites even sacrificed women and children to idols (Mormon 4:11, 14). Nevertheless, the mark of the dark skin had not yet returned to the wicked. Mormon noted that the remnant of this people would “become a dark, a filthy, and a loathsome people, beyond the description of that which ever hath been amongst us, yea, even that which hath been among the Lamanites” (5:15).

By the time of the final battles at Cumorah in AD 385, the “Nephites” had become so wicked that they were destroyed as a nation. Mormon lamented: “O ye fair ones, how could ye have departed from the ways of the Lord! O ye fair ones, how could ye have rejected that Jesus, who stood with open arms to receive

you! Behold, if ye had not done this, ye would not have fallen” (Mormon 6:17–18).

Who, then, were the “Lamanites” that survived the battle at Cumorah? Because during previous centuries there had been a thorough mixing of Nephites and Lamanites, the survivors were descendants of both Nephi and Laman. Even during the closing days of the Nephite nation, many “deserted over unto the Lamanites” (Moroni 9:24). Hence, although the survivors were identified with “Lamanites,” their heritage was really broader than that of the original Lamanites. Their background included righteous Nephites, courageous Lamanites—such as Helaman’s two thousand warriors and the prophet named Samuel—as well as wicked descendants of Laman. Elder Spencer W. Kimball explained:

The Lamanites are a mixture of many lines. Undoubtedly, there is in their veins the blood of Nephi, Joseph, and Jacob, as well as that of Laman, Lemuel and Sam, and also that of the Mulekites of Judah. . . . The name “Indian” was given to the early possessors of the Americas by Columbus. As they intermarried with the invading European conquerors and nations were formed, they became Mexicans, Peruvians, Bolivians, Guatemalans, and others. But the correct name for *all* the descendants of Lehi and Ishmael is “Lamanite.” This is an *honorable* name. It was the Lord who so designated them, and every descendant of Lehi should proudly say, “I am a Lamanite and I am proud of my heritage.” (“The Lamanites,” 1–2; compare Alma 45:13–14; D&C 3:16–18; 10:48)

The Lamanites’ Destiny and Our Responsibility

Contrary to the opinion of those who may have read the Book of Mormon only superficially or who have not read it at all and formed opinions based on hearsay, it *does not* portray a consistently negative image of the Lamanites. It *does* suggest a glorious future for this choice people. Samuel the Lamanite testified: “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, . . . 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 15:12–13; see also 3 Nephi 5:21–23).

Significantly Latter-day Saints shall have a role in assisting the Lamanites to achieve their destiny. Nephi spoke of the time when the Gentiles would take the Book of Mormon to the remnant of his people:

The gospel of Jesus Christ shall be declared among them; wherefore, they shall be restored unto the knowledge of their fathers, and also to the knowledge of Jesus Christ, which was had among their fathers. And then shall they rejoice; for they shall know that it is a blessing unto them from the hand of God; and their scales of darkness shall begin to fall from their eyes; and many generations shall not pass away among them, save they shall be a pure and a delightsome people. (2 Nephi 30:5–6)

The Lord likewise reminded Joseph Smith that the Lamanites would obtain the

knowledge of a Savior . . . through the testimony of their fathers. . . . For this very purpose are these plates preserved, which contain these records—that the promises of the Lord might be fulfilled, which he made to his people; and that the Lamanites might come to the knowledge of their fathers, and that they might know the promises of the Lord, and that they may believe the gospel and rely upon the merits of Jesus Christ, and be glorified through faith in his name. (D&C 3:16–20)

The Savior declared that “the Lamanites shall blossom as the rose” (49:24). To accomplish this, he has commanded the Latter-day Saints to “go unto the Lamanites and preach my gospel unto them; and inasmuch as they receive thy teachings thou shalt cause my church to be established among them.” (28:8)

Over the years, Church leaders have emphasized the Saints’ responsibility to the Lamanites. “The Lamanites must be brought into the covenant; they must receive the Gospel from us,” declared George Q. Cannon. “We must be their ‘nursing

fathers and their nursing mothers” (Journal of Discourses 22:282). President John Taylor insisted:

The work of the Lord among the Lamanites must not be postponed, if we desire to retain the approval of God. Thus far we have been content simply to baptize them and let them run wild again, but this must continue no longer; the same devoted effort, the same care in instructing, the same organization of priesthood must be introduced and maintained among the house of Lehi as amongst those of Israel gathered from Gentile nations. As yet, God has been doing all, and we comparatively nothing. He has led many of them to us, and they have been baptized, and now we must instruct them further, and organize them into churches with proper presidencies, attach them to our stakes, organization, etc. In one word, treat them exactly, in these respects, as we would and do treat our white brethren. (247)

Speaking of our responsibility to the Lamanites as president of the Church, Spencer W. Kimball asserted, “The Lord’s work in these latter days can in no wise be complete until these children of great promise are brought back into the fold” (“Our Paths” 4).

Elder Delbert L. Stapley recalled how President George Albert Smith had re-emphasized the Church’s responsibility to the Lamanites declaring that, “The day is here for the gospel to go to the Lamanites, and we must never fail them again.” He also noted that President David O. McKay had affirmed that “God would hold us accountable if we failed.” Elder Stapley then emphasized that *only we* “have the authentic record which furnishes the true origin of the American Indians, their history and God’s work and gospel teachings among them. Great are the promises of the Lord unto the Indians, which spiritual blessings,” he stressed, “this people [the Latter-day Saints] alone hold the keys, rights, and powers to grant and bestow upon them” (Stapley 417).

In 1947, Elder Spencer W. Kimball envisioned the Lamanites’ glorious future. He saw them as leaders in business, law, government, the arts, literature, and in the Church. “I saw the Church growing in rapid strides and I saw wards and stakes organized. I saw stakes by the hundreds [and] a temple” (Van

Orden 3). The first truly “Lamanite” stake was organized in Mexico City in 1961, and by 1989, there were 100 stakes in Mexico alone (Hart 3). In 1983 a temple was dedicated there, and within a few years one half dozen temples were opened in predominantly Lamanite areas of Latin America and Polynesia. In 1990, 58% of the Church’s 330,877 converts were baptized in Latin America.

The Lamanites truly are a people of destiny. When Church members more accurately appreciate the image and more fully understand the teachings of the Book of Mormon concerning the Lamanites, they should not feel the least hesitancy or embarrassment about sharing this book and its message with the descendants of these people. On the contrary, they should be eager to fulfill their responsibility to do so.

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*Secret Covenant
Teachings of Men and
the Devil in Helaman
Through 3 Nephi 8*

17

Victor L. Ludlow

The title page of the Book of Mormon records that a major purpose of this scripture is “To show unto the remnant of the House of Israel what great things the Lord hath done for their fathers; and *that they may know the covenants of the Lord*, that they are not cast off forever” (emphasis added). Thus, the Book of Mormon is intended to teach God’s chosen people about their covenant relationships with the Lord. The Book of Mormon prophets not only teach the Nephites about their covenant relationship with God, but they also record some covenant promises made by government leaders to each other. Furthermore, they instruct future readers about the origins and dangers of secret covenants with Satan and his followers.

Of the 154 references to “covenant” in the Book of Mormon, 113 of them explain some promises made between God and his children on the earth. Most of the remaining references describe honorable promises made between leaders and individuals, usually to end periods of conflict. But a third and smallest category of passages contains 17 references to evil, secret covenants made between men and the devil. Fifteen of these secret covenant references are found in the book of

Victor L. Ludlow is associate professor of Ancient Scripture and director of Bible Studies in the Religious Studies Center at Brigham Young University.

Helaman and the first chapters of 3 Nephi, where all three types of covenants are mentioned (see Alma 37:27, 29 for the other two secret covenant references). In a similar pattern, of the 41 “oath” references in the Book of Mormon, 20 of them are positive promises openly made between individuals and leaders while 9 of them are righteous oaths made with God or his servants, and the other 12 are negative vows entered into with secret combinations.

Ironically, when Helaman received stewardship over the records of the prophets, his father told him not to divulge the secret oaths and covenants found on the plates of Ether (Alma 37:27–29). Later, Helaman would witness the resurgence of secret covenants among his own people, but the knowledge of those covenants did not come from him or the records under his charge—instead the devil conspired anew with the wicked leaders of the time. The patterns of their origin and the examples of the destruction they wreaked upon the people provide insights for us today, because we have been warned that similar secret combinations and covenants will develop among the enemies of the righteous in the last days.

Meaning of “Covenant”

Before we start our discussion of secret covenants, it will be helpful to come to an understanding of what the word “covenant” and the concept “covenant making” mean. The first two definitions in Webster’s dictionary are both very appropriate to the covenant context within the Book of Mormon. First, Webster defines the word “covenant” as “a binding or solemn agreement by two or more persons, parties, etc.” (Compare BD 651). Covenants in the Book of Mormon are always binding or solemn agreements, whether they represent a vertical (God-to-person) relationship binding together Heavenly Father and individuals or a horizontal (person-to-person) relationship in a solemn oath between two people. Indeed, the Satanic

covenants were mainly horizontal and so serious that physical death was to be inflicted on those who broke them.

The second definition of “covenant” amplifies the vertical aspect. Webster defines covenants also as “the promises of God to man, usually carrying with them conditions to be fulfilled by man, as recorded in the Bible.” From this definition, we learn that covenants are conditional; they are promises dependent upon people’s individual and collective behavior as recorded in the scriptures. Unfortunately, Satan tries to replicate God’s covenants with his own set of conditions, all of them destructive, as he works as a “Father of Deceit” among the children of men.

The language roots of the Old Testament indicate that the ancient meanings of “covenant making” involved symbolic acts and customary rituals. For example, when two parties came to a covenantal agreement, they could indicate it through an unusual act—such as cutting the throat of an animal to be used either as a sacrificial offering or as the main dish for their feast of celebration. One of the Book of Mormon settings where “cutting” comes close to describing a symbolic covenant action is found in Alma 46:21–22 when the people rent or tore their garments or robes as a token that they would not forsake the Lord their God. Satan also directed his followers in the secret combinations to use a knife or sword in cutting/stabbing the flesh of their victims (Hel 9:6).

The Five Steps of Covenant Making

Moses, in the book of Deuteronomy, presents the oldest record we have of covenant making which continues into later dispensations. This process can be divided into the five steps, which are the same steps that a sovereign ruler would use to establish a covenant or treaty relationship with his vassals in the ancient Near East. These same five steps exemplify the covenant process between the Heavenly Sovereign of this earth

and his children, particularly as demonstrated through baptism and the temple ordinances:

1. Historical background = Introducing the covenant parties and recounting past relationships and promises
2. Stipulations = Listing the general and specific expectations of either party
3. Blessings and Curses = Announcing the possible consequences (blessings/rewards and curses/punishments)
4. Witnesses = Verifying the contract through earthly and heavenly observers
5. Remembrance = Recording a review, revision, and renewal process

We will see that all five of these steps are found among the imitation secret covenants of wicked men as recorded in Helaman and 3 Nephi.

The following chart shows all the “covenant” and secret “oath” references in this part of the Book of Mormon:

“COVENANT” REFERENCES IN HELAMAN AND 3 NEPHI 1–8:			
*	Helaman	1:11	covenant to protect Kishkumen, the murderer
*		1:12	Kishkumen and his secret band
*		2:3	Kishkumen’s band seeks Helaman’s death
* ;		6:21	a growing covenant band of robbers
**		6:22	signs and words of the secret band of robbers
* ;		6:25	Alma’s warning not to reveal secret covenants
* ;		6:26	Satanic origin of the “new” secret covenants
* ;	Helaman	6:30	the works and secret covenants of the devil
†	3 Nephi	5:4	Lamanites covenant to commit no more killings: set free
†		5:5	Lamanites who don’t covenant to cease killings: punished

‡‡‡	5:25	Lord's covenants with house of Jacob:
‡‡		mentioned five times in one verse
†	6:3	covenant by reformed robbers to keep peace in the land
***	6:28	evil men covenant with Satan against the righteous
*	6:29	covenant against the Lord's people and the laws of the land
*	6:30	covenant to destroy the legal government
*	7:11	opposition to those of the secret covenant band
‡	=	References to righteous/vertical covenants
†	=	References to positive/ horizontal covenants
*	=	References to negative/ "secret" covenants
i	=	References to negative/ "secret" oaths

Before we look at these secret covenants, we will first evaluate the one verse in this section of the Book of Mormon which refers to God's covenant promises with Abraham. In 3 Nephi 5:25, we read that Abraham's posterity is promised a full knowledge of God's covenants with the house of Jacob. In fact, in this one verse, the root "covenant" will appear five times, more than in any other single verse of scripture! Mormon indicates:

And as he [the Lord] hath *covenanted* with all the house of Jacob, even so shall the *covenant* wherewith he hath *covenanted* with the house of Jacob be fulfilled in his own due time, unto the restoring all the house of Jacob unto the knowledge of the *covenant* that he hath *covenanted* with them. (3 Nephi 5:25; emphasis added)

Some Book of Mormon insights into this covenant were presented earlier in 1 and 2 Nephi (see 1 Nephi 22 and 2 Nephi chapters 3, 10, and 29). But how is a knowledge of these covenants going to come to Jacob's descendants in the last days? Later in 3 Nephi, the resurrected Lord answers this question and gives further details about his covenant promises with the house of Israel in two important discourses: The Law and the Covenant Discourse (3 Nephi chapters 15 and 16), and

The Covenant People Discourse (3 Nephi 20:10–23:5; see also Ludlow).

These and other marvelous covenant teachings to be found later in the Book of Mormon are implied in the promise of Mormon as recorded in 3 Nephi 5:25, that the house of Jacob will come to a knowledge of their covenant relationship with God.¹ Mormon is speaking with inspired hindsight as he gives this promise. He already knows the covenant teachings of the resurrected Savior which he is going to record later on his gold plates.

Although only one verse in this section of the Book of Mormon specifically mentions God's covenants with his children, that verse contains the important promise that the house of Jacob will eventually come to a full knowledge of their covenant relationship.

The Secret Covenants of Men and the Devil

As indicated earlier, 15 of the 23 covenant references in Helaman through 3 Nephi 8 relate to secret vows made between men and Satan. These references are found in 12 verses. Analyzing these specific verses will tell us much about secret, evil vows. We will evaluate the key secret covenant elements in each verse and also highlight a modern manifestation of these elements in our contemporary setting. We will also identify the specific covenant steps in each set of passages. Studying the secret covenant elements and steps in these verses will, in turn, help us understand the motives and techniques of evil people and Satan as they conspire against God and his children today.

¹ Later in 3 Nephi, Mormon adds his own testimony to the covenant teachings of the Savior that he has recorded. In chapter 29, Mormon promises that after the Book of Mormon comes forth, the people will no longer say that the Lord delays his coming to the children of Israel. The prophet pronounces judgements upon those who deny the Lord's doings and those who persecute Israel (vv 6–8). Mormon testifies that no one can hinder the Lord from fulfilling the covenant which he has made with the house of Israel (v 9; later important teachings about covenant promises to Israel in the last days are in Mormon 5, 8; Ether 4, 13; and Moroni 7, 10).

The passages start in the first chapter of Helaman when contentions arise among the people as they try to select one of the sons of Pahoran as his successor after his death. We have capitalized each use of the word covenant for emphasis:

And he went unto those that sent him, and they all entered into a COVENANT, yea, swearing by their everlasting Maker, that they would tell no man that Kishkumen had murdered Pahoran.

Therefore, Kishkumen was not known among the people of Nephi, for he was in disguise at the time that he murdered Pahoran. And Kishkumen and his band, who had COVENANTED with him, did mingle themselves among the people, in a manner that they all could not be found; but as many as were found were condemned unto death. (Hel 1:11–12)

The key elements and covenant steps are highlighted in the following chart:

Secret Covenant Verses 1 & 2 = Helaman 1:11–12

KEY ELEMENTS:

SECRECY—To avoid consequences of actions, evil people try to defy justice as they “glory in their works for a season” (compare Moses 5:31—murder to get gain).

IRONY—Their Satanic oath is sworn in the name of God.

GROUP GOAL—They want to kill the people in authority over them [if they could, they would kill the ultimate chief judge—Christ].

DISGUISE—Secret combinations encourage “wolves in sheep’s clothing;” on the surface, evil and good are hard to distinguish; indeed, Satan can appear as an angel of light.

MODERN MANIFESTATIONS—We don’t “rat” on sinners, especially if their goals are the same as ours.

The wicked can disguise themselves in the world; as LDS become more materialistic and image oriented, they become virtually indistinguishable from Satan’s followers.

COVENANT STEPS IN THESE VERSES:

1. **Historical context**—Contention among the three sons of Pahoran: followers of one son (Paanchi), frustrated and angry, send assassin to kill Pahoran, the son elected by the people to be chief judge and governor
2. **Stipulations**—Secrecy
4. **Witnesses**—Band of men who sent Kishkumen

A few years later, Kishkumen and his secret band sought to kill the prophet, Helaman, who had recently been selected as the chief judge:

But behold, Kishkumen, who had murdered Pahoran, did lay wait to destroy Helaman also; and he was upheld by his band, who had entered into a COVENANT that no one should know his wickedness. (Hel 2:3)

A few new key elements of secret covenants become apparent in this passage. These elements and some additional attributes of covenant steps are shown in the following chart:

Secret Covenant Verse 3 = Helaman 2:3

KEY ELEMENTS:

TARGETS—The wicked seek to destroy anyone who may know of their wickedness (especially those with a spiritual gift of discernment).

MODERN MANIFESTATION—The wicked find safety in numbers and fear in disclosure; a people's righteousness will thwart a small secret combination.

COVENANT STEPS IN THIS VERSE:

2. **Stipulations**—secrecy, further murder; desire for the office of chief judgeship and political spoils
4. **Witnesses**—secret band of followers

The band of Kishkumen, also known as the Gadianton robbers, were eventually chased into the wilderness where they died out. About 25 years later, a new band of robbers began to

follow Satanic influences as secret covenants were established again:

But behold, Satan did stir up the hearts of the more part of the Nephites, insomuch that they did unite with those bands of robbers, and did enter into their COVENANTS and their oaths, that they would protect and preserve one another in whatsoever difficult circumstances they should be placed, that they should not suffer for their murders, and their plunderings, and their stealings.

And it came to pass that they did have their signs, yea, their secret signs, and their secret words; and this that they might distinguish a brother who had entered into the COVENANT, that whatsoever wickedness his brother should do he should not be injured by his brother, nor by those who did belong to his band, who had taken this COVENANT. (Hel 6:21–22)

Murdering, stealing, and all manner of wickedness characterized this growing band of robbers as they sought for increased power. Some key elements and covenant steps of their secret combination are seen in the following chart:

Secret Covenant Verses 4 & 5 = Helaman 6:21–22

KEY ELEMENTS:

ANARCHY—The wicked have a total disregard for the law and authority; the defenseless feel they have to band with others in order to survive.

ATTITUDES—A type of ultimate humanism develops as people look to other mortals (instead of God) for help and security; they also try to avoid punishment and suffering as you set up another system of “laws” and rule by the “arm of flesh.”

IMITATION—Satan introduces a blasphemous replica of the Lord’s covenant system of signs and tokens.

BROTHERHOOD—It is easy to be accepted by fellow conspirators.

MODERN MANIFESTATIONS—People try to follow the ways of the world and “get away with it.” This is much like modern street gangs and drug circles.

People follow the peer or “in” group and seek their acceptance.

COVENANT STEPS IN THESE VERSES:

1. **Historical context**—c. 25 years later—Gadianton band is found out, flees into the wilderness; Lamanites take land of Zarahemla; church dwindles but some missionary success, esp. among the Lamanites; “peace and prosperity” in the land; new murdering of the chief judges
2. **Stipulations**—protect and preserve one another; no punishments; secret signs and words
3. **Blessings/curses**—desire to get gain (v. 17) with no punishment; any disclosure of secrets results in trial and “justice” by the band
4. **Witnesses**—many Nephites, “brothers”
5. **Renewal**—expansion among new and more people

The source for these secret covenants was Satan, who had enticed Gadianton, as seen in the next set of verses:

Now behold, it is these secret oaths and COVENANTS which Alma commanded his son should not go forth unto the world, lest they should be a means of bringing down the people unto destruction.

Now behold, those secret oaths and COVENANTS did not come forth unto Gadianton from the records which were delivered unto Helaman; but behold, they were put into the heart of Gadianton by that same being who did entice our first parents to partake of the forbidden fruit—. (Hel 6:25–26)

The increasing power of Satan over these secret covenant makers is seen in the following chart:

Secret Covenant Verses 6 & 7 = Helaman 6:25–26

KEY ELEMENTS:

HUMAN NATURE—Satan’s expectations are easier to follow than God’s commandments.

GUILT BY ASSOCIATION—The longer people are exposed to evil, the more likely they will succumb to it.

BONDAGE—Once people are on the path to spiritual destruction, it is hard to turn back without losing face and “life.”

FALSE PROMISES—Satan’s covenants seem to be based on the premise that individuals can have “anything in this world” if they will follow him.

IRONY—Satan’s plan seems liberating on the surface (do what you want and you won’t be punished), when in reality it is the path to bondage; God’s plan seems to be restrictive (all those commandments)

MODERN MANIFESTATIONS—People believe the idea that following Satan isn’t really going to harm them.

Harboring too much time, talk, and energy on evil doings may lead to evil doings. In a similar manner, Latter-day Saints should not spend time or energy in putting down other religions or worrying overmuch about anti-Mormon movements.

Before long, Satan had great power over the people, as recorded in the next passage:

And behold, it is he who is the author of all sin. And behold, he doth carry on his works of darkness and secret murder, and doth hand down their plots, and their oaths, and their COVENANTS, and their plans of awful wickedness, from generation to generation according as he can get hold upon the hearts of the children of men. (Hel 6:30)

The pervasiveness of Satan’s influence is seen in the next chart:

Secret Covenant Verse 8 = Helaman 6:30

KEY ELEMENTS:

DARKNESS—Satan’s works are symbolized by darkness.

POWER—Satan’s plan is only as strong as its adherents “according as he can get hold.”

CONTINUITY—Wickedness often carries on from one generation to the next; false “traditions” are one of Satan’s most powerful tools because if a society is already evil, he does not have to work as hard to have his methods and secrets passed on (D&C 74:4; 93:39; 123:7).

MODERN MANIFESTATION—It is very difficult to break the pattern of sin (such as child abuse continuing into the following generations).

The power and influence of the Gadianton band remained in spite of the great examples, teachings, and warnings of the Nephi, the Nephite prophet, and Samuel, the Lamanite prophet. Famines, wars, and the miraculous signs of the Savior's birth did not eliminate the followers of wickedness and their secret covenants. In fact, the Gadianton leaders and their armies almost gained control of the Nephite lands (3 Nephi 3, 4). Finally, about 50 years after the founding of this latter secret robber band, the Nephites were able to destroy all the wicked, secret combinations (3 Nephi 5:6). Unfortunately, within ten years, a new secret combination of murderers and robbers was established:

And they did enter into a COVENANT one with another, yea, even into that COVENANT which was given by them of old, which COVENANT was given and administered by the devil, to combine against all righteousness. (3 Nephi 6:28)

As seen in the following chart, this new band soon followed the pattern of the earlier secret combinations:

Secret Covenant Verse 9 = 3 Nephi 6:28

KEY ELEMENTS:

AUTHORSHIP—Satan is the author and administrator of secret combinations.

MOTIVE—The devil and his followers rebel against all righteousness.

MODERN MANIFESTATION—Natural desire to join the crowd for one's own gain.

COVENANT STEPS IN THESE VERSES:

1. *Historical context*—over 50 years later—In the meantime: Gadianton band gains control of Nephite government; oppression of the weak and righteous; Nephi preaches; murdering within the band (Hel 8:27–28); Nephi gives signs of murder of chief judge and his murderer; wars, famines; strong Gadianton band; Samuel the Lamanite.

(3 Nephi) signs of Christ's birth given; Gadianton band increases; Nephites unite and Gadiantons are defeated; c. 10 years later a new group of secret members (judges, lawyers, high priests) form a new band under Satan's influence

2. *Stipulations*—oppose righteousness and the Lord's people; destroy the government; establish a king

3. *Blessings/curses*—no punishment for murder

4. *Witnesses*—judges, lawyers, high priests, friends and kindreds

5. *Renewal*—new, expanded Gadianton band (compare Hel 11:24–27)

The wicked purposes behind their secret covenants soon became obvious:

Therefore they did combine against the people of the Lord, and enter into a COVENANT to destroy them, and to deliver those who were guilty of murder from the grasp of justice, which was about to be administered according to the law.

And they did set at defiance the law and the rights of their country; and they did COVENANT one with another to destroy the governor, and to establish a king over the land, that the land should no more be at liberty but should be subject unto kings. (3 Nephi 6:29–30)

The key elements in the great struggle of the wicked who fight against the Lord and his followers are seen in the following chart:

Secret Covenant Verses 10 & 11 = 3 Nephi 6:29–30

KEY ELEMENTS:

REBELLION—The ultimate struggle is both against the Lord's people and also for the protection or deliverance of the guilty ones.

DEFIANCE—The wicked oppose the laws of the land which were about to administer justice upon the murderers.

POLITICAL CHAOS—Those in the secret combination sought to destroy liberty and the government and to establish a kingship, even though he might make them subject to him.

IRONY—The wicked try to eliminate those in authority while blindly subjecting themselves to the master authoritarian (the devil) and those like him (evil, powerful kings).

MODERN MANIFESTATIONS—The non-exercise of freedoms and liberty will result in a government of authoritarian control.

Might makes right

However, not all people were willing to follow the lovers of wickedness and their secret covenants. Although not wanting to join the righteous, many people still opposed the evil bands of robbers and their king, Jacob:

And it came to pass that they [of the evil band] were not so strong in number as the tribes of the people, who were united together save it were their leaders did establish their laws, every one according to his tribe; nevertheless they were enemies; notwithstanding they were not a righteous people, yet they were united in the hatred of those who had entered into a COVENANT to destroy the government. (3 Nephi 7:11)

Although no strong central government remained and only a minority of the people were righteous, the members of many tribes were able to weaken the power of the secret band, as seen in the following chart:

Secret Covenant Verse 12 = 3 Nephi 7:11

KEY ELEMENTS:

DIVISION—As the government fell, people banded into many various tribes, weakening the central control of the secret band of the wicked.

TERRESTRIAL JUSTICE—Descent, just people may not agree with each other, but they can unite in opposition to the wicked.

MODERN MANIFESTATION—Good “Gentiles” still have the wisdom and strength to unite in their hatred of evil, wicked leaders.

COVENANT STEPS IN THIS VERSE:

1. *Historical context*—chief judge killed, people divide into tribes; secret band appoints a king, Jacob; tribes united in hatred of band, which flees north; some “peace” in the land, but much wickedness; Lord’s great destruction at Christ’s crucifixion destroys the wicked
2. *Stipulations*—protect tribe, oppose band
3. *Blessings/curses*—some peace is finally established in the land
5. *Renewal*—the secret combinations lose their power

Ultimately, lasting peace (200 years of it) came only after the Lord destroyed the wicked off the face of the earth. Mortals were unable to cleanse the land of the secret combinations by themselves; they had to have divine assistance. Ideally, such secret combination should never be allowed to gain a foothold in society. Otherwise, they quickly become so powerful that only the powers of heaven can destroy them.

Summary

Let us now list and briefly describe 14 characteristics which we learn from these references from the book of Helaman and 3 Nephi about secret covenants.

1. Secret oaths: Oaths are sworn in secret.
2. Sworn in God’s name: Ironically, some oaths are sworn in the name of God, the “everlasting Maker” to give them some false “legitimacy.”
3. Goal is to overthrow anyone in authority: One major goal of secret combinations is to overthrow anyone in authority, political or religious.
4. Satan’s program includes murder for gain: The enticement of secret combinations is the same promise Satan made to Cain—you can murder and get gain. Satan’s plan is always the same.

5. **Escape punishment:** In overthrowing authority figures, secret combinations seek to murder and escape punishment; maybe to demonstrate that Heavenly Father is powerless as a God of power.

6. **Disguised as regular, even exemplary, members of society:** Secret combinations use the “wolf in sheep’s clothing” principle—they are disguised as regular, even exemplary members of society. For example, just as Satan can appear as an angel of light, these evil groups can appear harmless and even virtuous on the surface. If the Lord’s people are indistinguishable from the world in appearance and actions, they are in effect helping to camouflage those who are aligned with Satan.

7. **Target any who may expose their evil designs:** Secret combinations target any group that may expose their evil designs. Thus, prophets are often attacked. Even if it isn’t a physical attack, as President Kimball states, we mentally stone the living prophets by disregarding their counsel (257; see also 1 Nephi 19:7). When we rationalize and argue that the General Authorities are not really in touch with how things really are, we are aligning ourselves with Satan.

8. **Strength in numbers:** Secret combinations seek strength in numbers. They are the worst pyramid scheme possible! Their sales pitch is the antithesis of “seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matt 6:33). They say: “Take what you can now, through whatever wicked means, and establish your kingdom here.”

9. **Temporal security through protection and riches:** Rather than focusing on the long-term, spiritual consequences of their actions, they promise temporal security—protection and riches. Their slogan might be, “Seek to save your life and get rich, and forget about eternity.”

10. **Might makes right:** When a majority of the people choose iniquity and align themselves with secret combinations, law and justice are replaced by the law of the jungle—“might makes

right". Right and wrong are not even an issue; all that matters is that you are smart enough or powerful enough to escape punishment. Ironically, the original promises of security last only until factions form within the secret group, and then a person is more vulnerable than before. Thus, not only are eternal blessings sacrificed, but even the temporal rewards, which had seemed so appealing, are short-lived.

11. Counterfeit sets of tokens and signs: Satan's covenants are complete with their own set of tokens and signs in imitation of the Lord's system.

12. Easy acceptance into band: Acceptance into a secret combination is easy compared with acceptance into the Lord's church. For example, look at the example of teenagers—to be accepted by the drinkers, all they have to do is drink.

13. Darkness: Darkness is a term always associated with the plans of secret combination; it describes both their means and purposes.

14. As strong as its adherents: Satan's plan is only as strong as its adherents—"according as he can get hold upon the hearts of the children of men." We possess the power to crush him, while he can only bruise us if we let him.

Book of Mormon Warnings Against Secret Covenants

The Book of Mormon does not name and warn us about specific secret combinations in the last days. Rather, it reveals the general characteristics and eventual dangers of secret covenants. Even more important for us personally, it helps us realize that it is not just organized secret evil organizations that we have to fear; rather, we need to be alert for any manifestation of Satan's attitudes or techniques in our own lives. Satan is very subtle, and he would be glad to have us accept any of his lies. If we, through ignorance or selfishness, are converted to any of his ideology or behavior, then we not only weaken God's

kingdom on earth, but we also make it more difficult for the world to distinguish and eradicate wickedness from among us. With a careful reading of the scriptures, thoughtful study and pondering, and the gift of discernment, we should recognize the beginning signs of Satanic influences in our society, and thus we and others can more easily and quickly overcome them.

The purpose of this study has been primarily to warn about the elements of secret covenants. By looking at the negative examples of the devil's covenants, we are better able to appreciate the spiritual power of God's covenant people. The Book of Mormon exposes the characteristics of Satan's secret covenants to help us avoid his subtle means so that we will not uphold them as did some of the ancients. Our gratitude for God's covenants should motivate us to keep the promises we have made with him so we can strengthen ourselves and others against Satan's continuing evil influences in our own families and society.

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