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## *Learning to Love the Book of Mormon - The Book of Helaman*

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**Abstract:** This work consists of a rather comprehensive commentary on the verses of the Book of Mormon. I believe it may be read and enjoyed by the casual student of the Book of Mormon who might, for example, find use for it as a reference source. The book's intended purpose, however, is to assist the serious student who would like to begin a thorough, intensive, and searching tour through the book.

# Learning to Love the Book of Mormon

Updated August 2013 to February 2014

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## Introduction

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In the Church, our study and understanding of the Book of Mormon has undergone a most interesting evolution since the book's translation in 1829. As late as the early twentieth century our understanding of the book was not far advanced. Almost no serious studies of the book and its contents had been published, and the book was not heavily used in worship service discourse or in gospel instruction. There was even some skepticism about the literal divine origins of the Book within the LDS community, particularly among the more educated. By the mid 1900s, beginning with an acknowledged assumption of the book's divine origins, Sidney B. Sperry, Hugh W. Nibley, John L. Sorenson, and a few others had launched serious scholarly inquiries into the book. In the mid-1970s the rate of publications on Book of Mormon topics began to increase.

The rate of publications on the Book of Mormon particularly soared after President Ezra Taft Benson, soon after his ordination as president and prophet, called the Church to repentance in November of 1985 and at the April General Conference of the Church in 1986. The Church worked the Book of Mormon into the regular cycle of the new correlated curriculum for adults, and church leaders began using the Book of Mormon more frequently and systematically in speeches and instructional situations. Since then, the book's authenticity as an ancient scriptural record has become more firmly and generally established. Those who remain vocal doubters of the book's literal divine origins are no longer identified with the committed LDS community.

In the October General Conference in 1986, President Benson said:

We must make the Book of Mormon a center focus of our study [because] it was written for our day. The Nephites never had the book; neither did the Lamanites of ancient times. It was meant for us. . . . Under the inspiration of God, who sees all things from the beginning, [Mormon] abridged centuries of records, choosing the stories, speeches, and events that would be most helpful to us. . . .

If they [the Book of Mormon writers] saw our day then chose those things which would be of greatest worth to us, is not that how we should study the Book of Mormon? We should constantly ask ourselves, "Why did the Lord inspire Mormon (or Moroni or Alma) to include that in his record? What lesson can I learn from that to help me live in this day and age?" (*Conference Report*, October 1986, 3-7).

President Benson would later write:

It is not just that the Book of Mormon teaches us truth, though it indeed does that. It is not just that the Book of Mormon bears testimony of Christ, though it indeed does that, too. But there is something more. There is a power in the book which will begin to flow into your lives the moment you begin a serious study of the book. You will find greater power to resist temptation. You will find the power to avoid deception. You

will find the power to stay on the strait and narrow path. The scriptures are called the “words of life” (D&C 84:85), and nowhere is that more true than it is of the Book of Mormon. When you begin to hunger and thirst after those words, you will find life in greater and greater abundance (“The Book of Mormon—Keystone of Our Religion,” *Ensign*, November, 1986, 16:7).

Further:

I would like to speak about one of the most significant gifts given to the world in modern times. The gift I am thinking of is more important than any of the inventions that have come out of the industrial and technological revolutions. This is a gift of greater value to mankind than even the many wonderful advances we have seen in modern medicine. It is of greater worth to mankind than the development of flight or space travel. I speak of the gift of the Book of Mormon (*The Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft] 1988, 51).

President Benson often reiterated the prophet Joseph Smith’s statement when Joseph referred to the Book of Mormon as “the keystone of our religion” (*TPJS*, 194). A keystone, sometimes called the headstone, is the central stone in an arch. It holds all the other stones in place, and if it is removed, the arch crumbles.

Your author has developed the habit, as I read the Book of Mormon, of reading slowly and actually looking for words or phrases or concepts whose meanings are unclear. I search for ideas that are not completely compatible with the framework of knowledge I already possess. I have been surprised to learn that I seldom have to read more than two or three verses before coming upon some puzzlement, large or small. On each occasion, I am left with an unsettled perplexity, a sort of uncomfortable disequilibrium. “Why are there so many verses in this basic scriptural work,” I have wondered, “that cause me to struggle so?” Disquieting as these feelings are, I have come to recognize them as a first step in learning some valuable new insight.

Once I come upon a phrase or verse I don’t understand, I begin my search for the answer by reading and re-reading the “offending” passage, by checking cross references, by reading supplemental explanatory materials, by sometimes asking help of my learned friends, and often praying about the verse. Mercifully, I have found that my efforts are most always fruitful. I am able to re-establish my equilibrium with the verse, and, at the same time, find myself possessing a greater insight on some particular point. With some satisfaction, I then continue on in my reading, only to find the process beginning again a verse or two later. I heartily recommend this same approach to my readers, and I have attempted in this commentary to spare you some of the pain of finding your answers. I hope I have anticipated many of your perplexities as you study the Book of Mormon, yet I suspect that each of us will encounter and be obliged to overcome our own unique set of questions. There is certainly a magic in enduring in this process, for certainly as we do so, we are “treasur[ing] up . . . the words of life” (D&C 84:85).

Your author prefers to think of this work as an “enrichment commentary.” I believe it may be read and enjoyed by the casual student of the Book of Mormon who might, for example, find use for it as a reference source. The book’s intended purpose, however, is to assist the serious student who would like to begin a thorough, intensive, and searching tour through the book. Though it may be useful to the student who wishes to skip from one verse here to another verse there, it is intended to be read sequentially. Some concepts discussed in earlier verses in the book or even earlier verses in a particular chapter may receive more casual attention when encountered later in the text.

This work consists of a rather comprehensive commentary on the verses of the Book of Mormon. Some may have reservations about the basic concept of this book. I am aware of Peter’s warning: “Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of men: but Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost” (2 Peter 1:20-21). I have endeavored in this project not to add or detract from the scripture, but only clarify. Some will say that such a comprehensive commentary is not possible without placing a “private interpretation” on some verses. I have earnestly attempted to avoid assigning any purely individual or private interpretations to the scriptural verses. Your author is a student of the Book of Mormon and in no wise an expert. To create this volume I have prayerfully studied and utilized the thoughts and explanations of many authors and scholars whose explanations of the Book of Mormon verses might be generally considered to be “authoritative” and “scholarly.” I have collected materials from general authorities and from individuals with undeniable scholarly credentials who openly profess a spiritual witness of the book. When I have borrowed their ideas only, and have rephrased them for my purposes, no reference will be cited. When I have quoted another author’s wording, acknowledgment is provided. Indeed, I have begun and completed this project as a student who is simply trying to make it possible for myself and for others to understand the book’s sometimes difficult verses. I acknowledge the fact, however, that my private biases have not been completely eliminated.

I am also sensitive to the need to avoid proof-texting in a work such as this. That is, I have tried very hard to let the scriptures speak for themselves. An author guilty of proof-texting presupposes the doctrine and then seeks support from the scriptures. I have attempted to consider each verse in its historical and sequential context.

I have tried to include timely and necessary background information to make the book’s words, phrases, and verses really come alive. I have tried to avoid rhetoric and concentrate on the meat. It is not my purpose to preach about the principles contained in the book, rather my goal is to improve understanding. This work presupposes, in its reader, an “average” understanding of the Book of Mormon. I have tried to eliminate those commentary materials which would likely be redundant and unnecessary for my

so-called average reader. It is my intent to explain, clarify, and enrich your study and understanding of the book.

The work includes a variety of “supplemental articles” to which reference is made appropriately in the text. Among these supplemental articles is a purely historical telling of the Book of Mormon story entitled, *A Narrative Summary of the Book of Mormon*. From this “historical” summary, doctrinal materials have been omitted, but all characters, events, and places are included. It is hope that this historical account may be useful to the student who wishes to quickly “brush up” on the historical narrative.

A few “housekeeping” notes about this work are pertinent. The text of the Book of Mormon is included in bold with a blue color to clearly distinguish it from the commentary. All commentary is colored black. The paragraphs of commentary material are often preceded by a quoted phrase, also of blue color, without any punctuation except for quotation marks. These are phrases taken directly from the verse of text immediately above the commentary paragraph. The commentary then follows these quoted phrases. Sometimes the verse commentary for a group of verses will precede, rather than follow, the actual text rendering of the verses. This is done if it felt that a word of explanation before reading a passage would be helpful. Most block quotes appear in red print and are not double-indented. Finally, in this current updated version of this commentary (2014) page numbers have been eliminated, as they are considered unnecessary.

In reading the Book of Mormon, often we tend to regard some of the materials contained therein as non-essential. We wonder, “Why was the report of this battle or that incident included in the book?” As we study the book, we will assume that there is no “filler” material in the Book of Mormon. Every item in the book was placed there for a reason and purpose. In making his abridgment of the sacred records of the Book of Mormon people, Mormon wrote, “I cannot write the hundredth part of the things of my people” (Words of Mormon 1:5). Hence, we must assume that all items in the book have been included following thoughtful and inspired consideration.

There is a miracle in the scriptures. If a person reads the scriptures regularly, he or she will invariably have his or her life touched by them eventually. “Whosoever believeth on my words,” the Lord said in reference to the Book of Mormon, “them will I visit with the manifestation of my Spirit” (D&C 5:16). Isaiah prophesied that the Book of Mormon would bring a spiritually blind generation to an understanding of the doctrine of Christ (2 Nephi 27:35; Isaiah 29:24). It has been suggested by those experienced in gospel study that no individual who studies the scriptures daily will be remiss in keeping the commandments.

Our scriptures advise us of several other books of scripture yet to come forth. One day, “all things shall be revealed unto the children of men which ever have been . . . and which ever will be” (2 Nephi 27:11). Perhaps, though, we will never be privileged to receive additional scriptures until we learn to appreciate fully those we already have.

Consider the following testimony of The Book of Mormon by President Ezra Taft Benson:

We invite all men everywhere to read the Book of Mormon, another testament of Jesus Christ.

The Bible sits on the pulpit of hundreds of different religious sects. The Book of Mormon, the record of Joseph, verifies and clarifies the Bible. It removes stumbling blocks, it restores many plain and precious things. We testify that when used together, the Bible and the Book of Mormon confound false doctrines, lay down contentions, and establish peace (see 2 Nephi 3:12).

We do not have to prove that the Book of Mormon is true. The Book is its own proof. All we need to do is read it and declare it! The Book of Mormon is not on trial—the people of the world, including the members of the Church, are on trial as to what they will do with this second witness for Christ” (*Conference Report*, October 1984, 7; *Ensign* November 1984, 8).

I am deeply committed to the book as an authentic ancient scripture. The Spirit has born witness to my soul on numerous occasions as I have studied and pondered its verses. I know with all my heart that the book was written by ancient prophets who intended for their writings to come forth to the world and be translated in our day by Joseph Smith, Jr., through the “gift and power of God.”

Michael J. Preece

## The Book of Helaman

An account of the Nephites. Their wars and contentions, and their dissensions. And also the prophecies of many holy prophets, before the coming of Christ, according to the records of Helaman, who was the son of Helaman, and also according to the records of his sons, even down to the coming of Christ. And also many of the Lamanites are converted. An account of their conversion. An account of the righteousness of the Lamanites, and the wickedness and abominations of the Nephites, according to the record of Helaman and his sons, even down to the coming of Christ, which is called the book of Helaman.

Paul R. Cheesman, writing in the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, wrote the following about the book of Helaman in the Book of Mormon:

The book of Helaman chronicles one of the most tumultuous periods in the history of the Nephites and Lamanites (52 BC to 1 BC). . . .

This book takes its name from its first author, Helaman, the son of Helaman. Other contributors to the record were Nephi and Lehi, sons of Helaman (16:25), and Mormon, the principal editor of the Book of Mormon, who added political and religious commentary.

The account opens after Helaman had received custody of the Nephite records from his uncle Shiblon (Alma 63:11) in the fortieth year of the reign of the judges (ca. 52 BC). The narrative falls into six major segments: the record of Helaman (chapters 1-3); the record of Nephi (chapters 4-6); the prophecy of Nephi (chapters 7-11); Mormon's editorial observations on God's power (chapter 12); the prophecy of Samuel the Lamanite (chapters 13-15); and a brief statement about the five-year period before Jesus's birth (chapter 16). Several religious discourses are woven into the narrative, including Helaman's admonition to his sons (5:6-12), Nephi's psalm (7:7-9), Nephi's sermon from the tower in his garden (7:13-29; 8:11-28), Nephi's prayer (11:10-16), and Samuel's long speech atop the walls of Zarahemla (13:5-39; 14:2-15:17) (volume 1, "Book of Mormon").

Later on in the Book of Mormon, in 3 Nephi 8-9, we will read of the great destruction, storms, earthquakes, tempests, lightning, fires, and darkness that occurred at the time of the Savior's crucifixion and death—all of which will result in the destruction of the more wicked among the people. We will learn that God brought this destruction upon the people because of their iniquity. The book of Helaman chronicles the rapid decline of this people to a state of wickedness which will result in the Lord's destroying many of them from off the face of the earth.

The accounts in the book of Helaman and the book of 3 Nephi constitute a type of foreshadowing of our dispensation in that they were written of the period just prior to the Lord's coming to the Nephites at the temple in the land Bountiful. In an analogous

way, we now await his second coming and, before that blessed event, we anticipate a major cleansing of the earth—a destruction of the wicked prior to that coming.

### Chapter Outline of Helaman

A brief outline of the book of Helaman, worth committing to memory, is as follows:

**Helaman 5** Mission of Nephi and Lehi to the land of Nephi. They have a miraculous experience in a Lamanite prison during which they are surrounded by a wall of fire.

**Helaman 7-9** Nephi prays and preaches from his garden tower. He miraculously visualizes the murder of the chief judge and even identifies his murderer.

**Helaman 13-16** Preaching and Prophecies of Samuel the Lamanite

## Helaman Chapter 1

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### Scripture Mastery

**Helaman 1** Because of dissension and disorganization in the Nephite government following the murder by Kishkumen of the chief judge Pahoran, the son of Pahoran, as he sat upon the judgment seat, a well-armed Lamanite army, led by a large and mighty man named Coriantumr captures for a time the city of Zarahemla. Coriantumr is eventually defeated and slain by Moronihah, the son of Captain Moroni, and his Nephite army.

**1 And now behold, it came to pass in the commencement of the fortieth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi, there began to be a serious difficulty among the people of the Nephites.**

**verse 1 “it came to pass in the commencement of the fortieth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi”** The book of Helaman is a good example of a type of historical writing, common in the Near East, referred to as “annalistic” writing. In annalistic writing, the record keeper records events year by year and is careful to document the succession of years. Historical records so recorded are called “annals.” In the book of Helaman, the editor Mormon mentions almost every year and itemizes that year’s events. At times, years are mentioned when almost nothing of note occurs. Consider, for example, Helaman 3:2: “And there was no contention among the people in the forty and fourth year; neither was there much contention in the forty and fifth year.”

In order that you might remain well-oriented as to time, keep in mind that Jesus’s birth will occur in the ninety first year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi.

**2 For behold, Pahoran had died, and gone the way of all the earth; therefore there began to be a serious contention concerning who should have the judgment-seat among the brethren, who were the sons of Pahoran.**

**3 Now these are their names who did contend for the judgment-seat, who did also cause the people to contend: Pahoran, Paanchi, and Pacumeni.**

**verse 3 “Pahoran”** The Egyptian name transliterated *Paheran* means “the Syrian.” *Pahura* is the Canaanite (now Palestinian) adaptation of the name (*Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry, Daniel C. Peterson, John W. Welch, 458.)

**“Paanchi”** We have discussed on occasion the Egyptian influence found in Ancient Judah at the time Lehi departed that land and the resulting Egyptian influence found among the Book of Mormon peoples. It is interesting to note that Paankhi was an important royal name of the Late Period in Egypt from 525 to 332 BC (Hugh Nibley, “Book of Mormon Near Eastern Background” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*). Also Egyptologist Gunther Vittmann, in an article on the name *Paankhi* (pronounced “Pi-ankhi” or “Pa-ankhi”), indicates that it is a Twenty-Fifth Dynasty royal name of Meroitic (meaning of an ancient ruined city on the Nile—Meroe) origin (*Orientalia* 43 [1974]: 12-16). Even critics of the Book of Mormon concede that this name is indisputably Egyptian in origin. See also the supplemental article, *Names in the Book of Mormon*.

**“Pacumeni”** “This name resembles that borne by some of the last priest governors of Egypt, whose names are rendered *Pamenech*, *Pa-mnkh*, *Pamenches*, etc.” (Hugh Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert*, 22-23).

**4 Now these are not all the sons of Pahoran (for he had many) but these are they who did contend for the judgment-seat; therefore, they did cause three divisions among the people.**

**5 Nevertheless, it came to pass that Pahoran was appointed by the voice of the people to be chief judge and a governor over the people of Nephi.**

**verse 5 “the voice of the people”** This implies that a democratic type of voting was in place. King Mosiah, the son of King Benjamin, had instituted the “majority vote” which the people of his day utilized in selecting judges. He taught that the majority vote, the “voice of the people,” would seldom lead to erroneous decisions. When the majority vote did lead to an unrighteous decision, then that people were ripe in iniquity and likely to be destroyed (Mosiah 29:25-27).

**6 And it came to pass that Pacumeni, when he saw that he could not obtain the judgment-seat, he did unite with the voice of the people.**

**7 But behold, Paanchi, and that part of the people that were desirous that he should be their governor, was exceedingly wroth; therefore, he was about to flatter away those people to rise up in rebellion against their brethren.**

**verse 7** Paanchi and his followers plan a coup d' etat that is, unfortunately for Paanchi, discovered by the Nephite government.

This verse marks “the beginning of the end” of the Nephite people, since “Paanchi and his followers” are the charter members of the secret society of the Gadianton robbers which will prove to be the eventual downfall of the Nephite nation.

**8 And it came to pass as he was about to do this, behold, he was taken, and was tried according to the voice of the people, and condemned unto death; for he had raised up in rebellion and sought to destroy the liberty of the people.**

**verse 8** Paanchi is condemned to death, not for his ambition—his desire to become chief judge—nor for his opposition to Pahoran. Rather, he is accused of sedition—seeking to subvert the liberties of the people. The exact method for trying him and finding him guilty by the “voice of the people” is not made clear. Perhaps he was tried fairly by a jury or a council of his peers.

**9 Now when those people who were desirous that he should be their governor saw that he was condemned unto death, 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.**

**verse 9** “and murdered Pahoran as he sat upon the judgment-seat” Apparently Pahoran was murdered as he sat in audience. This is obviously a time when the chief judge would be easily accessible and vulnerable, and an assassination so timed would give immediate and effective public attention to the cause of the murderer’s supporters.

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

**11 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.**

**12 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.**

**verses 11-12** There are several instances of evil oaths or evil covenants in the book of Helaman and the early chapters of 3 Nephi (see also Helaman 2:3; 6:21-26, 30; 3 Nephi 6:28-30; 7:11). One may argue that Satan is the author and administrator of these secret combinations. He is also the great impersonator or imitator. Just as God

uses the covenant to bind and commit his followers to an agreement, so does Satan do the same to bind his adherents to evil purposes.

Victor L. Ludlow has written of Satan's evil covenants and has pointed out the characteristics that typify these covenants ("Secret Covenant Teachings of Men and the Devil in Helaman through 3 Nephi 8," *The Book of Mormon: Helaman through 3 Nephi 8, According To Thy Word*, 265-82). I will draw upon his article in commenting upon these covenants in the book of Helaman and in 3 Nephi 1-7. His material will be utilized in my commentary for the following verses: Helaman 1:11-12; 6:21-22, 26, and 30. It is useful for us to study these characteristics that we may learn more about the techniques Satan utilizes with us.

We may utilize the evil covenant found here in verses 11 and 12 to identify and study some of the key elements of Satan's covenants with man:

1. *Irony*—Note the phrase: "they all entered into a covenant, yea, swearing by their everlasting Maker" It is chilling and ironic that this wicked oath was regarded by those who made it as a religious oath. They swore their Satanic oath in the name of God!

2. *Murder*—Their group goal is to overthrow and kill people in authority, political or religious, over them (see also Helaman 2:3). Perhaps we might extend this idea to suggest that if they were able, they would kill the ultimate chief judge—the Savior himself. Their destruction of those in authority is in itself a great irony. In doing so they inadvertently subjugate themselves to the master authoritarian himself, even the devil and those authoritarians who follow him, the evil leaders of the earth. The group is also inclined to destroy those who learn of their wickedness, those who have discovered their identity. Thus, prophets are often attacked. Commenting on the peculiar phenomenon of murder being carried out as a religious act, Daniel C. Peterson wrote:

This seems odd to those of us unaccustomed to thinking of murder as a religious act. But the very word *assassin* was given to us by a religious sect of the medieval Near East who bore it as a name. The "Assassins" carried out daring murders for many years from mixed religious and political motives. The Assassins offer, in fact, a remarkably close parallel to the 'secret combinations' of the Nephite and Jaredite traditions. . . . And it would seem, from the story of Cain and Abel as recorded in the book of Moses, that such "religious" oaths go back to the very beginning of human history (Moses 5:29) (*Studies in Scripture, Volume Eight, Alma 30 to Moroni, 94, 104*).

3. *Secrecy*—Note the phrase: "swearing . . . they would tell no man that Kishkumen had murdered Pahoran." Here is an important element of the Satanic covenant—secrecy. They attempt to avoid the consequences of their actions and defy justice as they take an oath of secrecy.

4. *Disguise*—"Kishkumen and his band . . . did mingle themselves among the people, in a manner that they all could not be found." Secret combinations tend to become "wolves in sheep's clothing." These conspirators resumed their ordinary daily

pursuits as seemingly ordinary respected citizens, hoping to remain anonymous. They were successful in that only some of them were identified and punished. On the surface it is often difficult if not impossible to tell a good man from an evil man. Evil men may appear to be regular and virtuous, even exemplary members of society. Keep in mind that Satan himself can appear as an angel of light.

For more characteristics of evil covenants, see the commentary for Helaman 6:21-22, 26, and 30.

**13 And now behold, Pacumeni was appointed, according to the voice of the people, to be a chief judge and a governor over the people, to reign in the stead of his brother Pahoran; and it was according to his right. And all this was done in the fortieth year of the reign of the judges; and it had an end.**

**verse 13** “Pacumeni was appointed, according to the voice of the people . . . and it was according to his right” Undoubtedly Pacumeni, like Pahoran before him, was selected chief judge by some type of democratic majority vote.

**14 And it came to pass in the forty and first year of the reign of the judges, that the Lamanites had gathered together an innumerable army of men, and armed them with swords, and with cimeters and with bows, and with arrows, and with head-plates, and with breastplates, and with all manner of shields of every kind.**

**verse 14** “the Lamanites had gathered together an innumerable army of men” This verse is obviously hyperbole and simply indicates that a relatively large body of soldiers was involved.

**15 And they came down again that they might pitch battle against the Nephites. And they were led by a man whose name was Coriantumr; and he was a descendant of Zarahemla; and he was a dissenter from among the Nephites; and he was a large and a mighty man.**

**verse 15** The original Book of Mormon manuscript for Helaman 1:15 shows how the name “Coriantumr” was first written by Oliver Cowdery phonetically as “Coriantummer” but was then crossed out and spelled correctly on the same line. This is consistent with the account of witnesses who suggested that Joseph spelled the proper names that he translated.

**16 Therefore, the king of the Lamanites, whose name was Tubaloth, who was the son of Ammoron, supposing that Coriantumr, being a mighty man, could stand against the Nephites, with his strength and also with his great wisdom, insomuch that by sending him forth he should gain power over the Nephites—**

**verse 16** Tubaloth was obviously not a Lamanite by birth. Rather, he was the son of Ammoron, the brother and successor of the notorious Nephite dissenter

Amalickiah (Alma 46-49, 51). Not surprisingly he chose yet another Nephite dissenter, the Mulekite Coriantumr (“a descendant of Zarahemla”), to lead his forces against the Nephites. It would appear that apostates can often be counted on to hate that from which they apostatized.

**17 Therefore he did stir them up to anger, and he did gather together his armies, and he did appoint Coriantumr to be their leader, and did cause that they should march down to the land of Zarahemla to battle against the Nephites.**

**18 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.**

**verse 18** “because of so much contention and so much difficulty in the government” This undoubtedly refers to the confusion and contention produced by the bitter rebellion of Paanchi, the murder of Pahoran, and the need to elect two new chief judges in rapid succession.

**19 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.**

**verse 19** In reference to this blitzkrieg attack by Coriantumr and the Lamanites, Hugh Nibley wrote:

It struck with such speed and force under the leadership of the Nephite defector Coriantumr that it achieved a complete surprise, and before anyone was aware of what had happened, he had succeeded in taking and occupying Zarahemla itself! Coriantumr instantly followed up his advantage by marching through the country almost unopposed (verse 24), burning and destroying as he went, “slaying the people with a great slaughter, both [sic.] men, women, and children” (verse 27). But like the Germans in Russia, Coriantumr had really gotten himself in a jam: his drive had been successful because it was completely unexpected; and it had been unexpected because it was utterly foolish. The Nephite forces were stationed, of course, on the frontiers (verses 18, 26), and so Coriantumr’s great breakthrough which had put him in the heart of the country had also got him neatly surrounded (verses 25, 32). The Nephite army leaders only had to tighten the bag until Coriantumr was forced to surrender (verses 28-32) (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 7, 330).

**20 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.**

**21 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. And thus ended the days of Pacumeni.**

**verse 21** This verse contains the first reference to the fact that the city of Zarahemla did in fact have a surrounding wall. We will read more about this wall in the story of Samuel the Lamanite (Helaman 13:4).

**22 And now when Coriantumr saw that he was in possession of the city of Zarahemla, and saw that the Nephites had fled before them, and were slain, and were taken, and were cast into prison, and that he had obtained the possession of the strongest hold in all the land, his heart took courage insomuch that he was about to go forth against all the land.**

**23 And now he did not tarry in the land of Zarahemla, but he did march forth with a large army, even towards the city of Bountiful; for it was his determination to go forth and cut his way through with the sword, that he might obtain the north parts of the land.**

**verse 23** The reader ought to maintain a “mind’s eye” geographic orientation. See the *Hypothetical Map of Book of Mormon Lands*.

**24 And, supposing that their greatest strength was in the center of the land, therefore he did march forth, giving them no time to assemble themselves together save it were in small bodies; and in this manner they did fall upon them and cut them down to the earth.**

**verse 24** After Coriantumr took possession of Zarahemla he likely thought the whole land was his, “supposing that their greatest strength was in the center of the land.” We will learn that the Nephite strength was actually in “the cities around about in the borders” (verse 26). So while the invaders “had come into the center of the land, and had taken the capital city . . . and were marching through the most capital parts of the land . . . taking possession of many cities and of many strongholds” (verse 27), they were really playing right into chief captain Moronihah’s hands (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 6, 421- 22).

**25 But behold, this march of Coriantumr through the center of the land gave Moronihah great advantage over them, notwithstanding the greatness of the number of the Nephites who were slain.**

**26 For behold, Moronihah had supposed that the Lamanites durst not come into the center of the land, but that they would attack the cities round about in the borders as they had hitherto done; therefore Moronihah had caused that their strong armies should maintain those parts round about by the borders.**

27 But behold, the Lamanites were not frightened according to his desire, but they had come into the center of the land, and had taken the capital city which was the city of Zarahemla, and were marching through the most capital parts of the land, slaying the people with a great slaughter, both men, women, and children, taking possession of many cities and of many strongholds.

28 But when Moronihah had discovered this, he immediately sent forth Lehi with an army round about to head them before they should come to the land Bountiful.

**verse 28** To “head” means to intercept.

29 And thus he did; and he did head them before they came to the land Bountiful, and gave unto them battle, insomuch that they began to retreat back towards the land of Zarahemla.

30 And it came to pass that Moronihah did head them in their retreat, and did give unto them battle, insomuch that it became an exceedingly bloody battle; yea, many were slain, and among the number who were slain Coriantumr was also found.

31 And now, behold, the Lamanites could not retreat either way, neither on the north, nor on the south, nor on the east, nor on the west, for they were surrounded on every hand by the Nephites.

32 And thus had Coriantumr plunged the Lamanites into the midst of the Nephites, insomuch that they were in the power of the Nephites, and he himself was slain, and the Lamanites did yield themselves into the hands of the Nephites.

33 And it came to pass that Moronihah took possession of the city of Zarahemla again, and caused that the Lamanites who had been taken prisoners should depart out of the land in peace.

**verse 33** Hugh Nibley pointed out that Moronihah’s lenient approach here is typical of what Moroni would have done. He describes the period immediately following the defeat of Coriantumr’s army:

And then what? The Nephite commander Moronihah did just as his namesake Moroni would have—he let all the Lamanites “depart out of the land in peace.” No reprisals or vengeance for an army that had seized the capital and devastated the land without mercy! What would the Nephites think in reading the history of some of our present-day wars?” (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 7, 330).

34 And thus ended the forty and first year of the reign of the judges.

## Helaman Chapter 2

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**1 And it came to pass in the forty and second year of the reign of the judges, after Moronihah had established again peace between the Nephites and the Lamanites, behold there was no one to fill the judgment-seat; therefore there began to be a contention again among the people concerning who should fill the judgment-seat.**

**2 And it came to pass that Helaman, who was the son of Helaman, was appointed to fill the judgment-seat, by the voice of the people.**

**verse 2 “Helaman, who was the son of Helaman”** This Helaman was the keeper of the records and other sacred things which had been given them by his uncle Shiblon, the brother of Helaman (Alma 63:11). Thus, we might regard Helaman as also the chief high priest.

**3 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.**

**4 For there was one Gadianton, who was exceedingly expert in many words, and also in his craft, to carry on the secret work of murder and of robbery; therefore he became the leader of the band of Kishkumen.**

**verse 4** The name *Gadianton* is here used for the first time in the Book of Mormon. It will be used in thirty-two more verses in the book. It is interesting that in the original manuscript of the Book of Mormon, this name was spelled “Gaddianton.” The printer changed the spelling when he set the type. It is notable that the Hebrew word *giddud* means robber (see the commentary for 3 Nephi 3:12).

Gadianton was a highly skilled, professional propagandist. Hugh Nibley comments on his strategy:

**He worked out a plan which he guaranteed would put Kishkumen and his gang in complete control of the government. All they had to do was murder the chief judge Helaman, as they had already murdered his predecessor Pahoran II, and make Gadianton himself judge—he would take care of the rest. The plan miscarried and the villains had to skip town, and yet before many years “this Gadianton did prove the overthrow, yea, almost the entire destruction of the people of Nephi” (Helaman 2:13) (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 8, 359).**

In commenting on the takeover of this band of Paanchists by Gadianton, Daniel C. Peterson has pointed out an interesting parallel: “One cannot fail to be reminded of the takeover of an already-existing conspiratorial group in the Weimar Republic—the National Socialist German Workers’ Party—by an ambitious young ex-corporal named Adolf Hitler. If any one could be said to be ‘exceedingly expert in many words,’ it is he. Yet the pattern holds with remarkable consistency wherever such conspiracies arise:

Lenin, Mussolini, and Castro also come to mind. All were leaders of revolutionary organizations; all were given to seemingly endless speeches” (*Studies in Scripture, Volume Eight, Alma 30 to Moroni*, 105).

Commenting on this secret band, Brother Peterson has also pointed out: “Although they would never be successful in Gadianton’s lifetime, so complete was his control over them and so completely were they identified with him that ever afterward they were known among the Nephites as ‘Gadianton’s robbers’” (*Ibid.*).

Hugh Nibley summarized the characteristics of the secret band that eventually caused the overthrow of the Nephite culture:

Let us summarize the essential nature of what some have called “Gadiantonism”:

Objectives: (1) “Power and gain,” the two being interactive. Power wins gain, and gain wins power. (2) Control or overthrow of the government; using political office “to rule and do according to their wills, that they might get gain and glory” (Helaman 7:5).

Methods: (1) Secret agreements between individuals and groups. The Gadiantons are essentially an underground movement. (2) Assassination. These two things, “secret combinations” and “that men should shed blood,” have been forbidden by God “in all things . . . from the beginning of man” (Ether 8:19). (3) “Payola.” “Akish did offer them money” (Ether 9:11); “letting the guilty . . . go unpunished because of their money” (Helaman 7:5). (4) Skillful propaganda and public relations: “flattering words.” (5) The hate campaign: a steady output of charges, accusations, and rumors, in the manner of Amalickiah: Accuse—always accuse. Eagerness to accuse is from the devil, as Brigham Young often taught. (6) Intimidation: “breathing out many threatenings,” operating “by the hand of secrecy,” wearing fearsome disguises (3 Nephi 4:7). (7) Showmanship, e.g., the picturesque uniforms and romantic appeal to the young (3 Nephi 1:29). (8) Tight control of members—death penalty for betrayal (Ether 8:14; Helaman 1:11).

Attitude: (1) The Gadiantons were totally partisan, the laws and interests of the combination taking priority over all other laws and interests. (2) All were ambitious; hence they labored [diligently] for power and gain. Cain is the type and model. (3) The combinations were highly competitive, feuding fiercely among themselves. (4) They sought to project a noble image, with much talk of rights and wrongs, high courage and upright character (see the letter to Lachoneus in 3 Nephi 2). (5) They professed piety and religion, swearing their forbidden oaths not by the demons but “by the God of heaven” (Ether 8:14), “by their everlasting Maker” (Helaman 1:11). (6) They were paranoid, always attributing their troubles to the wickedness of others; never the aggressors, they are constantly seeking to avenge their wrongs. Vengeance is their watchword.

Ecology [the spacing and interdependence of people and institutions]: (1) They flourish best in an affluent business society, and wither in times of poverty. (2) They

crystallize around ambitious individuals. (3) They readily coalesce with king-men, would-be nobility, great families, ambitious local officials, and rapacious Lamanite overlords, i.e., with all who are opposed to popular government among the Nephites. (4) They have destroyed every civilization in the New World in which they have been able to thrive. (5) They cannot thrive or even survive without the acceptance and encouragement of the society in general. Being predatory and non-productive, i.e., parasites, they must have a complacent society to host and support them. Such a society is one which accepts as desirable the Gadianton goals of power and gain. (6) They can become dormant for long periods of time and then, when circumstances are favorable, suddenly appear in full strength and vigor, their plans having been buried and preserved intact against the day of opportunity.

The Gadiantons, terrible as they were, are treated more as a symptom than as a disease. The society that has them is sick, but they are like maggots that prey only on dead tissue. They simply exploit the evil situation that gives them their opportunity (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley, volume 7, 370-72*).

**5 Therefore he did flatter them, and also Kishkumen, that if they would place him in the judgment-seat he would grant unto those who belonged to his band that they should be placed in power and authority among the people; therefore Kishkumen sought to destroy Helaman.**

**verse 5** Gadianton wanted to be chief judge, and he promised positions of power and influence to those who would help him acquire that office.

**6 And it came to pass as he went forth towards the judgment-seat to destroy Helaman, behold one of the servants of Helaman, having been out by night, and having obtained, through disguise, a knowledge of those plans which had been laid by this band to destroy Helaman—**

**7 And it came to pass that he met Kishkumen, and he gave unto him a sign; therefore Kishkumen made known unto him the object of his desire, desiring that he would conduct him to the judgment-seat that he might murder Helaman.**

**8 And when the servant of Helaman had known all the heart of Kishkumen, and how that it was his object to murder, and also that it was the object of all those who belonged to his band to murder, and to rob, and to gain power, (and this was their secret plan, and their combination) the servant of Helaman said unto Kishkumen: Let us go forth unto the judgment-seat.**

**9 Now this did please Kishkumen exceedingly, for he did suppose that he should accomplish his design; but behold, the servant of Helaman, as they were going forth unto the judgment-seat, did stab Kishkumen even to the heart, that he fell dead without a groan. And he ran and told Helaman all the things which he had seen, and heard, and done.**

**verse 9** This “servant of Helaman” appears to have been, in fact, a sort of intelligence specialist employed by Helaman for the express purpose of infiltrating the secret band of Gadianton.

**10 And it came to pass that Helaman did send forth to take this band of robbers and secret murderers, that they might be executed according to the law.**

**11 But behold, when Gadianton had found that Kishkumen did not return he feared lest that he should be destroyed; therefore he caused that his band should follow him. And they took their flight out of the land, by a secret way, into the wilderness; and thus when Helaman sent forth to take them they could nowhere be found.**

**verse 11** “**And they took their flight out of the land, by a secret way, into the wilderness**” Ray C. Hiram has pointed out that from here on, the operation of the Gadianton robbers will provide a textbook example of guerrilla warfare conducted from their headquarters in the “wilderness” (“The Gadianton Robbers and Protracted War,” *BYU Studies*, volume 15, number 2, 215).

**12 And more of this Gadianton shall be spoken hereafter. And thus ended the forty and second year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi.**

**13 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.**

**verse 13** This editorial comment was written by Mormon who was certainly in a position to see clearly the destructive influence of the Gadianton robbers over the centuries subsequent to their inception.

**14 Behold I do not mean the end of the book of Helaman, but I mean the end of the book of Nephi, from which I have taken all the account which I have written.**

**verse 14** This verse suggests that the entire official Nephite record, the large plates of Nephi Mormon utilized in producing his abridgment, were referred to as the “book of Nephi.” Mormon likely organized his abridgment around a series of books to which he gave distinctive names—Mosiah, Alma, Helaman, etc.

## Helaman chapter 3

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### Scripture Mastery

**Helaman 3:35** Though they were persecuted by other members of the church, the humble and persecuted saints in Zarahemla did fast and pray oft, and did wax stronger and stronger in their humility, and firmer and firmer in the faith of Christ.

**1 And now it came to pass in the forty and third year of the reign of the judges, there was no contention among the people of Nephi save it were a little pride which was in the church, which did cause some little dissensions among the people, which affairs were settled in the ending of the forty and third year.**

**verse 1** “save it were a little pride which was in the church, which did cause some little dissensions among the people” What exactly is *pride*, and how might it lead to dissensions among people? For a discussion of universal sin, see “Pride” in *The “Natural Self” and “Spiritual Self,”* volume 1 chapter 5 of *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*.

**2 And there was no contention among the people in the forty and fourth year; neither was there much contention in the forty and fifth year.**

**3 And it came to pass in the forty and sixth, yea, there was much contention and many dissensions; in the which there were an exceedingly great many who departed out of the land of Zarahemla, and went forth unto the land northward to inherit the land.**

**verse 3** “And it came to pass in the forty and sixth, yea, there was much contention” This wording of this phrase is awkward. It would read more smoothly if the word “yea” were instead “year.” There are several LDS scholars working with what is called the “critical text” or “critical edition” of the Book of Mormon. This is a project designed to determine, as far as is possible, the original text of the Book of Mormon and to determine the historical evolution of the text, that is, to study the changes that have occurred over the several editions of the book that have been published. Relative to this particular verse, these scholars have suggested what they call a “conjectural emendation” to this phrase in verse 3. By studying the usage of the word *yea* in the text and by studying also the pattern of mistakes that Oliver Cowdery tended to make when he was taking dictation from Joseph, they have suggested that this phrase was likely intended to read: “And it came to pass in the forty and sixth year there was much contention.” They found, for example that in the Book of Mormon text the word *yea* is used to provide emphasis of something which has just been said. It emphasizes some particular aspect. In this verse, it doesn’t emphasize anything. They also observed that on some twenty different occasions, Oliver Cowdery, on intending to write the word

year, left off the *r* and wrote instead *yea*. Most of the time he caught himself and inserted a small *r*, but on this occasion he did not (Royal Skousen, “The Critical Text of the Book of Mormon,” a FARMS reprint).

**“an exceedingly great many who departed out of the land of Zarahemla, and went forth unto the land northward to inherit the land”** These Nephite migrants were following a pattern set by Hagoth and his people ten years earlier (Alma 63:4-10).

**4 And they did travel to an exceedingly great distance, insomuch that they came to large bodies of water and many rivers.**

**verses 3-4 “the land northward . . . [which contained] . . . large bodies of water and many rivers”** We have previously discussed the possible identification of a land which might be the “land northward” (see the commentary for Alma 63:4). For the reader’s convenience and for the sake of review, I will repeat that commentary:

The Book of Mormon text often speaks of a mysterious land. It may be referred to, as it is in this verse, as the “land which was northward” or simply the “land northward” (Alma 63:5-8, 10; Helaman 3:3-4, 7, 10-11). In another place it is referred to as the “northernmost part of the land” (3 Nephi 7:12). It is possible that this land is in the same location as the “great city of Jacobugath” (3 Nephi 9:9). Joseph L. Allen (*Exploring the Lands of the Book of Mormon*, 97-107) suggests that this mysterious land might be the ancient city of Teotihuacan, built in the valley of Mexico, near where Mexico City lies today. The ancient culture which inhabited this city had its beginnings about 150 BC and fell about AD 750. The circumstantial evidence that Teotihuacan might have played a role in the Book of Mormon includes the fact that between 55 BC and AD 29, the Book of Mormon mentions several migrations into this land where large bodies of water were found (see also Alma 63:7-8; Helaman 3:3-4, 12; 3 Nephi 7:12).

According to Dr. John L. Sorenson: “In former times the floor of the valley of Mexico was occupied by a set of lakes that were greater in combined size than anything else in central Mexico. It was this lake system that allowed the Aztecs to facilitate movement of goods needed to support their great city” (*An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*, 266-67).

This is the same time period when, according to archaeologists, Teotihuacan was experiencing a high growth rate. Also the valley of Mexico contained many lakes, in fact Mexico City is built on a dry lake bed. The Book of Mormon speaks of the people in the land northward building houses out of cement because timber was scarce in the land (Helaman 3:7, 10-11). The archaeological site of Teotihuacan contains many buildings made of cement, and timber is indeed scarce in the valley of Mexico (see also the commentary for verse 7).

**5 Yea, and even they did spread forth into all parts of the land, into whatever parts it had not been rendered desolate and without timber, because of the many inhabitants who had before inherited the land.**

**verse 5** It would seem that the Nephites strongly preferred wood as their favorite building material and that they used cement only when wood was not available. It is likely they were more dependent upon forests than we are today! This verse particularly refers to the land which was north of the narrow neck of land, as indicated by the following verse. Previous populations of people, presumably at least in part Jaredites, had not practiced effective conservation techniques and had, in some measure, denuded the land of its forests.

**6 And now no part of the land was desolate, save it were for timber; but because of the greatness of the destruction of the people who had before inhabited the land it was called desolate.**

**verse 6** All parts of the land were inhabited, even though many were denuded of timber. Even the land *Desolation* was inhabited, its name notwithstanding.

**7 And there being but little timber upon the face of the land, nevertheless the people who went forth became exceedingly expert in the working of cement; therefore they did build houses of cement, in the which they did dwell.**

**verse 7** Northward, there was “little timber upon the face of the land,” and the Nephite colonists from the land of Zarahemla who settled in the land northward in the first century BC are credited with becoming expert “in the working of cement” (see also verses 9, 11). This technology was not apparently available in Zarahemla.

Here we have several testable facts: the Book of Mormon tells us that people in ancient America became very skillful in the use of cement at a precise historical time. No one in the nineteenth century could have known that cement, in fact, was extensively used in Mesoamerica beginning at about this time, the middle of the first century BC (see Matthew G. Wells and John W. Welch, “Concrete [pun intended] Evidence for the Book of Mormon,” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, ed. Welch, 212-14).

Central and Gulf Coast Mexico was the scene of the culmination of concrete engineering. Particularly at the vast ruins of Teotihuacan, north of present-day Mexico City, large constructions of this material can still be seen. The area of Teotihuacan is, of course, northward from the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, which most LDS scholars consider to be the dividing point between the Nephite lands southward and northward. Teotihuacan has a city center that is literally built of cement. Apparently the use of cement appeared suddenly on the scene in the middle of the first century BC in the area of Teotihuacan. The earliest sample discovered was “a fully developed product.” The cement floor slabs at this site “were remarkably high in structural quality.” Although

exposed to the elements of nearly two thousand years, they still “exceed many present-day building code requirements” (David S. Hyman, *A Study of the Calcareous Cements in Pre-Hispanic Mesoamerican Building Construction* [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1970], ii, 6-7). It is also interesting that in that area timber is scarce and is very expensive. Until recently in that area, when steel has started to play a major role in construction, most modern buildings were built with cement. The earliest concrete known is from the Valley of Mexico and dates to perhaps two centuries BC. We may assume that the Nephites’ expertise in cement work was taught to them by people who were already living in the “land northward” and had earlier experience in that technology.

**8 And it came to pass that they did multiply and spread, and did go forth from the land southward to the land northward, and did spread insomuch that they began to cover the face of the whole earth, from the sea south to the sea north, from the sea west to the sea east.**

**verse 8 “they did multiply and spread . . . insomuch that they began to cover the face of the whole earth”** This statement should be interpreted as being hyperbolic rather than being a specific geographic declaration. It simply means that the people spread out all over the land. Hugh Nibley comments on what it means “to cover”:

Terms like “great,” “mighty,” “numerous,” etc., are purely relative and cannot for a moment be taken to indicate population on a modern scale. We are told, for example, that the people of the great northern migration “began to cover the face of the whole earth” (Helaman 3:8). What is meant by “cover”? In case one thinks of something like greater Los Angeles one need only read a few verses farther to learn that the Gadianton robbers established their cells “in the more settled parts of the land” (Helaman 3:23), which makes it clear that “covering the face of the whole earth” does not mean a dense and uniform occupation but can signify the thinnest possible settlement (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 6, 420).

**“from the sea south to the sea north”** This phrase is troublesome and seems not to fit with the geographical hypothesis proposed by John L. Sorenson. See the map *Book of Mormon Lands, a Proposed Setting*. There is no north sea or south sea! It seems likely that the entire phrase “the face of the whole earth, from the sea south to the sea north, from the sea west to the sea east” is not only hyperbolic but also metaphorical. It is likely that Mormon is waxing poetical and that the phrase has no real concrete meaning, rather he intends only to say that the Nephites spread over a wide area. It is interesting that in a parallel passage in Helaman 11 (verse 20) describing the same sort of population expansion no north or south sea is mentioned: “And thus it did come to pass that the people of Nephi began to prosper again in the land, and began to build up their waste places, and began to multiply and spread, even until they did cover

the whole face of the land, both on the northward and on the southward, from the sea west to the sea east.” Here all specific references or allusions to Book of Mormon seas are only to the east and west seas.

**“and did go forth from the land southward to the land northward”** In Joseph Smith’s day there was a view that the western hemisphere was populated across the Bering Strait, and that civilization moved from the Northwest through North America and then to Central America. This verse suggests that migrations went the opposite way. Today archaeologists, linguists, and historians who have studied the matter are agreed that a long sequence of cultural transmissions and migrations moved northward from southern Mexico. There are also many discovered cultural links between Mesoamerica and South America (John L. Sorenson, “Mesoamericans in Pre-Columbian North America,” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, edited by John W. Welch, 218).

**9 And the people who were in the land northward did dwell in tents, and in houses of cement, and they did suffer whatsoever tree should spring up upon the face of the land that it should grow up, that in time they might have timber to build their houses, yea, their cities, and their temples, and their synagogues, and their sanctuaries, and all manner of their buildings.**

**verse 9 “the people who were in the land northward did dwell in tents”** It would seem that no matter how firmly the Nephite people were established in cities, some of them always considered themselves wanderers in a strange land, and they had their tents readily available (see also Omni 1:12, 27; Mosiah 2:6; 10:13-16; 22:2; 24:20).

**“they did suffer whatsoever tree should spring up upon the face of the land that it should grow up”** Here is a colorful way of stating that timber was scarce and valuable, and the people encouraged the growing and perhaps planting of trees that they may be later harvested for their lumber.

**“temples, and their synagogues, and their sanctuaries”** For a discussion on the various places of worship among the Nephites, see the commentary for Alma 16:13.

**10 And it came to pass as timber was exceedingly scarce in the land northward, they did send forth much by the way of shipping.**

**verse 10 “they did send forth much by the way of shipping”** It is notable that the people were beginning to utilize ships for transportation and trade. This likely took place via the Pacific Ocean or “west sea” (see Alma 63:5-6). This verse, in spite of its use of the phrase “send forth,” seems to refer to the importing of timber. They sent forth other goods in return for timber imports.

**11 And thus they did enable the people in the land northward that they might build many cities, both of wood and of cement.**

**12 And it came to pass that there were many of the people of Ammon, who were Lamanites by birth, did also go forth into this land.**

**verse 12** These people who were moving to the north and were spreading all over the land were obviously a mixture of cultural groups who would go on to intermarry and mingle their various racial bloods. It is difficult to know whether to refer to them as Nephites or Lamanites, as either designation seems arbitrary and inaccurate.

**verses 13-17** Here Mormon suddenly pauses in his narrative and editorializes about the general decay of the Nephite culture from his vantage point in about AD 385.

**13 And now there are many records kept of the proceedings of this people, by many of this people, which are particular and very large, concerning them.**

**verse 13** One might suppose that this verse refers to the peoples who had migrated to the lands northward. Yet it is clear from the context that Mormon is referring to the large plates of Nephi, the record kept of the people in the land southward.

Perhaps this verse is pertinent in another way. Opponents of the Book of Mormon have repeatedly raised alternate theories regarding its authorship. A variety of theories have been proposed including such proposed authors as Joseph Smith, Solomon Spaulding, Oliver Cowdery, or Sidney Rigdon. Modern computers have given birth to a new science of analyzing word patterns in documents whose authorship is disputed. The technique is called “wordprint analysis” or “wordprinting.” This technique has been applied, by Dr. John L. Hilton, to the Book of Mormon and to related writings (“On Verifying Wordprint Studies: Book of Mormon Authorship,” *BYU Studies* 30 [1990]: 89-108). It is based on the fact that each individual author subconsciously uses a consistent and characteristic pattern as he employs such common words as “and,” “the,” “of,” and “that.” Sixty-five different patterns of usage have been identified. Utilizing these patterns, it is possible for researchers to ascertain with a high degree of statistical certainty whether two separate works were written by the same or by different authors. The technique has been applied to translated works, and it has been determined that the process of translation does not invalidate the technique.

Specific conclusions drawn thus far by Dr. Hilton include the following:

1. The writings of Nephi in the Book of Mormon were written by a different author than the writings of the younger Alma.

2. The writings of Nephi and the writings of Alma were found not to be written by Joseph Smith, Oliver Cowdery, or Solomon Spaulding.

**14 But behold, a hundredth part of the proceedings of this people, yea, the account of the Lamanites and of the Nephites, and their wars, and contentions, and dissensions, and their preaching, and their prophecies, and their shipping and their building of ships, and their building of temples, and of synagogues and**

**their sanctuaries, and their righteousness, and their wickedness, and their murders, and their robbings, and their plundering, and all manner of abominations and whoredoms, cannot be contained in this work.**

**verse 14 “behold, a hundredth part of the proceedings of this people . . . cannot be contained in this work”** Mormon is implying that voluminous records were available to him as commenced his work of abridgement, and he was able to include only a “hundredth part” of those materials. The phrase “this work,” of course, refers to the plates of Mormon. If the reader still has a lingering confusion regarding the nomenclature of all the plates pertinent to the Book of Mormon, please see the supplemental article, “Those Confusing Book of Mormon Plates.” Mormon likely included those parts of the history which, by inspiration, he felt would be applicable to us today.

Please note the many “ands” in this verse—there are eighteen in all. Biblical Hebrew uses the equivalent of the conjunction *and* much more than English uses *and*, particularly in historical narrative and prose but also in poetry and direct speech. Its frequent use in English sounds irregular and repetitive. Consider the ten *ands* in the KJV of 1 Samuel 17:34-35:

*And* David said unto Saul, Thy servant kept his father’s sheep, *and* there came a lion, *and* a bear, *and* took a lamb out of the flock: *and* I went out after him, *and* smote him, *and* delivered it out of his mouth: *and* when he arose against me, I caught him by his beard, *and* smote him, *and* slew him (emphasis mine).

Compare also the thirteen *ands* in a single verse of Joshua:

*And* Joshua, *and* all Israel with him, took Achan the son of Zerah, *and* the silver, *and* the garment, *and* the wedge of gold, *and* his sons, *and* his daughters, *and* his oxen, *and* his asses, *and* his sheep, *and* his tent, *and* all that he had: *and* they brought them unto the valley of Achor (Joshua 7:24, emphasis mine).

The Book of Mormon corresponds to the Old Testament in its use of many *ands* throughout its historical and prose sections. This particular verse is an excellent example. There are other examples in the Book of Mormon. There are twenty-two *ands* in 1 Nephi 11:30-32, twelve *ands* in 1 Nephi 12:4, eight *ands* in Mosiah 10:8; and fifteen *ands* in Alma 46:12-13.

**15 But behold, there are many books and many records of every kind, and they have been kept chiefly by the Nephites.**

**verse 15 “many books and many records of every kind”** We are aware, of course, of both the large plates of Nephi and the small plates of Nephi. And the large plates of Nephi were likely a large set of plates consisting of several subsets. In this phrase Mormon may refer to the large plates of Nephi, or perhaps there were other “books and records” kept which cannot be classified among the plates of Nephi.

As you read this verse and some others in the Book of Mormon, you may intuitively conclude that all of the inhabitants of the Western Hemisphere two thousand years ago were literate. Archaeologists have provided evidence that this is not the case. Actually, the Book of Mormon does provide evidence of literacy among the ruling and priestly classes (Alma 59-60; Mormon 6:2; Mosiah 1:2) but not among all the Book of Mormon people—let alone all the inhabitants of the Western Hemisphere.

**16 And they have been handed down from one generation to another by the Nephites, even until they have fallen into transgression and have been murdered, plundered, and hunted, and driven forth, and slain, and scattered upon the face of the earth, and mixed with the Lamanites until they are no more called the Nephites, becoming wicked, and wild, and ferocious, yea, even becoming Lamanites.**

**verse 16** “And they have been handed down from one generation to another by the Nephites, even until they have fallen into transgression” Notice that the two “they’s” in this phrase have different antecedents. The first “they” refers to the “many books and many records of every kind” spoken of by the prophet Mormon in the previous verse. The second “they” refers to the Nephites in the time of Mormon who apostatized from the truth and who now (at the time of Mormon’s writing) were being “hunted . . . driven forth . . . slain, and scattered.”

**17 And now I return again to mine account; therefore, what I have spoken had passed after there had been great contentions, and disturbances, and wars, and dissensions, among the people of Nephi.**

**verse 17** “what I have spoken had passed” Here Mormon seems to be referring to the migration of peoples to the land northward. He intends to say, “This migration occurred following a period of great contention and war among the people of Nephi.”

**18 The forty and sixth year of the reign of the judges ended;**

**19 And it came to pass that there was still great contention in the land, yea, even in the forty and seventh year, and also in the forty and eighth year.**

**20 Nevertheless Helaman did fill the judgment-seat with justice and equity; yea, he did observe to keep the statutes, and the judgments, and the commandments of God; and he did do that which was right in the sight of God continually; and he did walk after the ways of his father, insomuch that he did prosper in the land.**

**verse 20** Keep in mind that the Helaman spoken of here is Helaman, the son of Helaman, and the primary author of the large part of the book of Helaman. Other contributing authors to the book of Helaman were Nephi and Lehi, the sons of Helaman, and the prophet Mormon.

**21 And it came to pass that he had two sons. He gave unto the eldest the name of Nephi, and unto the youngest, the name of Lehi. And they began to grow up unto the Lord.**

**verse 21** These two sons of Helaman will establish themselves as valiant servants. The older of the two, Nephi will become one of the most valiant and noble prophets in all of the Book of Mormon.

**22 And it came to pass that the wars and contentions began to cease, in a small degree, among the people of the Nephites, in the latter end of the forty and eighth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi.**

Hugh Nibley comments on the peaceful circumstances of this particular time but then provides an ominous preview of things to come:

In Helaman [chapter] 3, after a thumbnail picture of a civilization—a skillfully condensed vignette like one of those astonishing ivory panoramas carved on a single elephant’s tusk (Helaman 3:14), we are introduced into the underworld and are told how skillfully the crime families gradually infiltrate the whole society during a time of peace and prosperity, getting themselves “established in the more settled parts of the land” so quietly that their activities “were not known unto those who were at the head of the government” (Helaman 3:23). The prosperity of the time is actually called “astonishing beyond measure,” a time of “peace and exceedingly great joy” (Helaman 3:25, 32). Yet scarcely two years later “pride . . . began to enter into the church” (Helaman 3:33), and soon “the more humble part of the people,” suffering great persecutions, “did wax stronger and stronger in their humility” (Helaman 3:34-35), while the great majority had their vices “grow upon them from day to day, . . . because of their exceedingly great riches and their prosperity” (Helaman 3:36-37). Such was the way of the church. The general public (not the church members) were able to drive out the worst criminals, who went to stir things up among the Lamanites (Helaman 4:1-2) and finally persuaded them to make war against the Nephites who had thrown them out. The worst offenders in those days were “those who professed to belong to the church of God. And it was because of the pride of their hearts, because of their exceeding riches, yea, of their oppression of the poor, withholding their substance from the hungry,” and so on (Helaman 4:11-12), that “in the space of not many years” (Helaman 4:26) the Nephites were reduced to a sorry, materialistic people, hopelessly outnumbered by their enemies but with no inclination whatsoever to call upon God. “The voice of the people . . . chose evil, . . . therefore they were ripening for destruction, for the laws had become corrupted” (Helaman 5:2). Nephi gave up the judgment seat in disgust (Helaman 5:4) (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 8, 553-54).

**23 And it came to pass in the forty and ninth year of the reign of the judges, there was continual peace established in the land, all save it were the secret combinations which Gadianton the robber had established in the more settled parts of the land, which at that time were not known unto those who were at the head of government; therefore they were not destroyed out of the land.**

**verse 23** “the secret combinations which Gadianton the robber had established . . . which at that time were not know unto those who were at the head of government” Gadianton and his band had truly gone underground to the point where even the heads of government did not know of their existence. Brother Nibley Comments: “And that explains how it was possible later on, in the midst of great peace and prosperity, for the chief of state, Cezoram, and after him his son and successor, to be murdered in office in such a way that the assassins were never discovered (Helaman 6:15)” (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 7, 363-64).

**24 And it came to pass that in this same year there was exceedingly great prosperity in the church, insomuch that there were thousands who did join themselves unto the church and were baptized unto repentance.**

**verse 24** The “prosperity” here may well refer to a righteous spiritual prosperity rather than material prosperity.

**25 And so great was the prosperity of the church, and so many the blessings which were poured out upon the people, that even the high priests and the teachers were themselves astonished beyond measure.**

**verse 25** “even the high priests and the teachers were themselves astonished beyond measure” One is reminded of the Lord’s revelation to the prophet Habakkuk: “I will work a work in your days, which ye will not believe, though it be told you” (Habakkuk 1:5).

**26 And it came to pass that the work of the Lord did prosper unto the baptizing and uniting to the church of God, many souls, yea, even tens of thousands.**

**27 Thus we may see that the Lord is merciful unto all who will, in the sincerity of their hearts, call upon his holy name.**

**verse 27** “Thus we may see” Here again is that phrase which identifies this verse as an editorial comment by the prophet Mormon (see the commentary for Alma 50:19). Mormon’s editorial comment extends through verse 30.

**28 Yea, thus we see that the gate of heaven is open unto all, even to those who will believe on the name of Jesus Christ, who is the Son of God.**

**29 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, 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—**

**verse 29 “whosoever will may lay hold upon the word of God”** To “lay hold upon the word of God” is to study the scriptures and obey the commandments therein.

President Ezra Taft Benson quoted this verse in an address to priesthood leaders of the Church. Before he did so, he asked a question of them: “Are there members of your flock who are deep in sin and need to pull themselves back? Helaman’s promise is for them.” He suggested that a powerful tool for bringing the wayward back is the “word of God” (“The Power of the Word.” *Ensign* [May 1986] 16:80-81).

The “wiles” of the Devil refers to his tricks and his strategies for deceiving and ensnaring.

What is a “man of Christ”? Certainly it is a man (or woman) who is in tune with and enlightened by the Spirit of the Holy Ghost and who is truly striving to obey and thereby making steady progress in their spiritual growth.

**“strait and narrow course”** While some may object to the use of the word *strait* here rather than *straight*, there is significant justification for its use as discussed in the supplemental article *Strait and Straight in the Book of Mormon*.

**30 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.**

**verse 30 “to sit down with . . . all our holy fathers, to go no more out”** Elder Bruce R. McConkie wrote:

Saved persons remain in their exalted state forever. They cannot fall, but dwell forever in the celestial city, to go out never more at all. Their lot is “to sit down” in the kingdom of heaven “with Abraham, and Isaac, and with Jacob, and with all our holy fathers, to go no more out.” (Helaman 3:30.) Their inheritance is in that realm from which no friend departs and into which no enemy enters. They are as God, and God is as he is from everlasting to everlasting (*Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, volume 3, 459).

**verses 29-30** Hugh Nibley comments on the complex imagery of these verses, pointing out how this pattern is typical of Near Eastern literature:

Sometimes imagery seems to get remarkably jumbled up in the Book of Mormon, as in Helaman 3:29-30. . . . Here in a single sentence we have the image of the rod or staff (‘lay hold’), the sword, the nets, the path, the yawning gulf, the ship, the throne, and the kingdom. To us this may appear rather tasteless and overdone, but it is typical [Hebrew thought] (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 7, 161-62).

31 And in this year there was continual rejoicing in the land of Zarahemla, and in all the regions round about, even in all the land which was possessed by the Nephites.

32 And it came to pass that there was peace and exceedingly great joy in the remainder of the forty and ninth year; yea, and also there was continual peace and great joy in the fiftieth year of the reign of the judges.

33 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—

34 And they were lifted up in pride, even to the persecution of many of their brethren. Now this was a great evil, which did cause the more humble part of the people to suffer great persecutions, and to wade through much affliction.

**verse 34** “And they were lifted up in pride, even to the persecution of many of their brethren” For a discussion of pride, the section “Pride” in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 5, *The “Natural Self” and “Spiritual Self.”* The persecution of more humble members by those who profess membership in the church is a sure sign of spiritual sickness. Some may find it difficult to understand how church members could persecute other church members. Consider the following description of a secular church youth group:

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 . . . 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. . . . 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 (Vance Packard, *The Status Seekers*, New York: Picket Books, 1971, 174).

Why would the proud be inclined to persecute their brethren? The proud tend to view others as their competitors rather than their equals. Rather than lifting others, they are inclined to try always to outdistance them. They are given to judging others based on strictly worldly criteria. Those whom they judge to be inferior are likely to be treated disdainfully or simply ignored. They are apt to be highly class-conscious, smug, and

arrogant. It is not difficult to understand why they might mistreat the more humble among their brothers and sisters.

**35 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.**

**verse 35** Yet these unpretentious saints, in spite of the mistreatment by the prideful saints, remained humble and grew in the faith. Because of their remaining faithful in the face of much pain and affliction, they were rewarded by the Spirit “with joy and consolation.”

**“Even to the purifying and the sanctification of their hearts”** For a review of the important process of sanctification, please see *Justification and Sanctification*, in chapter 17 of volume 1, *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*.

**“which sanctification cometh because of their yielding their hearts unto God”** Elder Neal A. Maxwell asks a most provocative question: “Are we really ready . . . to accept the reality that there is only one name and only one way whereby we can obtain salvation? (2 Nephi 31:21)” (*Not My Will, But Thine*, 13).

**36 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.**

**37 And it came to pass in the fifty and third year of the reign of the judges, Helaman died, and his eldest son Nephi began to reign in his stead. And it came to pass that he did fill the judgment-seat with justice and equity; yea, he did keep the commandments of God, and did walk in the ways of his father.**

**verse 37** This Nephi is certainly one of God’s greatest, though unsung prophets as will become apparent as we read the account of his ministry.

## Helaman Chapter 4

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**1 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.**

**verse 1** “there were many dissensions in the church” It was the nature of Nephite civilization that dissensions within the church soon led to civil dissensions which came to plague the entire Nephite nation and plunge it into a destructive series of wars with the Lamanites.

**2 And the rebellious part were slain and driven out of the land, and they did go unto the king of the Lamanites.**

**3 And it came to pass that they did endeavor to stir up the Lamanites to war against the Nephites; but behold, the Lamanites were exceedingly afraid, insomuch that they would not hearken to the words of those dissenters.**

**verse 3** The Lamanites had been beaten too many times and were not enthusiastic about the prospects of yet another assault on the Nephites. Daniel C. Peterson wrote: “The great war narrated in the book of Alma had ended in utter Lamanite defeat only a little more than two decades earlier, and the spectacular campaign led by Coriantumr had concluded disastrously just thirteen years before. And both of these military catastrophes had been set in motion by dissenters from the Nephites, who often seemed more than willing to fight their erstwhile brethren down to the last drop of Lamanite blood. Thus, the Lamanites did not respond favorably to the incitements of this particular group of dissenters” (*Studies in Scripture, Volume Eight, Alma 30 to Moroni, 99*).

**4 But it came to pass in the fifty and sixth year of the reign of the judges, there were dissenters who went up from the Nephites unto the Lamanites; and they succeeded with those others in stirring them up to anger against the Nephites; and they were all that year preparing for war.**

**verse 4** But yet another wave of dissenters wore down the Lamanites’ reluctance to fight the Nephites.

**5 And in the fifty and seventh year they did come down against the Nephites to battle, and they did commence the work of death; yea, insomuch that in the fifty and eighth year of the reign of the judges they succeeded in obtaining possession of the land of Zarahemla; yea, and also all the lands, even unto the land which was near the land Bountiful.**

**6 And the Nephites and the armies of Moronihah were driven even into the land of Bountiful;**

**verse 6** The city and land of Bountiful was the vital northernmost fortification of the eastern border of Nephite territory at this time. Its strategic purpose was to restrict access to the land northward in order to prevent the Nephites from becoming boxed in by the Lamanites (Alma 22:29, 33; 50:32-34; 51:28-32; 52:9; Helaman 1:23, 28).

**7 And there they did fortify against the Lamanites, from the west sea, even unto the east; it being a day's journey for a Nephite, on the line which they had fortified and stationed their armies to defend their north country.**

**verse 7** Exactly what distant is being referred to here that is “a day’s journey for a Nephite.” It would appear that the length of the fortified line created by the Nephites for defense against the Lamanites could be negotiated by a Nephite on foot in one day. Apparently the fortified line began at the west sea and extended toward the east. No east sea is mentioned (see also Alma 22:32).

**8 And thus those dissenters of the Nephites, with the help of a numerous army of the Lamanites, had obtained all the possession of the Nephites which was in the land southward. And all this was done in the fifty and eighth and ninth years of the reign of the judges.**

**verse 8** “all the possession of the Nephites which was in the land southward” Notice here that the land of Zarahemla is divided into a land northward (including the land Bountiful into which the Nephites had retreated) and a land southward which includes the city of Zarahemla.

**9 And it came to pass in the sixtieth year of the reign of the judges, Moronihah did succeed with his armies in obtaining many parts of the land; yea, they regained many cities which had fallen into the hands of the Lamanites.**

**10 And it came to pass in the sixty and first year of the reign of the judges they succeeded in regaining even the half of all their possessions.**

**11 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.**

**verses 12-14** In these three following verses, Mormon interrupts his narrative to offer some observations on the reasons for the Nephites’ inability to defend against this Lamanite invasion. One might expect Mormon, himself a great military commander, to comment on military tactics or strategy. Instead he comments on the wickedness of the Nephites, which wickedness had even extended into the church of God. Competent as

Mormon was in military matters, he never forgot that the Lord ultimately determines the course of all human affairs.

**12 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—**

**verse 12** Here are enumerated the major sins of the Nephites. Perhaps their most formative and fundamental sin was that of pride and the consequent withdrawal of the Spirit of God. The other sins mentioned here spring from pride and its consequences. For a discussion of the sin of pride see “Pride” in volume 1, chapter 5, *The “Natural Man” and “Spiritual Man” in Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*.

**“deserting away”** Stan Larson has suggested an alternate word for “deserting” here:

*Deserting* in the phrase “deserting away into the land of Nephi, among the Lamanites” of Helaman 4:12 has appeared in every printed edition of the Book of Mormon. The word *deserting* would normally be found in a context indicating an abandoning of military service. However, the printer’s manuscript has “desenting.” This could be taken either as deserting or dissenting. A consideration in favor of the latter is the association of the same preposition, away, found in 3 Nephi 3:11 where it talks about dissenting away. Also Oliver Cowdery’s spelling habits in the Book of Mormon manuscript should be considered. There are ten other places where dissent (or related forms) are spelled as desent, which certainly pushes in favor that dissenting was the intent of the printer’s manuscript at this point. Thus, by a not-too-far-fetched conjectural emendation the text becomes dissenting” (*BYU Studies*, volume 18, number 4, 568).

**13 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.**

**verse 13** To be “left in their own strength” is, of course, to be cut off from the Lord’s protective influence.

**14 But behold, Moronihah did preach many things unto the people because of their iniquity, and also Nephi and Lehi, who were the sons of Helaman, did preach many things unto the people, 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.

15 And it came to pass that they did repent, and inasmuch as they did repent they did begin to prosper.

16 For when Moronihah saw that they did repent he did venture to lead them forth from place to place, and from city to city, even until they had regained the one-half of their property and the one-half of all their lands.

**verse 16** While Moronihah succeeded in winning back about one half of all the Nephite lands, the remainder would become irretrievably lost to the Nephites.

17 And thus ended the sixty and first year of the reign of the judges.

18 And it came to pass in the sixty and second year of the reign of the judges, that Moronihah could obtain no more possessions over the Lamanites.

19 Therefore they did abandon their design to obtain the remainder of their lands, for so numerous were the Lamanites that it became impossible for the Nephites to obtain more power over them; therefore Moronihah did employ all his armies in maintaining those parts which he had taken.

**verse 19** The Nephites are forced to adopt a defensive strategy of mere defense and containment.

20 And it came to pass, because of the greatness of the number of the Lamanites the Nephites were in great fear, lest they should be overpowered, and trodden down, and slain, and destroyed.

21 Yea, they began to remember the prophecies of Alma, and also the words of Mosiah; and they saw that they had been a stiffnecked people, and that they had set at naught the commandments of God;

**verse 21** “they had been a stiffnecked people” There is symbolism involved in being “stiffnecked.” This term may represent the people’s refusal to bow their heads in humble reverence and submission to God. To be “stiffnecked” is to be proud and stubborn.

22 And that they had altered and trampled under their feet the laws of Mosiah, or that which the Lord commanded him to give unto the people; and they saw that their laws had become corrupted, and that they had become a wicked people, insomuch that they were wicked even like unto the Lamanites.

**verses 21-22** Throughout the Book of Mormon, it is clear that there was an intimate relationship between the spiritual and secular laws of the Nephite peoples. The “standard works” or the scriptural records of the Church of God—the brass plates of Laban and the small and large plates of Nephi—contained the laws of the gospel and the scriptural basis for the Nephite civil government and law. The corruption of civil law

was always preceded by the rejection of those moral principles upon which that law was founded (see also Helaman 5:2). This is a grand principle and should well serve as a warning for all nations of the world even today. We regard the constitution of the United States of America as an inspired document. We believe that God inspired the founding fathers so that a country might be established with sufficient freedoms to allow the establishment and growth of the Lord's Church in these last days. Yet, this country still lacks the ideal form of government which will pertain during the Millennium—a theocracy with the Lord Jesus Christ at its head. The government of the United States is a necessary compromise. Thus, this country has been foreseen in prophecy as the “great Gentile nation.”

**23 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.**

**verse 23 “the judgments of God did stare them in the face”** The judgments of God stare a people in the face when that people is on the very threshold of incurring the wrath and judgments of God because of their behavior.

**24 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—**

**verse 24 “the Spirit of the Lord did no more preserve them”** These Nephites had broken their sacred covenants, and thus the Spirit could no longer dwell with and preserve them.

Mormon likens the condition of the apostate Nephites to that of an unholy temple wherein the Spirit can no longer dwell.

**25 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.**

**26 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.**

**verse 26** Brother Hugh Nibley comments: “‘In the space of not many years,’ the Nephites were reduced to a sorry, materialistic people, hopelessly outnumbered by their enemies but with no inclination whatsoever to call upon God” (*Collected Works of Hugh*

*Nibley*, volume 8, 553-54). The book of Helaman repeatedly makes the point that a great civilization can be lost in a very short time (see also Helaman 6:32; 7:6).

## Helaman Chapter 5

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### Scripture Mastery

**Helaman 5** The mission of Nephi and Lehi to the land of Nephi. They have a miraculous experience in a Lamanite prison during which they are surrounded by a wall of fire.

**Helaman 5:8-12** Posthumous counsel of Helaman to his sons Nephi and Lehi: 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.

**1 And it came to pass that in this same year, behold, Nephi delivered up the judgment-seat to a man whose name was Cezoram.**

**2 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.**

**verse 2** The ominous situation described here was just what Mosiah had warned of some sixty years previously. At that time he abolished the monarchy and established the system of judges. He taught that the laws under which the Nephites then lived were correct and given to them by the hand of the Lord. He taught also that creating a more representative form of government would tend to lead to the continuation of correct laws: “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 . . . do your business by the voice of the people [majority vote]” (Mosiah 29:25-26). But Mosiah also warned: “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” (Mosiah 29:27). Thus we might conclude that the Nephite people are now ripe for destruction or “ripened in iniquity” (Ether 2:9; 9:20). Amulek, in his preaching to the people of Ammonihah, had also recalled the words of king Mosiah and had issued a similar warning (Alma 10:19).

It is sobering to realize that even a fundamentally sound form of government, such as the constitutional government of the United States of America, may fail in times of wickedness when the majority of people choose that which is morally wrong. In such a government, the majority rules, but if the majority is not morally right, then the government will not protect the righteous, but instead will protect the wicked in their wickedness. President John Adams often expressed his conviction that a nation’s liberty is ultimately dependent upon the morality of the people. He said: “[The

Constitution] was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other” (Nelson, W. O., *The Charter of Liberty* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book] 1987, 101). On another occasion President Adams said: “We have no government armed with power capable of contending with human passions, unbridled by morality and religion” (*Ibid.*).

We know that the Book of Mormon was written specifically for our time. It is clear that the Lord knew that the same kinds of dangers to the integrity of government would exist in our day, and he has seen to it that we are appropriately warned. Early signs of significant deterioration of a people’s culture might include a loss of respect for authority, a lack of trust in the doctrines of Jesus Christ, a cessation of miracles, a replacement of spiritual things by rationalism, humanism, materialism, and skepticism. In latter-day revelation, the Lord said: “Beware of pride, lest ye become as the Nephites of old” (D&C 38:39).

### **3 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.**

**verse 3** The people had turned from just laws and righteous principles and would not be governed by such. They had become so wicked that the voice of the people chose only those laws that allowed them to do evil. These would surely lead to their physical captivity, destruction, and ultimately spiritual death.

### **4 And it came to pass that Nephi had become weary because of their iniquity; and he yielded up the judgment-seat, and took it upon him to preach the word of God all the remainder of his days, and his brother Lehi also, all the remainder of his days;**

**verse 4** “Nephi . . . yielded up the judgment-seat, and took it upon him to preach the word of God all the remainder of his days” Nephi doubtless knew of the similar action of his great-grandfather Alma (Alma 4:15-19).

**verses 5-12** Here Mormon cites a direct quotation from Helaman. It has been pointed out by Ronald D. Anderson that Helaman, in counseling his sons, uses the word *remember* thirteen times in these eight verses. Brother Anderson suggests that Helaman’s frequent use of this word is intentional and is intended to identify and emphasize the main theme of his counsel. Brother Anderson further points out that this use of repetition of a word or phrase for emphasis is a common literary device used in the Bible. This literary technique has been called by its German name “leitwörter” meaning “theme words” (“Leitwörter in Helaman and 3 Nephi” in *The Book of Mormon: Helaman Through 3 Nephi 8, According To Thy Word*, 241-49).

In studying these verses, the reader should also keep in mind the rich meaning of the verb to *remember*. To remember means more than simply maintaining a fact in

one's memory. It means to be obedient to, to follow, to dedicate oneself to, to prayerfully ponder, to strive, and to act.

**5 For they remembered the words which their father Helaman spake unto them. And these are the words which he spake:**

**verses 6-12** Helaman is here quoted posthumously by the prophet Mormon. This counsel of Helaman was doubtless found on the large plates of Nephi. Helaman's counsel proved to be most influential in the lives of his sons (see Helaman 5:14). The theme of his remarks is "remembrance." Helaman counsels them to remember to keep the commandments, to remember the example of their forefathers, to remember that salvation comes only through Jesus Christ, and to remember that Jesus Christ is our sure foundation. Ultimately remembrance is divine awakening of memories of the spirit. It is a reminder of that which we have previously known. 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? . . . By the power of the Spirit . . . 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 (*Gospel Doctrine*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1978, 13-14).

There is apparently a great spiritual significance in this type of remembrance, and, indeed, in pondering these particular subjects. In response to our striving to remember, it would seem that the Spirit stands ready to witness to us the truth of those things we are pondering and seeking and obeying.

**6 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.**

**verse 6** "I have given unto you the names of our first parents who came out of the land of Jerusalem" I have named you after Father Lehi and his son Nephi. Jennifer Clark Lane has taught: "In the Book of Mormon, names have importance and significance consistent with Israelite practices recorded in the Old Testament (i.e., a name can be a memorial, an indication of change of character, and a part of a covenant or an adoptive relationship). The Israelite concept that the term *name* (*sem*) also means

*memorial* is demonstrated in the passage when Helaman talks with his sons Nephi and Lehi about their names” (*Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, “The Lord Will Redeem His People: Adoptive Covenant and Redemption in the Old Testament and Book of Mormon,” 47).

**“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”** Regarding the importance of remembering of our forefathers and the Lord’s promises to them, Joseph Smith taught:

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 the 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 (*TPJS*, 65-66).

Nephi, the son of Lehi, wrote: “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). Previously, this same Nephi had stated with confidence: “The Lord is able to deliver us even as our fathers” (1 Nephi 4:3). In this context, see also the preface to the Book of Mormon, Mosiah 27:16, Alma 29:11-12, and Alma 36:29. As we grow in our understanding of the past, our perception of the present and our vision of the future expand.

**7 Therefore, my sons, 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.**

**8 And now my sons, 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.**

**9 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.**

**verse 9** Helaman likely makes reference here to Mosiah 3:17: “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.” The prophet Nephi also emphasized that the name of Jesus Christ is the only name by

which man is saved: “Behold I say unto you, that as these things are true, and as the Lord God liveth, there is none other name given under heaven save it be this Jesus Christ, of which I have spoken, whereby man can be saved” (2 Nephi 25:20).

**10 And remember also the words which Amulek spake unto Zeezrom, in the city of Ammonihah; for he said unto him 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.**

**verse 10** “**he should not come to redeem them *in* their sins, but to redeem them *from* their sins**” (italics mine). Helaman has reference here to Amulek’s teachings in Alma 11:34-37. To redeem mankind “in their sins” is to save or exalt everyone without regard to their propensity for righteousness or evil. It was Satan in the premortal world who offered to save all men in their sins. Brigham Young taught: “If you undertake to save all, you must save them in unrighteousness and corruption” (*JD*, 13:282). Christ’s atonement is infinite in its scope. It is endless and eternal in its applications, yet it has limitations. It cannot save an individual in his sins. It cannot bestow power and glory and eternal life in the celestial kingdom upon those who are unrepentant and unclean. The atonement makes it possible for man to be redeemed “from his sins”—they may be blotted out based upon his repentance and obedience.

**11 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.**

**verse 11** “**And he hath power given unto him from the Father to redeem them from their sins because of repentance**” Here is a profound concept regarding the divine sonship of the Savior. Jesus lived a sinless life, his motives and love for us were absolutely pure, and he agonizingly atoned in Gethsemane and on the cross. We know his sacrifice resulted in his being enabled to forgive those whom he judged worthy of forgiveness. This authority was given him by those who enforce the law of justice. Yet, here we learn that he could not have become our Savior and he could not have put into effect the great law of mercy without, in addition, “power given unto him from the Father.” This final power must have been granted him following his atoning sacrifice.

Other significant powers were vested in him at the time of his birth into mortality by virtue of his relationship with his Father. The body in which he performed his mortal ministry was sired by the Father in the most literal sense. He was not the son of Joseph. He was the literal son of the Eternal Father. He consequently had power over his life—the complete freedom to either lay down his life voluntarily or not do so. It was apparently vital that he be in complete control to surrender to his crucifixion voluntarily or not, as he wished. His sacrifice had to be the voluntary sacrifice of a God, not the

sacrifice of a man. He confirmed that this was so: “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). He also consequently had the power to endure the physical, mental, and spiritual agony required to complete the process of atoning without succumbing to those extreme adversities.

**“the tidings of the conditions of repentance”** The “tidings” are the good news: Our Savior has made it possible to have our sins deleted and return to live with God again! Repentance, of course, is essential. Without it there can be no redemption from the spiritual fall.

**“which bringeth unto the power of the Redeemer, unto the salvation of their souls”** This phrase is clearer if one word is inserted: “which bringeth unto *them* the power of the Redeemer . . .”

**12 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.**

**verse 12** There is some danger that the reader may become distracted by the repeated metaphors in this verse. The concept of building one’s foundation on the “rock of our Redeemer” is a vital one that deserves a few words of comment and some considerable pondering. How, in a practical sense, does one build one’s foundation upon the Lord? Primarily, it would seem, one must strive to acquire one of the most fundamental and vital gifts of the Spirit, that of a revealed testimony of Jesus. One who possesses this gift enjoys a close and personal relationship with the Savior and comes to center one’s life around him. The individual who has been so favored is never again the same as before. There comes with a personal testimony of Christ a peace and comfort and confidence in his presence, a dependence upon him, and a daily seeking him out. A few moments’ contemplation of the Savior is often accompanied by that particular and unique nudge by the Spirit which each individual comes to know as his own particular indication of divine contact.

As with any of the gifts of the Spirit there is an earthly counterpart for which we must strive “in the trenches” as we “experiment upon the word.” It is the diligent seeking after this earthly counterpart that is eventually rewarded by the Spirit with the priceless gift. And how do we “experiment upon the word”? By praying earnestly and often; studying, pondering, and prayerfully reading the scriptures; proactively looking for opportunities to obey his commandments; obediently and humbly responding to any

opportunity to serve in his Church; and looking for opportunities to teach others of him and of his atonement, his mercy, and his incomparable grace.

**13 And it came to pass that these were the words which Helaman taught to his sons; yea, he did teach them many things which are not written, and also many things which are written.**

**14 And they did remember his words; and therefore they went forth, keeping the commandments of God, to teach the word of God among all the people of Nephi, beginning at the city Bountiful;**

**verse 14** It is interesting to note that Nephi and Lehi began their mission in the city Bountiful in the land Bountiful. From here they will travel to the city of Gid and then to the city of Mulek, cities near the borders of the east sea.

**“And they did remember his words”** This phrase illustrates an interesting editorial technique that was discovered in the Bible following the time of the prophet Joseph Smith called “repetitive resumption.” For a description of this technique, see the commentary for Alma 11:20. Repetitive resumption refers to an editor’s return to an original narrative following a deliberate interlude. Old Testament writers accomplished this by repeating a key word or phrase that immediately preceded the textual interruption. Here, the editor, Mormon, just prior to this verse had inserted a brief account of Helaman’s powerful discourse to his sons Nephi and Lehi (verses 6-12). This insertion was intentionally prefaced by the editorial introduction, “For they remembered the words which their father Helaman spake unto them” (see verse 5). The editor then, in this verse (verse 14), uses the phrase “And they did remember his words” in order to return to his original narrative. This is another example of repetitive resumption.

**15 And from thenceforth to the city of Gid; and from the city of Gid to the city of Mulek;**

**16 And even from one city to another, until they had gone forth among all the people of Nephi who were in the land southward; and from thence into the land of Zarahemla, among the Lamanites.**

**verse 16** Formerly the “land southward” was the Lamanite land of Nephi, south of the land of Zarahemla. At the time of this verse, the land southward is everything south of the land Bountiful. The definition of the land southward and the land northward changes from time to time depending on the political situation of the moment. The land of Zarahemla, formerly the Nephite capital, is now, of course, under Lamanite control.

**17 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.**

**verse 17** It is truly remarkable that Nephite dissenters were moved to re-accept the gospel. Usually, as a group, they are unlikely to be receptive to the promptings of the Spirit.

**18 And it came to pass that Nephi and Lehi did preach unto the Lamanites with such great power and authority, for they had power and authority given unto them that they might speak, and they also had what they should speak given unto them—**

**19 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.**

**verse 19** “the wickedness of the traditions of their fathers” See the commentary for Enos 1:14 and Mosiah 10:12-17. See also verse 51 of this chapter.

**20 And it came to pass that Nephi and Lehi did proceed from thence to go to the land of Nephi.**

**21 And it came to pass that they were taken by an army of the Lamanites and cast into prison; yea, even in that same prison in which Ammon and his brethren were cast by the servants of Limhi.**

**verse 21** “they were taken by an army of the Lamanites” Apparently the Lamanites at times maintained a standing army even when they were not fighting the Nephites.

This Ammon was not the missionary Ammon, the son of Mosiah. Rather this was the Ammon, of Mulekite descent, who had been sent to the land of Nephi nearly a century earlier along with fifteen other men. King Mosiah had dispatched them to inquire after the Nephites who had traveled to the land of Nephi under the direction of Zeniff several years previously. Ammon and his men had been imprisoned by the very people they set out to rescue. Once their identity and purpose were discovered, however, they had been released and were instrumental in rescuing Limhi and his group of Nephites.

**22 And after they had been cast into prison many days without food, behold, they went forth into the prison to take them that they might slay them.**

**verse 22** Be careful to keep the pronouns “they” and “them” straight in this verse and in the three following verses.

**verses 23-33** Here the Lord intervenes in a powerful and dramatic way to save these Nephite missionaries. The extent of his intervention suggests that the continued preaching of Nephi and Lehi and the conversion of these Lamanites was of major importance to the Lord's purposes. For most of the remainder of the Book of Mormon, it will be the Lamanites and not the Nephites who are the righteous followers of the Lord.

**23 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.**

**verse 23** “Nephi and Lehi were encircled about as if by fire” Exactly with what or by whom were Nephi and Lehi encircled about? It is likely that they were encircled by the protective presence of heavenly beings accompanied by the glory and power and brightness of God which gave them the appearance of fire (see verse 39). At the time of the Savior's appearance to the Book of Mormon people, a similar situation will occur. Following Christ's blessing of the little children, the multitude “cast their eyes towards heaven, and they saw the heavens open, and they saw angels descending out of heaven as it were in the midst of fire; and they came down and encircled those little ones about, and they were encircled about with fire; and the angels did minister unto them” (3 Nephi 17:24).

**24 And when they saw that they were encircled about with a pillar of fire, and that it burned them not, their hearts did take courage.**

**verse 24** Doubtless Nephi and Lehi were initially apprehensive and concerned about their own safety when this glorious manifestation began.

**25 For they saw that the Lamanites durst not lay their hands upon them; neither durst they come near unto them, but stood as if they were struck dumb with amazement.**

**26 And it came to pass that Nephi and Lehi did stand forth and began to speak unto them, saying: 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.**

**27 And behold, when they had said these words, the earth shook exceedingly, and the walls of the prison did shake as if they were about to tumble to the earth; but behold, they did not fall. And behold, they that were in the prison were Lamanites and Nephites who were dissenters.**

**verse 27** “they that were in prison” These were not the fellow prisoners of Lehi and Nephi. Rather they were those Lamanites who had gone “forth into the prison

to take them that they might slay them.” We will learn that there were some three hundred of them.

**28 And it came to pass that they were overshadowed with a cloud of darkness, and an awful solemn fear came upon them.**

**29 And it came to pass that there came a voice as if it were above the cloud of darkness, saying: Repent ye, repent ye, and seek no more to destroy my servants whom I have sent unto you to declare good tidings.**

**30 And it came to pass when they heard this voice, and beheld that it was not a voice of thunder, neither was it a voice of a great tumultuous noise, but behold, it was a still voice of perfect mildness, as if it had been a whisper, and it did pierce even to the very soul—**

**verse 30 “it was a still voice of perfect mildness, as if it had been a whisper, and it did pierce even to the very soul”** Ralph C. Hancock has observed: “Revealed light and natural light [secular learning] are not completely distinct categories. Revelation engages natural reason and indeed may build upon it. It is sometimes described in LDS teaching as ‘a still voice of perfect mildness’ able to ‘pierce unto the very soul’ (Helaman 5:30) or as a spirit that resonates with the mind to produce a feeling of ‘pure intelligence’ or ‘sudden strokes of ideas’ (*TPJS*, 151). It is thus appropriate to seek and prepare for revelation by the effort of reason: ‘You must study it out in your mind; then you must ask me if it be right’ (D&C 9:8)” (*Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, volume 3, “Reason and Revelation”).

**“it was not a voice of thunder”** Elder Neal A. Maxwell comments: “True faith is not to be brought about by overwhelming and intimidating intervention from God, either. The Lord is a shepherd with a ‘mild’ and ‘pleasant’ voice—not a shouting and scolding shepherd” (*Not My Will, But Thine*, 32).

**31 And notwithstanding the mildness of the voice, behold the earth shook exceedingly, and the walls of the prison trembled again, as if it were about to tumble to the earth; and behold the cloud of darkness, which had overshadowed them, did not disperse—**

**32 And behold the voice came again, saying: Repent ye, repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand; and seek no more to destroy my servants. And it came to pass that the earth shook again, and the walls trembled.**

**verse 32 “repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand”** Of what is the Lord prophesying here? His mortal ministry, perhaps? Or maybe the post-mortal life of all of us? Is it not true that for each individual this mortal phase is most fragile and transient, and the next phase of our lives is virtually always near (“at hand”)? Our mortal experience is so fleeting and so temporary that it is wholly inappropriate to regard the next life to be a long way off. It is the nature of man, however, particularly in

his youth to inappropriately regard his mortal life as permanent unless the Spirit whispers to him otherwise or unless calamitous circumstances cause him to realize the truly temporary nature of this mortal phase.

**33 And also again the third time the voice came, and did speak unto them marvelous words which cannot be uttered by man; and the walls did tremble again, and the earth shook as if it were about to divide asunder.**

**verse 33** “marvelous words which cannot be uttered by man” It is not clear whether these words were included on the large plates and Mormon simply chose not to include them here, or whether they were never even recorded because of their sacred nature.

**34 And it came to pass that the Lamanites could not flee because of the cloud of darkness which did overshadow them; yea, and also they were immovable because of the fear which did come upon them.**

**verse 34** This spectacular supernatural display had completely stunned and immobilized the Lamanites. Fortunately an apostate Nephite was nearby whose heart was touched. He was able to explain to the Lamanites how they might find their way out of this “cloud of darkness.”

**35 Now there was one among them who was a Nephite by birth, who had once belonged to the church of God but had dissented from them.**

**verse 35** We will learn that this verse refers to the rather enigmatic character Aminadab (see verse 39). The brief episode in his life that unfolds in these few verses should give hope to parents whose child has rebelled and rejected the gospel.

**36 And it came to pass that he turned him about, and behold, he saw through the cloud of darkness the faces of Nephi and Lehi; and behold, they did shine exceedingly, even as the faces of angels. And he beheld that they did lift their eyes to heaven; and they were in the attitude as if talking or lifting their voices to some being whom they beheld.**

**verse 36** This shining countenance has been observed when mortals are transfigured in the presence of the Lord. In the cases of Abinadi and Stephen just prior to their executions (Mosiah 13:5; Acts 6:15) and in the case of Moses coming down from Sinai (Exodus 34:29-35).

**37 And it came to pass that this man did cry unto the multitude, that they might turn and look. And behold, there was power given unto them that they did turn and look; and they did behold the faces of Nephi and Lehi.**

**38 And they said unto the man: Behold, what do all these things mean, and who is it with whom these men do converse?**

**39 Now the man's name was Aminadab. And Aminadab said unto them: They do converse with the angels of God.**

**40 And it came to pass that the Lamanites said unto him: What shall we do, that this cloud of darkness may be removed from overshadowing us?**

**verse 40** Here, the Lamanites' cry for help and mercy is more than merely an appeal to be helped out from under this frightening cloud of darkness. The Spirit had apparently witnessed to them the seriousness of their spiritual plight. They were sinners badly in need of repentance, and the Holy Ghost had made them keenly aware of that fact. They realized that they were lost without someone to redeem or rescue them.

**41 And Aminadab said unto them: You must repent, and cry unto the voice, even until ye shall have faith in Christ, who was taught unto you by Alma, and Amulek, and Zeezrom; and when ye shall do this, the cloud of darkness shall be removed from overshadowing you.**

**verse 41** Aminadab may have been addressing here primarily the Nephite dissenters who called themselves Lamanites. Alma, Amulek, and Zeezrom never did preach among the Lamanites per se. They did, however, about 45 years earlier, travel together to preach in the land of the Zoramites who were Nephite dissenters and likely the ancestors of some of those present during this experience in the Lamanite prison. It is interesting to note that following the mission to the Zoramites of Alma, Amulek, and Zeezrom, the Zoramites who remained unconverted "became Lamanites" (see Alma 43:4). It is certainly possible that Aminadab and some of his Lamanite friends were young Zoramites during the mission to the Zoramites, remained unconverted during that mission, and later become Lamanites.

The conversion of Aminadab, formerly an apostate Nephite, should be heartening to parents of rebellious offspring. Usually apostates become and remain the church's bitterest enemies. On occasion they are capable, as was the case with Aminadab, of dredging up and recalling from deep within their memories those truths they believed in former times.

**"you must repent . . . even until ye shall have faith in Christ"** Here is a reminder of the fundamental process of utilizing faith to acquire gifts of the Spirit—in this case a testimony of Jesus Christ. The process, which Alma has referred to as "experimenting on the word" (Alma 32:27), involves diligent and persistent striving including study, pondering, prayer, and most importantly repeatedly repenting and deliberately obeying the Lord's commandments. This process is called manifesting one's deliberate faith. Then comes the precious spiritual gifts—the inevitable gifts of the spirit that accompany deliberate obedience. These spiritual gifts are increments of the

attributes of Christ. They are received by an obedient individual through revelation and become a second type of faith—the obedient individual’s revealed faith. The sum total of an individual’s spiritual gifts makes up his or her revealed faith. This faith is the essence of spiritual strength, spiritual character, and spiritual growth. Elder Dallin H. Oaks 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 (“Sin and Suffering.” *BYU Devotional Fireside Speeches* 1989-90, 150-51).

As we repent of our sins, we gain what President McKay termed a “consciousness of victory over self and of communion with the Infinite. 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” (“The True Purpose of Life,” *Improvement Era* [December 1963] 66:1057). This exquisite emotional experience is referred to in the scriptures—it is the experience of true joy.

“when ye shall do this, the cloud of darkness shall be removed from overshadowing you” Aminadab may be reciting something that he had heard Amulek preach to the Zoramites forty-five years earlier. Amulek had warned the Zoramites that if they did not repent, there would come a “night of darkness wherein there can be no labor performed” (Alma 34:33).

**42 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.**

**verse 42** “they all did begin to cry unto the voice of him who had shaken the earth” In teaching of the process of repentance, President Spencer W. Kimball has taught of the principle of “godly sorrow” (2 Corinthians 7:9-11). This type of sorrow is actually a gift of the Spirit given to the sinner who has assiduously sought and pled for the Lord’s forgiveness. In essence, it is a clear and painful insight into one’s eternal fate were the blessings of the Lord’s atonement never extended. Once the sinner has received the gift of godly sorrow, he is, with profound gratitude, inclined to completely and without condition, submit his will to the Lord. President Kimball has compared this man’s heartfelt cry for mercy to a surrender, and he has pointed out that the surrender must be unconditional and not conditional. He observed, “Many of us have not yet surrendered, or if it has been a surrender, it has been a conditional surrender, with

many reservations” (*Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*. Ed. Edward L. Kimball: Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1982: 106). We must submit completely to the will of God. We may not know if or when or how the clouds of darkness will disperse. Nevertheless, we must continue to cry unto the Lord. Only through clouds of darkness can our faith be tested and strengthened.

This same unconditional surrender to the will of God may also occur in circumstances that do not involve sin. Referring to the ancient Hebrew captives Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego as examples, Elder Neal A. Maxwell wrote:

[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 know 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” (Abraham 1:11) (*Not My Will, But Thine*. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1988, 119-20).

**43 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.**

**44 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.**

**verse 44** “neither did it take hold upon the walls of the prison” The prison walls did not catch fire.

“they were filled with that joy which is unspeakable and full of glory” Ordinarily this joy, which is a marvelous gift which can only be experienced through the influence of the Spirit, is given to those who have earned it by diligent striving and obedience. Here the Spirit gratuitously allows these newly-converted, or re-converted, Lamanites to experience a sampling of it.

No gift of the Spirit should be regarded as being permanent or perfect. One may earn a gift, the gift of a broken heart and contrite spirit for example, through years of diligent striving. That gift should be regarded, however, as always being in a dynamic or fluid state. One can always continue to strive and build upon that gift. In addition one might also backslide and lose part, or all, of the gift one once possessed. In certain

circumstances, the Spirit might bestow temporarily some gifts to those he wishes to reward or spiritually affirm. These gifts might be provided as a sign and an encouragement along the road of spiritual growth. The gift of joy in this verse and the gift of prophecy in the following verse might be examples. Ordinarily signs are given as a reward to those who are faithful and not to those inclined to be faithless and skeptical. It is likely that the three hundred or so Lamanites gathered at the prison were not the hardened, cynical apostates from whom the Spirit had completely withdrawn. Certainly there were some of the latter among the Lamanite peoples. Rather, these Lamanites at the prison were more likely individuals inclined to be responsive to promptings of the Spirit. The Spirit is not “casting pearls before swine” here. He is doubtless rewarding those who had already begun to wonder and seek after spiritual things. Obviously the Spirit had been active among the people in this group for some time.

**45 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.**

**46 And it came to pass that there came a voice unto them, yea, a pleasant voice, as if it were a whisper, saying:**

**47 Peace, peace be unto you, because of your faith in my Well Beloved, who was from the foundation of the world.**

**verse 47** The gift of peace, comfort, and spiritual security and confidence is yet another gift of the Spirit given to those who sincerely repent of their sins (D&C 59:23). It accompanies the remission of their sins.

Who is speaking here? The Father? The Son? The verse suggests that it is either the Father or, more likely, the Son speaking as though he were the Father by the principle of divine investiture of authority.

**48 And now, when they heard this they cast up their eyes as if to behold from whence the voice came; and behold, they saw the heavens open; and angels came down out of heaven and ministered unto them.**

**verse 48** Who were these “angels”? Joseph Smith taught that “there are no angels who minister to this earth but those who do belong or have belonged to it” (D&C 130:5). Also President Joseph F. Smith observed:

**When messengers are sent to minister to the inhabitants of this earth, they are not strangers, but from the ranks of our kindred, friends, and fellow-beings and fellow-servants. The ancient prophets who died were those who came to visit their fellow creatures upon the earth. They came to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob; it was such beings—holy beings if you please—who waited upon the Savior and administered to him on the Mount. . . .**

In like manner our fathers and mothers, brothers, sisters and friends who have passed away from this earth, having been faithful, and worthy to enjoy these rights and privileges, may have a mission given them to visit their relatives and friends upon the earth again, bringing from the divine Presence messages of love, of warning, of reproof, and instruction, to those whom they had learned to love in the flesh (*Gospel Doctrine*, 435-37).

**49 And there were about three hundred souls who saw and heard these things; and they were bidden to go forth and marvel not, neither should they doubt.**

**verse 49** “they were bidden to go forth and marvel not, neither should they doubt” These new converts were commanded to “marvel not.” In other words they were commanded not to wonder or be surprised or over-awed by what they had seen and heard.

**50 And it came to pass that they 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.**

**verse 50** Here is an illustration of a general rule. Those who are converted to the Savior, tend to become saviors themselves. He has invited each of us to join him in his ministry to become “a savior unto my people Israel” (D&C 86:11).

The labors of this remarkable force of three hundred Lamanite missionaries resulted in the conversion of “the more part,” which we assume is the majority, of the Lamanite people in the land of Nephi! The prophet Mormon will later look back upon this experience of Nephi and Lehi and offer his explanation of what enabled it to happen: “Behold, it was the faith of Nephi and Lehi that wrought the change upon the Lamanites” (Ether 12:14).

**51 And as many as were convinced did lay down their weapons of war, and also their hatred and the tradition of their fathers.**

**52 And it came to pass that they did yield up unto the Nephites the lands of their possession.**

**verse 52** The Lamanites gave back to the Nephites the lands that the latter had lost in battle. We will learn that this included even the city and land of Zarahemla.

## Helaman Chapter 6

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**1 And it came to pass that when the sixty and second year of the reign of the judges had ended, all these things had happened and the Lamanites had become, the more part of them, a righteous people, insomuch that their righteousness did exceed that of the Nephites, because of their firmness and their steadiness in the faith.**

**verse 1** The reader has a tendency to regard the Lamanites as a primitive and uncivilized and even savage culture, yet we sense, by their response to the gospel message a significant sophistication and spiritual sensitivity. In the next several verses, we will read of their desire to share the gospel with their erstwhile enemies, the Nephites. Perhaps the influence of the Nephite dissenters who joined with the Lamanites in previous years contributed to the upgrading of the secular civilization of the Lamanites (see Mosiah 24:4-7).

**2 For behold, there were many of the Nephites who had become hardened and impenitent and grossly wicked, insomuch that they did reject the word of God and all the preaching and prophesying which did come among them.**

**3 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.**

**verse 3** “And they did fellowship one with another, and did rejoice one with another, and did have great joy” We will see that the amicable relationship between the Nephite church goes and the newly converted Lamanites will spread into the secular cultures of both peoples and result in a generally friendly relationship between the Nephites and Lamanites. This will occur in spite of the fact that probably the minority of Nephites were committed to the church. We thus see another illustration of the powerful influence which the church culture had over the civil culture.

**4 And it came to pass that many of the Lamanites did come down into the land of Zarahemla, and did declare unto the people of the Nephites the manner of their conversion, and did exhort them to faith and repentance.**

**verse 4** Apparently the land and city of Zarahemla are now back in the hands of the Nephites (see Helaman 5:52).

**5 Yea, 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.**



i' the Lord (verse 10)  
 h' Mulek (verse 10)  
 g' north (verse 10)  
 f' Lehi (verse 10)  
 e' south (verse 10)  
 d' gold, silver, precious ores (verse 11)  
 c' rich (verse 11)  
 b' prosperity in both lands (verses 12-13)  
 a' peace (verse 13)

The center of this chiasm involves two individual words. Just as divine names often appear at the center of biblical chiasms, at the very apex of this passage, the words Zedekiah and Lord stand parallel to each other. The parallelism between these two names is intriguing not only because Zedekiah was the king and adoptive royal son of Yahweh, the Lord, but also because the Hebrew word for Lord (*YHWH*) constitutes the final syllable, or theophoric suffix, *-yah*, at the end of the name Zedekiah. Thus the central chiastic structure in Helaman 6:10 actually would have worked better and would have been more obvious in Hebrew (or its related Nephite dialect) than in the English translation.

A parenthetical note of some interest: The use of chiasmus has been pointed out in Hebrew scripture and in the Book of Mormon. It has now also been described in ancient Mayan texts (Allen J. Christenson, "The Use of Chiasmus in Ancient Mesoamerica," a FARMS reprint).

**7 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.**

**8 And it came to pass that the Lamanites did also go whithersoever 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.**

**verse 8** *Webster's 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language* defines *intercourse* as, "Communication; commerce; connection by reciprocal dealings between persons or nations, either in common affairs and civilities, in trade, or correspondence by letters."

It is apparent from this verse and a few others in the text (see Mosiah 24:7; 3 Nephi 6:11-12) that trading for goods and services was a common practice among the peoples of the Book of Mormon. It is likely that trade was carried out both on a "national" level (among their own people, the Nephites and Lamanites) and on an "international" level (with people outside Book of Mormon lands).

It is probably important for the student of the book of Mormon to have at least a rudimentary understanding of the nature of trading practices among ancient Mesoamerican peoples since Mesoamerica is the likely venue of the Book of Mormon story, and studies have been done that have demonstrated an “international” trade among the people of Mexico and Central America at the time of the Book of Mormon story. If the reader has an interest in this topic, I would refer you to the helpful article by Allen J. Christenson, “Nephite Trade Networks and the Dangers of a Class Society” (*The Book of Mormon: Helaman Through 3 Nephi 8, According To Thy Word*, 223-40). Clearly trading practices do have significant impact on the cultural, social, and religious lives of the people who engage in trade. The Book of Mormon does not, of course, describe in any detail the trading customs of its people, but there are allusions and evidences in the text that suggest that trade was important and contributed to changing important events in the Book of Mormon story.

Most communities are unable to live in complete isolation from their neighbors, since those in any one community do not enjoy all the resources and skills necessary to make themselves fully economically independent. Trade with other areas and other peoples is therefore desirable and even necessary in order to obtain goods and services not available locally.

There is nothing inherently wicked about trading with one’s neighbors. There are, for example, times when it is likely that trade flourished, and the people prospered in righteousness (4 Nephi 1:23). There are, however, several possible adverse consequences that may occur and likely did indirectly impact negatively the spiritual well-being of the Nephites and Lamanites. These may be summarized as follows:

1. Often the communities who happen to be in position to engage in active trade, because of their favorable strategic locations along the trade routes, are in position to benefit financially to an unprecedented extent. Within these communities there arises a bureaucracy of wealthy and powerful merchants and officials. This results in a newly rich upper class. This newly and rapidly acquired wealth leads to a gap in wealth between those who participate in the business of trade and those who do not. This leads to the appearance of a relatively poor or underprivileged class (3 Nephi 6:12). The elite class often smugly places themselves in rank and privilege above those with less wealth. The rich often are inclined to deprive the poor of their liberties (Helaman 3:36; 6:17, 39; 3 Nephi 6:11-14). It appears that at times in the Book of Mormon, not only were the poor denied access to the benefits of lucrative foreign trade, they were even banned from participation in the religious rituals of the elite class as in the instance of the poor Zoramites (Alma 32:5).

2. Among those ancient Mesoamerican societies involved in active foreign trade, there was a powerful tendency for the head of government to be a king with near totalitarian powers rather than an elected official whose influence was limited by checks and balances of a more democratic government. “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 [a king], foreign merchants could not function effectively” (Christenson, *Ibid.*, 227.) Such a king was also in a position to direct the opportunities for trading to those in his society whom he favored, thus enhancing his influence. The king also had an opportunity to benefit financially to an outrageous extent under these circumstances through the selling of these opportunities. There are several instances in the Book of Mormon when there arose a strong desire on the part of some of the people (sometimes called the “king-men”) to set up a king at the head of government. It is likely that these instances correlated with the spread of trade networks among the Nephites and Lamanites (Alma 51:5-8; 61:8; Helaman 7:4-5; 3 Nephi 3:10; 6:30; 7:1, 12). These king-men were anxious to seize control of the government in order to control the lucrative trading industry. As a result we often find them seeking to establish alliances with the Lamanites, with whom they likely wanted to establish profitable economic ties (Alma 35:2-11; 48:2; 61:8).

3. The establishment of foreign trade was not always a peaceful process. There was considerable wealth at stake and, as might be predicted, unscrupulous people were attracted to the business. One such example was the Gadianton robbers whose motivation was likely primarily economic (see 4 Nephi 1:46 and verses 17-18 of this chapter). In order to benefit fully from the business of foreign trade, they had to seize the reigns of government (Helaman 7:5). It is clear that from their initial appearance in the Book of Mormon their agenda was the acquisition of wealth and power through political control (Helaman 1:9; 2:8; 6:15, 18-19; 9:6). Whenever the Gadianton Society was able to grab control they moved to adopt a class-based society based on wealth (Helaman 6:39).

It is clear that the church came out in opposition to the economic privileges of the wealthy and the resulting neglect or abuse of the lower socioeconomic class. Specifically the prophets counseled against class-based societies and the institution of kingship. Consequently the church became a threat to this new economic order.

**9 And it came to pass that they became exceedingly rich, both the Lamanites and the Nephites; and they did have an exceeding plenty of gold, and of silver, and of all manner of precious metals, both in the land south and in the land north.**

**verse 9** The mutual prosperity of both the Nephites and Lamanites because of free trade is a clear cut illustration of an economic law that is well known in our day but unrecognized in Joseph Smith’s time. This has been pointed out by Daniel C. Peterson (*Studies in Scripture, Volume Eight, Alma 30 to Moroni*, 106). Brother Peterson quotes the textbook written by the Nobel laureate economist Paul A. Samuelson (*Economics*, 8th edition, 668): “There is essentially only one argument for free or freer trade, but it is an exceedingly powerful one, namely: Unhampered trade promotes a mutually

profitable international division of labor, greatly enhances the potential real national product of all countries, and makes possible higher standards of living all over the globe.”

**10 Now the land south was called Lehi and the land north was called Mulek, which was after the son of Zedekiah; for the Lord did bring Mulek into the land north, and Lehi into the land south.**

**verse 10** When Mosiah, the father of King Benjamin, led the righteous Nephites from the land of Nephi north to the land of Zarahemla about 200 BC, the Book of Mormon lands became divided into the southern land of the Lamanites, the land of Nephi, and the northern Nephite territory, the land of Zarahemla (see the *Hypothetical Map of Book of Mormon Lands*). Obviously the names of the lands of the Book of Mormon story evolved with time. The original land of Nephi later became the land of Lehi-Nephi, and at this time in the story it has again become the land of Lehi. Apparently the land of Zarahemla is now referred to as the land of Mulek.

**11 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.**

**verse 11** The identity of this “precious ore” is unknown. John L. Sorenson has speculated that it might have been iron ore used to make polished mirrors or magnetite used to make compasses (*An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*, 285).

For many years archaeologists have supposed that metals were not used in Mesoamerica prior to AD 900. The current literature shows that between fifty and one hundred specimens from about forty sites predate AD 900. These known fragments date back to at least 100 BC (John L. Sorenson, “FARMS Update” in *Insights* [May 1992], 2).

**“curious workmen”** One meaning of the word *curious* in *Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language* is, “Accurate; careful not to mistake; solicitous to be correct.”

**12 They did raise grain in abundance, both in the north and in the south; and they did flourish exceedingly, both in the north and in the south. And they did multiply and wax exceedingly strong in the land. And they did raise many flocks and herds, yea, many fatlings.**

**verse 12 “flocks and herds, yea, many fatlings”** The specific animal species referred to here is unknown. A “fatling” is an animal which has been raised and fattened before it is slaughtered for food.

**13 Behold their women did toil and spin, and did make all manner of cloth, of fine-twined linen and cloth of every kind, to clothe their nakedness. And thus the sixty and fourth year did pass away in peace.**

**14 And in the sixty and fifth year they did also have great joy and peace, yea, much preaching and many prophecies concerning that which was to come. And thus passed away the sixty and fifth year.**

**15 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. And it came to pass that in the same year, that his son, who had been appointed by the people in his stead, was also murdered. And thus ended the sixty and sixth year.**

**16 And in the commencement of the sixty and seventh year the people began to grow exceedingly wicked again.**

**verses 16-17** It had been some twenty-four years since Gadianton had been forced to go underground. Yet, we will learn that it is his group of robbers and murderers that has again surfaced and is responsible for the murder of these two chief judges. It is pertinent to note that this group would likely have remained underground and kept in check were it not for the general moral depravity of the people. Unfortunately, as is noted in this verse, “the people [had begun] to grow exceedingly wicked again” (Helaman 6:16).

**17 For behold, the Lord had blessed them so long with the riches of the world that they had not been stirred up to anger, to wars, nor to bloodshed; 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.**

**verse 17** “they began to set their hearts upon their riches” As we have observed on previous occasions in the Book of Mormon, wealth carries with it major risks to the spiritual well being of those who possess it. Wealth may even come to literally possess the wealthy. Here is one of life’s great ironies: Those with an abundance of the world’s goods tend to become more obsessed with them than those who have to struggle just to make ends meet. Just what is it about wealth that tends to be erosive of one’s spiritual growth? Perhaps the best general answer is that wealth makes available things of the world that would not be otherwise available including material possessions, comfort or ease (which is erosive of one’s proactive work ethic), and social position. In all of these things of the world, there is a tendency to like them, to appreciate them, to come to depend on them, and to come to want more of them. Another question may be asked: Does any wealthy man ever emerge from his wealth truly unscathed spiritually? Certainly some do, but there can be no doubting the danger of wealth.

**“they began to seek to get gain that they might be lifted up one above another”** The sequence here is an old familiar refrain. Start with a removal of the Spirit of God. Then with wealth comes the feeling of superiority which results in people’s becoming status-conscious. With a feeling of status, comes a greater appetite for more of the same. Then comes a desperate need to acquire the things that will provide that status. Then, these things come to be all important. Then, any scruples that may stand in the way of their acquisition are pushed aside. Even murder may be permissible as long as one is not found out.

Brother Hugh Nibley observed:

The most calamitous effect of wealth, according to the Book of Mormon, is the inequality it begets in any society. Right at the beginning, Jacob sounds the warning: “Many of you have begun to search for . . . precious ores, in the which this . . . land of promise . . . doth abound most plentifully. And the hand of providence hath smiled upon you most pleasingly . . . and because some of you have obtained more abundantly than that of your brethren ye are lifted up in the pride of your hearts. . . Do ye not suppose that such things are abominable unto him who created all flesh? And the one being is as precious in his sight as the other” (Jacob 2:12-13, 21). Jacob then denounces the “grosser crime” of immorality, which in the Book of Mormon as in secular history is the infallible attendant on the pride of wealth. Inequality is not only the result of wealth-seeking: it is sometimes actually its purpose: “They began to seek to get gain that they might be lifted up one above another” (Helaman 6:17) (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 7, 358).

Elder George Q. Cannon taught:

I see young men growing up, and in their growth is the love of wealth, the love of ease and worldly comfort, and the desire and greed for money. I will tell you that the man who has the greed or hunger for money within him, and does not repress it, can not be a Latter-day Saint. A woman who has the love of finery and of earthly ease and comfort within her, and that is the paramount feeling in her heart, can not be a Latter-day Saint. No man can be a Latter-day Saint in truth and in deed who does not hunger after righteousness and the things of God more than he does after everything else upon the face of the earth; and whenever you see or feel this money hunger, this dress hunger, this hunger for worldly ease and comfort in yourselves or others, you may know that the love of God is being withdrawn from you or them, and sooner or later it will be extinguished, and the love of the world will grow until it becomes predominant. I do not know anything more corrupting than this greed, hunger and lust for the things of this life, or anything more degrading and debasing in its effects, except it be the love or lust for women. As a people we believe that lust for women is, next to murder, shedding innocent blood, the most deadly of all sins. Committing whoredom or adultery destroys the man who indulges in it, and next to that, in my estimation, is the love of wealth—the lusting after the things of this life; and there ought to be, and is in every rightly

constituted nature, a constant warfare against this evil. We have this to contend with. We should watch it in our children and in ourselves, and we should endeavor to govern and bring all our feelings and desires into such a position that they can be controlled by the love of the truth (Conference talk October 6, 1873).

**18 And now behold, those murderers and plunderers were a band who had been formed by Kishkumen and Gadianton. 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.**

**verse 18** Kishkumen is, of course, dead (Helaman 2:9) and Gadianton never specifically surfaces again in Mormon's historical account, yet their legacy lives on!

Perhaps it would be helpful to the reader to digress here for a few moments and comment on a present-day issue raised by opponents of the LDS Church. Some have seen a parallel between Gadianton's robber band and the Masons of Joseph Smith's day.

The so-called "environmentalist theory" of the origin of the Book of Mormon has become very fashionable in anti-Mormon circles today. This theory, simply stated, holds that Joseph Smith absorbed the images, attitudes, and conceptions present in the New York rural culture in which he was reared, and he wove them into the Book of Mormon story.

The proponents of this theory hold that the Gadianton robbers are a classic specific example. In almost comical flailing and remonstrating, some Book of Mormon critics have claimed that the term "secret combinations" was strictly confined to the Masons during an anti-Masonic agitation of the late 1820s (Robert N. Hullinger, *Mormon Answer to Skepticism: Why Joseph Smith Wrote the Book of Mormon*, 114, notes 30 and 31). They therefore have claimed that the "Gadianton robbers" are merely nineteenth-century Freemasons, transparently disguised. They maintain that Joseph's "idea" for the Gadianton robbers came from this secret society in Joseph's nineteenth century environment. They point to several basic parallels between the Gadianton robbers and the Masons of the 1820s: (1) Both groups have secret signs and secret words which aid in mutual identification. (2) Both have oaths for fraternal protection which, when uttered, obliged the members to protect each other. (3) Both claim to have ancient origins. (4) Both groups are referred to as "secret societies" and "secret combinations." The Book of Mormon refers to Gadianton and his band using these terms, and the newspapers of the early nineteenth century used these same terms to refer to Masonry of that period. (5) Both groups were seen as a threat to the institutions of their native lands.

The claim of these critics seems so ludicrous as to demand no explanation, but consider the following observations:

While Joseph obviously became interested in Masonry in the early 1840s in Nauvoo, there is not even the slightest mention of Masonry in any of his earlier writings. He never talked about it, and indeed seemed to have no concern or interest whatever in it during those early years.

Literally thousands of organizations have had their own signs and words used for the purpose of mutual identification and protection. Even the early Christians had such signs. If an early Christian, for example, wanted to identify himself or herself to a brother or a sister, he or she traced with a stick or a toe in the sand a figure of a fish.

People and their organizations have always had a tendency to try to relate themselves to their pristine origins. It has never been particularly desirable to belong to a novel or new organization. The past is the model. Man always tends to look to the past and claim his roots of authority from the past.

Regarding the fact that both groups were regarded as a threat to the institutions of their day, again, we have a very general or generic parallel. Every organization that is considered revolutionary may be seen as a threat to the institutions of its day.

The terms “secret society” and “secret combination” were certainly terms that were “in the air” during Joseph Smith’s early years. He couldn’t have helped reading and hearing them. Let us never lose sight of the fact that the Book of Mormon was indeed translated by someone who lived in the early nineteenth century. Joseph translated the book into the English that he knew. Certainly we can expect to find evidences of Joseph’s vocabulary and terminology and ideas in the Book of Mormon. In addition, Daniel C. Peterson has patiently documented the finding of the phrase “secret combination” in a non-Masonic context written in 1826 (*Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, 1/1 [1992], 184-88).

It must be a discouraging to be one of those who are constantly railing and flailing against the truth.

**19 And it was they who did murder the chief judge Cezoram, and his son, while in the judgment-seat; and behold, they were not found.**

**20 And now it came to pass that 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.**

**verse 20** Regarding the Lamanites’ successful campaign against the secret combination, Ray C. Hillam, has written: “Initially [the robbers] had found sanctuary among the Lamanites, but the Lamanite leaders, being politically embarrassed by their presence, ‘did use every means in their power to destroy them. . .’ (Helaman 6:20). Their success in removing them from their midst came through (1) the building of the people’s faith in their leaders and obedience to law, (2) the vigorous and forceful suppression and pursuit of the robbers, and (3) a conversion program for those Gadianton rebels who would listen (verses 34, 37). Because of this comprehensive

strategy by the Lamanites, the band of robbers was utterly destroyed among them” (*BYU Studies*, volume 15, number 2, 216).

**21 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.**

**verse 21** Brother Nibley comments:

Determined to “get gain” at any price, the Nephites soon learned that the quickest way to get rich with a minimum risk and the best way to avoid the inconvenience of the law was to belong to a protective society: “The more part of the Nephites . . . did unite with those bands of robbers, and did enter into their covenants and their oaths, that they would protect and preserve one another.” With this type of insurance, an individual could operate with impunity “contrary to the laws of their God,” enjoying the protection and priority of another system of laws—the rules of the society or corporation (verses 23-24). This system, Helaman tells us, went right back to the beginning of the race, and took root among the Nephites at the time when they “did trample under their feet the commandments of God . . . and did build up unto themselves idols of their gold and silver” (verse 31). It was not idols, please note, but the gold and silver itself that they worshipped (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 7, 364).

**22 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.**

**verse 22** Brother Nibley continues:

The Gadianton Protective Association soon became the biggest business in America! Card-carrying members (those who knew the secret signs and words) (verse 22) could do about anything they wanted “contrary to the laws of their country and also the laws of their God” (Helaman 6:23), and thus acquire unlimited wealth and power. Nevertheless we must not think of the protective association as a lawless outfit. Far from it! They operated with great integrity, instructing their members in all the company rules and disciplining them in accordance with those rules (verse 24). For them the laws of the land were supplanted by this new code of laws (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 6, 383).

**verses 21-22** We may study these verses to learn some of the important characteristics of Satan's covenants with man (for some other key features of these evil covenants, see the commentary for Helaman 1:11-12; 6:26, 30). These features are:

1. Anarchy (a society without government or laws)—“that they should not suffer for their murders, and their plunderings, and their stealings” Members of this wicked covenant order have a total disregard for the law and for anyone or anything placed over them. They are rebellious and defiant. They seek to produce political and social chaos. When government and the law of the land begins to crumble under their influence and fail to provide adequate protection for the people, those without the evil covenant order feel they have to join with the wicked in order to survive.

2. Extreme humanism—“that they would protect and preserve one another in whatsoever difficult circumstances they should be placed.” The people look to other mortals (instead of God) for sustenance and security.

3. Counterfeiting the Lord's system of covenants—“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.” Satan's covenants include a blasphemous counterfeit of the Lord's signs and tokens. There is also a brotherhood, and though it will not endure, it is a replica of the priesthood brotherhood that exists in the Lord's church. Satan's brotherhood actually quickly becomes a form of bondage since once a person is in, it is difficult and unsafe to get out.

**23 And thus they might murder, and plunder, and steal, and commit whoredoms and all manner of wickedness, contrary to the laws of their country and also the laws of their God.**

**24 And whosoever of those who belonged to their band should reveal unto the world of their wickedness and their abominations, should be tried, not according to the laws of their country, but according to the laws of their wickedness, which had been given by Gadianton and Kishkumen.**

**verse 24** Members of this secret band operated by the rules of their organization and “not according to the laws of their country,” which they felt were too confining.

**25 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.**

**26 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—**

**verses 25-26** When Alma the younger passed the records along to his son Helaman, Helaman learned that the secret works of darkness were had among the

Jaredite peoples. Apparently the blueprint for these wicked secret combinations—their oaths, their covenants, their agreements, their signs, and their secret abominations—were found upon the twenty-four plates upon which Ether had recorded the record of his people. Alma warned his son to keep this part of the Jaredite record from the people lest they “fall into darkness also and be destroyed” (Alma 37:21-32). We know that Helaman was diligent in following this instruction of his father. How then were the secrets of this secret combination passed along from the Jaredites to the descendants of Lehi? Did Gadianton really receive them anew from Satan by revelation? It is more likely that they were passed along in more ordinary ways. John L. Sorenson has addressed this topic:

The Nephite secret combination pattern is obviously very similar to what had been present among the Jaredites. Was there a historical connection? It is true that Alma instructed his son Helaman not to make known to their people any contents of Ether’s record that might give them operating procedures for duplicating the secret groups (see Alma 37:27-29). A later writer says that it was the devil who “put into the heart” of Gadianton certain information of that sort (see Helaman 6:26). Yet an efficient alternative explanation of how the later secret groups came to look so much like those of the Jaredites is direct transmission of the tradition through survivors of the Jaredites to the people of Zarahemla and thus to Gadianton. This process probably would have been unknown to Alma or other elite Nephite writers, who must have had little to do directly with the mass of “Mulekite” folk. Support for the idea comes from a statement by Giddianhi, one-time “governor” of the Gadianton organization. Their ways, he claimed, “are of ancient date and they have been handed down unto us” (3 Nephi 3:9) (*Journal of Book of Mormon Studies: “When Lehi’s Party Arrived in the Land, Did They Find Others There”*, volume 1, Fall 1992, 21).

“by that same being who did entice our first parents” Here is implied another characteristic of Satan’s evil covenants, that of false promises. Satan entices by offering “anything in this world” if people will by follow him. He promises further that any worldly thing can be had without guilt or fear of punishment. Yet it is this worldliness which leads one away from the greatest eternal reward and into the curse of captivity to the devil.

**27 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.**

**verse 27** The brief biblical account of Cain and Abel in Genesis 4 contains nothing of the manner in which Cain entered into a secret covenant with Satan by which Cain became Master Mahan, master of the great secret that he could murder and get gain; thus giving rise to secret combinations on the earth. These truths were obviously contained on the brass plates, Mormon’s source for this material. Also we have had it

restored to us today by revelation to Joseph Smith as he wrote his inspired revision of the Bible (see Moses 5).

**verses 26-27** These verses contain characters and events that we might well take for granted and pass right on by. These characters are Adam and Eve, Cain, and Satan, and the events are the transgression of Adam and Cain's murdering Abel. It is important to know that sophisticated Bible scholars today feel that these were not characters that actually existed and events that actually occurred. Rather they have concluded that these characters and these incidents are merely myths and legends of an ancient culture (*Interpreter's Bible*, 1:484, 520). Yet the Book of Mormon confirms and re-confirms that fact that these characters did actually live and that these events literally did occur.

Other analogous events and characters, that intellectual Bible scholars explain in mythological terms and which the Book of Mormon validates, include the story of the tower of Babel (see verse 28; *Interpreter's Bible*, 1:562), Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Helaman 3:30; 8:17; *Interpreter's Bible*, 1:442-43), and Moses's parting the Red Sea (Helaman 8:11; *Interpreter's Bible*, 1:834-35).

**28 And also it is that same being 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.**

**verse 28** Commenting on this verse, Elder Neal A. Maxwell wrote: "These . . . words tell us who the architect of the tower was and how he caressed mortal egos of his clients for his own purposes. He has not lost that skill" (*Plain and Precious Things*, 85).

**29 Yea, it is that same being who put it into the heart of Gadianton to still carry on the work of darkness, and of secret murder; and he has brought it forth from the beginning of man even down to this time.**

**30 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.**

**verse 30** "doth hand down their plots, and their oaths, and their covenants, and their plans of awful wickedness, from generation to generation" Wickedness often carries on from one generation to the next by "false traditions" that are difficult to break. If wickedness is already established among a people, Satan's job is greatly facilitated as he seeks to have his secrets and methods passed on.

**“according as he can get hold upon the hearts of the children of men”**

Satan’s power and influence depends completely upon the acquiescence of those whom he would attempt to lead. We possess the power to crush him, while he can only bruise us—but only if we allow him to do so.

**31 And now behold, he had got great hold upon the hearts of the Nephites; yea, insomuch that they had become exceedingly wicked; yea, the more part of them had turned out of the way of righteousness, and did trample under their feet the commandments of God, and did turn unto their own ways, and did build up unto themselves idols of their gold and their silver.**

**verses 30-31** Just what is the precise role played by Satan in leading a man down to hell? In what way is he the “author of all sin”? It has been suggested that perhaps Satan gets too much of the blame for a man’s failure to respond to spiritual promptings.

Perhaps the man himself is largely to blame. After all, is it not true that the designer of this great mortal experience with all its challenges and opportunities for both spiritual growth and spiritual deterioration was, in fact, God himself and not Satan? And is it not also true that within each of the children of God there is an element of the so-called “natural self” or the “natural man”—that side of each man that possesses a propensity, hidden or overt, to respond to the worldly influences that we encounter during this mortal testing period? Certainly Satan did not have any role in creating men with the characteristics they possess. Even if Satan did not exist, there would still be evil in God’s universe because in each man there exists the potential for pride, disobedience, lustfulness, and worldliness. Indeed, while Satan may function as the cheerleader, the facilitator, the role model for wickedness, he did not create it. He is not the inventor of the “natural self” within each of us. Who did create it then? Was it God? Would God or could God ever create something evil? Certainly not. Whence cometh evil in God’s universe then? It seems likely that from the time of man’s most elementary and primitive state, when he existed as an intelligence—that primordial essence of each of individual—there existed a potential for both good and evil, obedience and disobedience. God did not create the intelligences, indeed they have co-existed with God forever (D&C 93:29; Abraham 3:18). They have always existed, a fact that defies human understanding. From the moment they were swept up into our Father in Heaven’s round of creation they began to test themselves against the eternal law. They each possessed agency. Each intelligence also had a “natural self.” It was therefore inclined to do the easy and comfortable thing and not the more difficult thing. From the earliest time we can imagine, spiritual growth resulted from doing the more difficult and challenging thing—from obeying God’s commandments. Some were more obedient and some less so. When it came time for the spiritual creation, when all intelligences

were embodied with a body of spirit matter, some were honored to be embodied with bodies after the image of their heavenly parents, and some were not.

Later on, among those who were spiritual offspring of our heavenly parents in the premortal world, there eventually appeared a great rift. Some were more adherent to God's plan while others forfeited forever their opportunity to be born on earth with a mortal body and continue their progress toward godhood. They were cast out of heaven. Lucifer was their leader, their provocateur, their agitator, but certainly he was not responsible for the evil, "natural" tendencies of his followers.

What then is Satan's part in all of this? Just how does he function? What techniques does he employ? Does he have free access to men's hearts, or does he operate with significant restrictions? Is his role in influencing the thoughts and behavior of men in any way comparable to that of the role of the Spirit of God?

It is true that this earth's mortal obstacle course, with all of its opportunities, challenges, and pitfalls, is just as God would have it. It provides for each individual born into mortality a fitting and proper test of his mettle, and an opportunity to either succeed or fail, based on that individual's own merits, in returning again to the presence of our heavenly parents. By virtue of God's plan for us, we each have the inalienable right to exercise our agency while we are here on earth. Satan cannot interfere with that right, and God also will not interfere with our right to choose. On literally thousands of occasions, here in mortality, we will each have an opportunity to choose good or choose evil. The choice is entirely our own. The choosing of good is inevitably more difficult—more challenging. It requires strength of character. It is in the choosing, that we enable either the Holy Spirit or Satan to prompt us. The role of the Spirit and that of Satan are, in a curious way, analogous, but in diametrically opposite directions.

There are perhaps two specific parts or roles Satan plays in pulling a man down spiritually:

1. Through his ministrations here on earth, he has managed to create a setting where there the evil and purely worldly influences are abundantly and widely advertised. Worldliness is made easily available to all. That worldliness that entices, tempts, and allures is all around us—it is ubiquitous. One need not venture far without encountering myriad opportunities to commit serious sins.

2. His second, and perhaps his most influential role in defeating a man's spiritual resolve is put into action only when a man, faced with the decision to either obey a commandment or to cave in to his natural self and commit sin decides on the latter. Satan is powerless when we obey. It is when we chose to sin that his influenced on us begins. Choosing evil or committing sin not only insulates us from the Spirit of God, but it also renders us more responsive to the whisperings of the devil. As we choose evil he will comfort and affirm us in that chosen path. If sin produces in us discouragement and a low spiritual self esteem, he will attempt to provide us with abundant rationalizations, self-justifications, and reasons why we should not worry. His ministrations will provide

us with reassurances that we are “all right,” and “it’s okay to go ahead and sin again.” He will try to instill in us a curious pride in our own strength, a self-sufficiency, and a fierce independence. He would teach us that we need not be reliant on anyone. We can and should stand on our own and not seek or accept counsel from others. Who are they, after all, to presume to teach us anything? At any rate, others are only competitors who would seek to lift themselves at our expense. Humility, Satan would suggest, is not a virtue; rather it is a weakness. He would have us become cynical about any need, on our part, to repent. One might well hear him say, “Are you a child or an adult? Do you need someone telling you what to do, or are you mature enough to choose for yourself? Both of you are old enough—you are two consenting adults; what you choose to do in the privacy of your bedroom is nobody’s business. You’re not hurting anyone else. Go ahead and do what you want.”

Thus we see clearly the nature of Satan’s ministrations or “temptations.” The farther we go with him down his pathway, the more difficult it is to turn back. As we place ourselves more firmly in his grasp, new and evil ideas may occur to us. He instills these ideas, and in this way, he becomes the “author of all sin.” Ultimately his road leads away from our intended and eternal celestial home and toward eternal captivity.

On the other hand, when a righteous choice is made, we make it possible for the Spirit of God to make contact. We also block the potential line of communication between us and Satan. The Spirit’s ministrations will allow us to experience true joy and lasting satisfaction. We will be prompted to love, rather than resent, others. We will view our fellow mortal sojourners as individuals, just like ourselves, struggling to achieve their spiritual goals in this difficult world. We will be imbued with a desire to help others whenever it is possible. We will also become inclined, as we respond to the Spirit, to accept and love ourselves in spite of our occasional failings. We will sense the love and concern of others and are grateful to receive their help whenever it is needed. We also become keenly aware of the love of our Father in heaven and of our Savior for us. We are lifted by it and inclined to repent of our “natural” inclinations in order to please the Father and Son and draw closer to them.

Both Satan and the Holy Spirit have limited access to us, and that access is determined exclusively by us. It is true that each of us possesses, as a free gift at our birth, a small yearning for eternal and spiritual things. This is actually a subtle tendency possessed by all men to respond to the promptings of the Holy Ghost and is referred to as the “spirit of Christ” or the “light of Christ.” This free gift may prove to be an invaluable influence even in the life of the sinner in serving to invite him back to the road to the celestial kingdom. The sinner, over time, however, may completely “block” or neutralize this subtle gift as he responds repeatedly to Satan’s attempts to influence him. He may then completely lose his ability to respond to the Spirit, but will increase in his ability to hear clearly the promptings of Satan. For a more complete discussion of the “natural” and “spiritual” self each of us possesses, and for further discussion of the

Role of Satan in our lives, see the following chapters in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*: (1) volume 1, chapter 5, *The “Natural Self” and “Spiritual Self,”* (2) volume 1, chapter 6, *The Gospel and the Two Natures of Man,* and (3) volume 1, chapter 16, *The Role of Satan.*

**verse 31** “they . . . did turn unto their own ways, and did build up unto themselves idols of their gold and their silver” Money was the name of the game, the ultimate motivation.

**32** 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.

**33** And they did grow in their iniquities in the sixty and eighth year also, to the great sorrow and lamentation of the righteous.

**34** And thus we see that the Nephites did begin to dwindle in unbelief, and grow in wickedness and abominations, while the Lamanites began to grow exceedingly in the knowledge of their God; yea, they did begin to keep his statutes and commandments, and to walk in truth and uprightness before him.

**35** 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.

**verse 35** “because of the wickedness and the hardness of their hearts” See the discussion of hard-heartedness in the commentary for Alma 10:6.

**36** And thus we see that the Lord began to pour out his Spirit upon the Lamanites, because of their easiness and willingness to believe in his words.

**verse 36** President Spencer W. Kimball, always an enthusiastic supporter of the Native American groups, believed that the effects of this pouring out of the Lord’s Spirit has had an enduring effect on the “Lamanites” of today: “Lamanites show great devotion. The converted Lamanite is devout. Few ever apostatize. Some lose their way as they partake of the worldliness about them, but generally the children of Lehi of the twentieth century have inherited that grace and ability to believe like their ancestors of the long ago. We read in Helaman 6:36: “And thus we see that the Lord began to pour out his Spirit upon the Lamanites, because of their easiness and willingness to believe in his words” (*The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, 178).

Today, we understand that most all of the “native Americans”—the “American Indians” are probably not descendants of the Book of Mormon peoples. Oh, that all of the American Indians were like unto the Lamanites described in Helaman 6.

**37** And it came to pass that 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.**

**verse 37** The Lamanites put into effect a comprehensive plan for ridding themselves of the Gadianton band. It included (1) the building of their people's faith in God and in his statutes. Since these were intimately related to the laws of the land, they also acquired faith in their governmental leaders (verse 34). (2) the vigorous and forceful pursuit and eradication of the robbers, and (3) a conversion program for those Gadianton rebels who would listen. Because of this comprehensive strategy by the Lamanites, the "band of robbers was utterly destroyed from among [them]."

**38 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.**

**verse 38** The greater part of the Nephites had been reduced to believing "in their works" and partaking "of their spoils." In other words, the Nephites began to share in the ill-gotten gain of the Gadianton robbers including their money and material possessions.

**39 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.**

**verses 38-39** Ray C. Hillam observed, "The Nephites had . . . become particularly vulnerable to infiltration and subversion by the Gadianton rebels. Being soft and permissive, they were soon politically seduced, even 'the righteous until they had come . . . to believe in their [the rebels'] works and partake of their spoils, and to join with them.' And 'they [the Gadianton leaders] did obtain the sole management of the government' of the Nephites (Helaman 6:38-39) and 'usurped the power and authority of the land' (Helaman 7:4)" (*BYU Studies*, volume 15, Number 2, 217).

**verse 39** Brother Nibley wrote:

If the reader has imagined to himself the Gadianton band as abandoned wretches or street Arabs lurking in dark alleys and fleeing from the light of day in dingy and noisome hideouts, let him disabuse his mind of such a concept. They were a highly respected concern that made their handsome profits by operating strictly within the letter of the law, as they interpreted and controlled it. They were the government, the well-to-do, the respectable, and the law-abiding citizens (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 6, 385).

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

**41 And it came to pass that thus ended the sixty and eighth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi.**

## Helaman Chapter 7

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**The Prophecy of Nephi, the son of Helaman—God threatens the people of Nephi that he will visit them in his anger, to their utter destruction except they repent of their wickedness. God smiteth the people of Nephi with pestilence; they repent and turn unto him. Samuel, a Lamanite, prophesies unto the Nephites. Comprising chapters 7 to 16 inclusive.**

This headnote or superscription, written by the prophet Mormon, contains a sentence that arguably doesn't quite belong here. It is the sentence "Samuel, a Lamanite, prophesies unto the Nephites." It doesn't quite belong because it is redundant—it is repeated by Mormon in a headnote for Helaman 13 which is a more appropriate location. The prophet Samuel's preaching is reported in Helaman chapters 13-16. This minor disjuncture may have been due to the exigencies of time and circumstances that must have plagued Mormon in abridging the many records in his possession. The end for the Nephites was drawing near, and he undoubtedly was feeling the pressure of it all.

The suggestion has been made that it might have been reasonable to divide the book of Helaman, turning the single book into "Helaman" (chapters 1-6 of our present book of Helaman) and "Nephi, son of Helaman" (chapters 7-16).

### Scripture Mastery

**Helaman 7-9** Nephi prays and preaches from his garden tower. He miraculously visualizes the murder of the chief judge and even identifies his murderer.

**1 Behold, now it came to pass in the sixty and ninth year of the reign of the judges over the people of the Nephites, that Nephi, the son of Helaman, returned to the land of Zarahemla from the land northward.**

**2 For he had been forth among the people who were in the land northward and did preach the word of God unto them, and did prophesy many things unto them;**

**verse 2** Again, it is likely that the "land northward" is not the land Desolation which is north of the narrow neck of land. Nephi had probably been preaching in the northern part of the former land of Zarahemla—the northern part of the present land of Mulek (see Helaman 6:10 and its commentary). This likely included the land Bountiful.

**3 And they did reject all his words, insomuch that he could not stay among them, but returned again unto the land of his nativity.**

4 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;

**verse 4** “laying aside the commandments of God, and not in the least aright before him” *In Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language*, the definition of the word *aright* is “in a right form; without mistake or crime.” The implication here is that the ethic or rules of conduct of the Gadianton robbers was hardly correct in the eyes of God. They were laying aside God’s commandments, an action that was “not in the least aright” before God.

5 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—

**verse 5** Brother Hugh Nibley writes: “The Gadiantons ‘did obtain the sole management of the government’ [Helaman 6:39] . . . and ‘they governed in the interest of one class alone’ (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 9, 100).

Further:

The Gadiantons knew where the real power lay, and they were careful to fill the judgment seats with their own people who could make and interpret the laws to their own advantage, “letting the guilty and the wicked go unpunished because of their money.” And what could anybody do about it, now they were the law, “held in office at the head of the government, to rule and do according to their wills,” deciding for themselves what was right and wrong and enjoying unlimited power? Nephi was helpless in his high office and looked on “in the agony of his soul” (Helaman 7:6). . . . And yet in all this they considered themselves very righteous—it was all perfectly legal (Helaman 7:5; 8:1-7). It was time for something to happen—a terrible drought at Nephi’s request [will bring] the people to their senses and [break] the Gadianton power (Helaman 11:4-10) (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 8, 555).

Still further:

The one thing the Gadianton administration respected was money, and their policy was “to rule and do according to their wills, that they might get gain and glory of the world,” naturally [as mentioned in the previous paragraph] “letting the guilty and the wicked go unpunished because of their money” (Helaman 7:5). To operate with impunity they needed public support: “Ye have united yourselves unto . . . that secret band . . . established by Gadianton!” [Helaman 7:25] cries Nephi to his countrymen. “Yea, wo shall come unto you because of that pride which ye have suffered to enter

your hearts, which has lifted you up beyond that which is good because of your exceedingly great riches!" (Helaman 7:25-26) (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 7, 364-65).

**"Condemning the righteous because of their righteousness"** Joseph Fielding McConkie and Robert L. Millet have aptly written:

Wickedness and righteousness have no tolerance for each other. Like light and darkness, they cannot share the same space at the same time. If light is to shine, darkness must flee; if darkness is to reign, the light must give way. Each seeks the victory over the other. Thus it is that the truly pure, honest, and righteous cannot avoid the bile, spleen, and gall of the wicked (*Doctrinal Commentary of the Book of Mormon*, Volume III—Alma through Helaman, 367).

**6 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:**

**7 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—**

**8 Yea, if my days could have been in those days, then would my soul have had joy in the righteousness of my brethren.**

**verses 7-8** One cannot help being a bit amused here at Nephi's wish and lament. Certainly in the days of father Lehi and his family there was much good and many who were obedient. There was also much stubbornness and recalcitrance. Isn't it true, for all of us, that at times the past somehow seems easier, more pleasant and more favorable than our present reality? Ralph Waldo Emerson said: "Memories assume pleasing forms as clouds do afar off."

**9 But behold, I am consigned that these are my days, and that my soul shall be filled with sorrow because of this the wickedness of my brethren.**

**10 And behold, now it came to pass that it was upon a tower, which was in the garden of Nephi, which was by the highway which led to the chief market, which was in the city of Zarahemla; therefore, Nephi had bowed himself upon the tower which was in his garden, which tower was also near unto the garden gate by which led the highway.**

**verse 10** Brother Hugh Nibley has reported the relatively recently-discovered custom of the ancient Hebrews of having special shrines or prayer-rooms in their houses for the purpose of domestic worship. In other places in scripture these have been referred to as "closets and secret places" (Luke 12:3; Alma 34:26). Nephi's tower

might well have been such a designated place though it was obviously not secret (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 6, 405).

See also the commentary on “tower” in Omni 1:22.

**“in his garden”** For decades the prevailing view was that cities with high-density populations did not exist at all in Mesoamerica. More recently, work at places like Teotihuacan and Monte Alban have demonstrated unquestionably that cities in the modern sense were indeed known during the Book of Mormon times. In at least some of these cities, garden areas were cultivated immediately adjacent to single habitation complexes.

**“by the highway which led to the chief market”** This is the only instance in which the word “market” is used in the Book of Mormon. What is the significance of the description chief market? The adjective “chief” implies that the cities of this time period had more than one market and that one of the markets was either larger or more important than the others. Wallace E. Hunt, Jr. has described evidence that the larger ancient cities of Mesoamerica, the most likely geographic site for the lands of the Book of Mormon, had main or central (chief) markets as well as satellite or smaller markets (“The Marketplace,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, volume 4, number 2, 138-41).

**11 And it came to pass that there were certain men passing by and saw Nephi as he was pouring out his soul unto God upon the tower; and they ran and told the people what they had seen, and the people came together in multitudes that they might know the cause of so great mourning for the wickedness of the people.**

**12 And now, when Nephi arose he beheld the multitudes of people who had gathered together.**

**13 And it came to pass that he opened his mouth and said unto them: Behold, why have ye gathered yourselves together? That I may tell you of your iniquities?**

**14 Yea, because I have got upon my tower that I might pour out my soul unto my God, because of the exceeding sorrow of my heart, which is because of your iniquities!**

**15 And because of my mourning and lamentation ye have gathered yourselves together, and do marvel; yea, and ye have great need to marvel; yea, ye ought to marvel because ye are given away that the devil has got so great hold upon your hearts.**

**verse 15 “ye have gathered yourselves together, and do marvel”** The gathered Nephites wondered why Nephi was praying for their souls. After all, they considered themselves righteous.

Gerald Hansen, Jr., in commenting on this verse, observed: “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 member of the church in Laodicea, “[thou] knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked” (Revelation 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” (“The Terrifying Book of Helaman” in *The Book of Mormon: Helaman Through 3 Nephi 8, According To Thy Word*, 173-74).

It was not uncommon for early Israelite prophets to use acted-out examples in their preaching. When Jeremiah wanted to impress the people of Jerusalem with his prophecy that they would be yoked into bondage by the Babylonians, he draped himself with thongs and a yoke and thus went forth proclaiming his message of doom (see Jeremiah 27:2-11). Other similar symbolic acts performed by prophets are found in Jeremiah 13:1-11 (hiding a waistcloth), Jeremiah 19:1-13 (smashing a bottle), 1 Kings 11:29-39 (tearing a garment into twelve pieces), 2 Kings 13:15-19 (shooting an arrow), and Isaiah 20:2-6 (walking naked). It has been suggested that this sermon of Nephi was similarly staged as a prophetic allegory in the form of some kind of mock funeral sermon. This might explain the “great mourning” and “lamentation.” Perhaps the crowd gathered because they were curious to know who had died. In that context he will prophetically announce the death of the chief judge (Helaman 8:27).

**“ye are given away”** You have surrendered your will and your agency to the devil.

**16 Yea, 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?**

**verse 16 “how could you have given way . . .”** This literary style is called the prophetic lament. The lament always begins with the word *how* (see also Isaiah 1:21).

**“him who is seeking to hurl away your souls down to everlasting misery and endless wo”** Just where is Satan seeking to hurl these souls? This passage realistically refers to the spirit prison, though ultimately Satan desires that many will, at the end, “remain filthy still” (D&C 88:102) and be hurled into outer darkness.

**17 O repent ye, repent ye! Why will ye die? Turn ye, turn ye unto the Lord your God. Why has he forsaken you?**

**verse 17 “Why has he forsaken you?”** We are not accustomed to reading that God has forsaken anyone, yet here that seems to be the case. In what way has God forsaken these wicked Nephites? He has withdrawn his Spirit and has left them spiritually adrift. The reader should be assured that in doing this the Lord has not, nor would he ever, violate the law of justice.

**18 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.**

**verse 18** “ye have provoked him to anger against you” A thoughtful consideration of the Lord’s *anger* leads to the conclusion that it consists mainly of a poignant and agonizing disappointment.

**19 And behold, instead of gathering you, except ye will repent, behold, he shall scatter you forth that ye shall become meat for dogs and wild beasts.**

**verse 19** We have discussed previously the reasons why the Lord gathers or scatters a people (see the discussion of the gathering and scattering of Israel in the introductory commentary for 1 Nephi 20). The only circumstances under which the Lord will assist in his peoples’ gathering are true repentance and conversion to the gospel of Jesus Christ (Isaiah 43:1-7; Jeremiah 3:12-23; 16:11-21; 1 Nephi 10:14; 2 Nephi 9:2; 10:6-7; 3 Nephi 20:29-33). The dispersion or scattering of a people occur when they apostatize from the truth (Deuteronomy 28:15, 25, 64; Jeremiah 16:11-13; 2 Nephi 6:9-11; 10:5-6; Helaman 7:19).

**20 O, how could you have forgotten your God in the very day that he has delivered you?**

**verse 20** Nephi will answer his own question in the following verse.

**“in the very day that he has delivered you”** This phrase should be interpreted figuratively and not literally. The Lord’s redemption (the result of his atoning suffering and death) to individuals and to groups of individuals is available or offered to the worthy on any day or in any situation.

**21 But behold, it is to get gain, to be praised of men, yea, and that ye might get gold and silver. And ye have set your hearts upon the riches and the vain things of this world, for the which ye do murder, and plunder, and steal, and bear false witness against your neighbor, and do all manner of iniquity.**

**22 And for this cause wo shall come unto you except ye shall repent. For if ye will not repent, behold, this great city, and also all those great cities which are round about, which are in the land of our possession, shall be taken away that ye shall have no place in them; for behold, the Lord will not grant unto you strength, as he has hitherto done, to withstand against your enemies.**

**23 For behold, thus saith the Lord: I will not show unto the wicked of my strength, to one more than the other, save it be unto those that repent of their sins, and hearken unto my words. Now therefore, I would that ye should behold, my brethren, that it shall be better for the Lamanites than for you except ye shall repent.**

**verse 23 “it shall be better for the Lamanites than for you except ye shall repent”** The implication here is obvious. Those who receive light knowledge are responsible to live in accordance with it. Those who sin after having received knowledge of the truth by revelation bear greater condemnation than those who sin in ignorance (D&C 82:3; Luke 12:48).

**24 For behold, they are more righteous than you, 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.**

**verse 24 “he will lengthen out their days”** The Lamanites will never be completely annihilated, rather a remnant will be preserved even to the latter days (see Helaman 15:15-16).

Hugh Nibley has pointed out that the Lord made distinct and different two-part promises to both the Nephites and the Lamanites:

The Nephites and Lamanites each received a promise in the beginning, and each promise contained two parts, a promise of bliss and a promise of woe, “for this is the cursing and the blessing of God upon the land” (Alma 45:16). . . . For the Lamanites the penalty of their backsliding is that they shall be scattered and smitten and driven by the Gentiles; the reward of their faith is that they are to survive all their afflictions and in time become the Lord’s own people again. For the Nephites the promised reward of faith is that nothing on earth can, without their own will and action, in any way ever mar their liberty, security, prosperity, and happiness: “And now there was nothing in all the land to hinder the people from prospering continually, except they should fall into transgression” (3 Nephi 6:5). This tremendous guarantee is matched by a promise of total extinction in case they should fail to comply with the conditions of the contract. Since they never became fully ripe in iniquity as did the Nephites, the Lamanites were allowed to remain in the land, paying for the privilege by taking a terrible beating: “Wherefore, if ye are cursed, behold, I leave my blessing upon you. . . . Because of my blessing the Lord God will not suffer that ye shall perish” (2 Nephi 4:6-7). It was an unconditional promise of survival (Jacob 3:5-9; Helaman 7:24; 15:14-17). No such promise was given the Nephites, and Enos was told that though the Nephites might perish, still the Lamanites would survive to receive his record (Enos 1:13, 16) (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 7, 389-90).

**“increase their seed”** An abundant and righteous posterity is a blessing at times promised to the faithful. We know that Abraham, because of his obedience, was promised a posterity as numerous as “the stars of the heaven, and as the sand upon the sea shore” (Genesis 22:17). This blessing also applies to our dispensation. For those who enter into the new and everlasting covenant of marriage, “this promise is yours also, because ye are of Abraham” (D&C 132:31).

25 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!

26 Yea, wo shall come unto you because of that pride which ye have suffered to enter your hearts, which has lifted you up beyond that which is good because of your exceedingly great riches!

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

28 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.

29 Behold now, I do not say that these things shall be, of myself, because it is not of myself that I know these things; but behold, I know that these things are true because the Lord God has made them known unto me, therefore I testify that they shall be.

**verse 29** Nephi, as a prophet, appropriately seals his message with his testimony of the message's divine origin.

## Helaman Chapter 8

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**1 And now it came to pass that when Nephi had said these words, behold, there were men who were judges, who also belonged to the secret band of Gadianton, and they were angry, and they cried out against him, saying unto the people: Why do ye not seize upon this man and bring him forth, that he may be condemned according to the crime which he has done?**

**2 Why seest thou this man, and hearest him revile against this people and against our law?**

**verse 2** These evil judges are asking, “Why do you tolerate this man’s reviling against you and your laws? In response to Nephi’s criticizing the status quo, those with status desired to silence him. They did it by a technique that some might call patriotism. It is actually a false patriotism used by those who wish to put down anyone whom they oppose. The usual tactic is to portray themselves as loyal and patriotic and then cast aspersions on the motives and morals of those with differing ideas. When Nephi spoke out against them, these dishonest judges made it appear that he (Nephi) was the one who was disloyal, charging him with reviling against the people, the law, and the judges.

**3 For behold, Nephi had spoken unto them concerning the corruptness of their law; yea, many things did Nephi speak which cannot be written; and nothing did he speak which was contrary to the commandments of God.**

**verses 2-3** In preaching and warning according to the commandments of God, perhaps Nephi had broken the law of the land. Apparently there was a law against “revil[ing] against this people and against our law.” If indeed contempt of institutions was a crime, Nephi was guilty, for he had plainly “spoken unto them concerning the corruptness of their law.”

**4 And those judges were angry with him because he spake plainly unto them concerning their secret works of darkness; nevertheless, they durst not lay their own hands upon him, for they feared the people lest they should cry out against them.**

**5 Therefore they did cry unto the people, saying: Why do you suffer this man to revile against us? For behold he doth condemn all this people, even unto destruction; yea, and also that these our great cities shall be taken from us, that we shall have no place in them.**

**6 And now we know that this is impossible, for behold, we are powerful, and our cities great, therefore our enemies can have no power over us.**

**verses 4-6** Why did not the judges take matters into their own hands and initiate legal action against Nephi for what they considered treasonable rhetoric against their

government? Why did they “durst not lay their hands upon him,” and why did they appeal to the people with the question: “Why do you suffer this man to revile against us”? A possible reason has been suggested by Noel B. Reynolds in his article “Book of Mormon, Government and Legal History” (*Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, volume 1):

At the time the Nephites abandoned the monarchy, Mosiah instituted a major reform of Nephite procedural law. A system of judges and other officers was instituted; lower judges were judged by a higher judge (Mosiah 29:28); judges were paid for the time spent in public service (Alma 11:3); a standardized system of weights and measures was instituted (Alma 11:4-19); slavery was formally prohibited (Alma 27:9); and defaulting debtors faced banishment (Alma 11:2). There were officers (Alma 11:2) and lawyers who assisted, but their official functions are not clear. It appears that ordinary citizens had sole power to initiate lawsuits (otherwise, the judges would have brought the action against Nephi in Helaman 8:1).

There would yet come a time when the judges would acknowledge no such restraints: “Many . . . who testified of the things pertaining to Christ . . . were taken and put to death secretly by the judges, so that the knowledge of their death came not unto the governor . . . until after their death” (3 Nephi 6:23).

**verse 6 “therefore our enemies can have no power over us”** Supposedly the Nephites and Lamanites existed at this time in a condition of peace (Helaman 6:34-37). So who were the Nephites’ “enemies”? Might there have been other, non-Lamanite groups which might have considered to be enemies?

**7 And it came to pass that thus they did stir up the people to anger against Nephi, and raised contentions among them; for there were some who did cry out: Let this man alone, for he is a good man, and those things which he saith will surely come to pass except we repent;**

**8 Yea, behold, all the judgments will come upon us which he has testified unto us; for we know that he has testified aright unto us concerning our iniquities. And behold they are many, and he knoweth as well all things which shall befall us as he knoweth of our iniquities;**

**verse 8 “he has testified aright unto us”** We have recently above discussed the definition of the word *aright*. It is “in a right form; without mistake or crime; correctly.”

**9 Yea, and behold, if he had not been a prophet he could not have testified concerning those things.**

**10 And it came to pass that those people who sought to destroy Nephi were compelled because of their fear, that they did not lay their hands on him; therefore he began again to speak unto them, seeing that he had gained favor in the eyes of some, insomuch that the remainder of them did fear.**

**verses 11-24** In these verses Nephi will cite examples of past prophets' prophesying of Christ hoping to win support for his own prophecies. His argument is that if his hearers reject his words, the words of a living prophet, then they are rejecting the testimonies of such revered prophets as Isaiah, Moses, Zenos, Jeremiah, Lehi, and others.

**11 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?**

**12 And now behold, if God gave unto this man such power, then why should ye dispute among yourselves, and say that he hath given unto me no power whereby I may know concerning the judgments that shall come upon you except ye repent?**

**13 But, behold, ye not only deny my words, but ye also deny all the words which have been spoken by our fathers, and also the words which were spoken by this man, Moses, who had such great power given unto him, yea, the words which he hath spoken concerning the coming of the Messiah.**

**14 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.**

**15 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.**

**verses 14-15** Here again is a reference to that colorful story of the Lord's setting fiery serpents upon the disobedient Israelites (see the commentary for 1 Nephi 17:41 and for 2 Nephi 25:20). If the reader desires to review this story, please do so in Numbers 21:4-9. Briefly, because of the sins of the Israelites in the wilderness, the Lord sent among them poisonous serpents. These serpents bit many, and, as a result, many died. Moses petitioned the Lord for a way to save his people from these serpents. In response, the Lord commanded Moses to make a serpent of brass and place it on a pole. Whosoever was bitten by a poisonous serpent could be saved from death by looking upon the brass serpent. The serpent, of course, was a type and symbol of Christ.

One of the ways in which the Book of Mormon is "Another Testament of Jesus Christ" is that it testifies that the mortal ministry of Jesus Christ was the fulfillment of prophecy given in Old Testament times. An example of these Old Testament

prophecies includes the fact that the law of Moses was given “and all things which have been given of God from the beginning of the world . . . are [for] the typifying of [Christ]” (see the commentary for 2 Nephi 11:4). Examples of these types and prophecies, in addition to the brazen serpent, are: the coming of a prophet like Moses (Deuteronomy 18:15-19; Acts 3:22-23; 1 Nephi 22:20-21); a virgin bearing a son (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:23; 2 Nephi 17:14); and the suffering servant (Isaiah 53; Mark 9:12; Romans 4:25; Mosiah 13:33 - 15:1). The Book of Mormon “establish[es] the truth” (1 Nephi 13:40) of the New Testament’s references to Old Testament prophecies (see John 5:39; Luke 24:27).

**16 And now behold, Moses did not only testify of these things, but also all the holy prophets, from his days even to the days of Abraham.**

**17 Yea, and behold, Abraham saw of his coming, and was filled with gladness and did rejoice.**

**verse 17** The mortal Christ testified to the Pharisees, “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad” (John 8:56-59). The biblical antecedent of this testimony is not found in our present-day Old Testament. It is, however, found in the Joseph Smith Translation: “It came to pass, that Abram looked forth and saw the days of the Son of Man, and was glad, and his soul found rest, and he believed in the Lord; and the Lord counted it unto him for righteousness” (JST, Genesis 15:12). It is also likely that the “Ephraim Bible”—the brass plates of Laban—contained this reference and was the likely source material for Nephi in this verse.

**18 Yea, and behold I say unto you, 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.**

**verse 18** “the order of God; yea, even after the order of his Son” These phrases refer to the same priesthood that we would call today the Melchizedek priesthood.

“a great many thousand years before his coming” The traditional chronology of the Irish Anglican archbishop James Ussher (AD 1581-1656), places the fall of Adam at 4,004 BC. To arrive at that number, Ussher worked back from known dates using the data for births and deaths given for the various patriarchs in the text of the book of Genesis. Unfortunately, these numbers are not consistent in the various manuscripts and versions of the Bible, and we have no way of knowing which, if any, of these that have come down to us are accurate, except as they may occasionally appear in modern scripture (see D&C 107:42-53). The question here is whether we ought to regard this phrase as simply hyperbole, or whether, in fact, the fall of Adam and the introduction of

the family of man to the earth did occur much earlier than 4,000 BC. Only four thousand years before the coming of Christ does not seem to qualify as “a great many thousand years.” I don’t feel speculation about the age of the earth—and particularly speculation about the duration of the history of the family of man here on earth beginning with Adam and Eve—is entirely appropriate here. It seems certain, however, that the earth’s age is far older than the traditional six, or so, thousand years. In fact, it will not be surprising to find that the creation of this earth began even millions or billions of years ago. It is even possible that the history of family of man here on the earth, is also longer than the six thousand years. See “The Duration of Our Premortal Experience” in volume 1, chapter 3, *The Creation*, in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*.

**19 And now I would that ye should know, that even since the days of Abraham there have been many prophets that have testified these things; yea, behold, the prophet Zenos did testify boldly; for the which he was slain.**

**verse 19** From reading the Book of Mormon, one might conclude that the two dominant prophetic voices recorded on the brass plates were those of Isaiah and Zenos both of whom died as martyrs.

**20 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?**

**verses 19-20** Here is a bit of insight regarding those non-Biblical prophets whose writings were presumably found on the brass plates, Zenos, Zenock, and Ezias. They lived and wrote “since the days of Abraham.” Since Abraham, Isaiah, and Jeremiah are mentioned in chronological order, we might logically assume that the others are also. Thus it is likely that Zenos, Zenock, and Ezias all lived after the time of Abraham and before the days of Isaiah, and perhaps they lived and ministered in the chronological order just mentioned. Abraham’s birth is thought by Bible scholars to have been about 2167 BC. The birth of Isaiah was about 770 BC. For further information concerning these prophets, see the commentary for 1 Nephi 19:10, 1 Nephi 5:16, and the introductory commentary for Jacob 5.

Verse 20 is the only mention of the prophet Ezias in the Book of Mormon. It is possible that Ezias is the same as the one called Esaias, a contemporary of Abraham, one who is twice mentioned in the revelations given to Joseph Smith (D&C 76:100; 84:12-13).

**verse 20** It is notable that the Book of Mormon prophets including Lehi (1 Nephi 5:13; 7:14) had access to some of the writings of Jeremiah who was a contemporary of Lehi’s in Jerusalem. Obviously these writings of Jeremiah were contained on the plates of brass. Here Nephi indicates that Jeremiah had prophesied of the Messiah’s first

coming. However, current texts of Jeremiah do not have clear references to this event, underscoring the observation that in the transmission of the biblical text, parts may have been lost, or that Lehi may have possessed a fuller version. This should not be surprising since ancient evidence both from Dead Sea fragments and from the Septuagint version of Jeremiah suggests that the text of his book has not been well preserved (William J. Adams Jr. "Prophecies of Jeremiah," *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, volume 2).

**21 And now will you dispute that Jerusalem was destroyed? Will ye say that the sons of Zedekiah were not slain, all except it were Mulek? Yea, and do ye not behold that the seed of Zedekiah are with us, and they were driven out of the land of Jerusalem? But behold, this is not all—**

**verse 21** We know that all the sons of Zedekiah were not slain. There is even evidence that the surviving son of Zedekiah, Mulek, might be mentioned in the Old Testament. Please review the commentary for Mosiah 25:2.

**22 Our father Lehi was driven out of Jerusalem because he testified of these things. Nephi also testified of these things, and also almost all of our fathers, even down to this time; yea, they have testified of the coming of Christ, and have looked forward, and have rejoiced in his day which is to come.**

**23 And behold, he is God, and he is with them, and he did manifest himself unto them, that they were redeemed by him; and they gave unto him glory, because of that which is to come.**

**verse 23** The pronouns "them" and "they" in this verse refer back to Lehi, Nephi, and "our fathers" in the previous verse.

**"he is God"** Christ is indeed God. Elder Bruce R. McConkie wrote: "If we are to envision our Lord's true status and glory, we must come back to the pronouncement of pronouncements, the doctrine of doctrines, the message of messages, which is that Christ is God" (*Promised Messiah*, 98).

**24 And now, seeing ye know these things and cannot deny them except ye shall lie, therefore in this ye have sinned, for ye have rejected all these things, notwithstanding so many evidences which ye have received; yea, even ye have received all things, both things in heaven, and all things which are in the earth, as a witness that they are true.**

**verse 24 "seeing ye know these things and cannot deny them except ye shall lie"** Nephi is able to discern the hearts of some in his audience. The Spirit whispers to him that some of his hearers are sinning against the "pricks" of their consciences.

**25** But behold, ye have rejected the truth, and rebelled against your holy God; and even at this time, instead of laying up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where nothing doth corrupt, and where nothing can come which is unclean, ye are heaping up for yourselves wrath against the day of judgment.

**verse 25** “ye are heaping up for yourselves wrath against the day of judgment” This is a colorful way of saying that those who rebel against God in this life shall feel the wrath of God at the time of the final judgment.

**26** 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.

**27** 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.

**28** 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.

## Helaman Chapter 9

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1 Behold, now it came to pass that when Nephi had spoken these words, certain men who were among them ran to the judgment-seat; yea, even there were five who went, and they said among themselves, as they went:

2 Behold, now we will know of a surety whether this man be a prophet and God hath commanded him to prophesy such marvelous things unto us. Behold, we do not believe that he hath; yea, we do not believe that he is a prophet; nevertheless, if this thing which he has said concerning the chief judge be true, that he be dead, then will we believe that the other words which he has spoken are true.

3 And it came to pass that they ran in their might, and came in unto the judgment-seat; and behold, the chief judge had fallen to the earth, and did lie in his blood.

4 And now behold, when they saw this they were astonished exceedingly, insomuch that they fell to the earth; for they had not believed the words which Nephi had spoken concerning the chief judge.

5 But now, when they saw they believed, and fear came upon them lest all the judgments which Nephi had spoken should come upon the people; therefore they did quake, and had fallen to the earth.

6 Now, immediately when the judge had been murdered—he being stabbed by his brother by a garb of secrecy, and he fled, and the servants ran and told the people, raising the cry of murder among them;

**verse 6 “he being stabbed by his brother”** One might wonder if this murder by stabbing or cutting was not part of the evil covenant Satan had made with his followers in this secret combination. In ancient times covenant making involved symbolic acts and customary rituals. For example, when two parties reached a covenantal agreement, they could close or confirm the agreement by a symbolic act such as cutting the throat of an animal. The animal could then be used as a sacrificial offering, or the meat of the animal could be used as the main course of a feast of celebration. One example in the Book of Mormon where “cutting” comes close to describing a symbolic ritual is found in Alma 46:21-22 when the people rent their garments as a token that they would not forsake the Lord. Satan may have also directed his followers in the secret combinations to use a knife or sword in cutting or stabbing the flesh of their victims.

**“by a garb of secrecy”** No one had witnessed Seantum killing his brother. Cases of unwitnessed murders presented special problems under the law of Moses. Generally speaking, a person could not be convicted of murder on circumstantial evidence, for such was ruled out under Israelite law, which required every fact to be substantiated by the testimony of two eyewitnesses (see Deuteronomy 19:15). While

the two-witness rule would seem to be an insurmountable barrier in the way of ever obtaining a conviction in this case, such a heinous crime could not simply be ignored. If a person was found slain in the land and the murderer could not be found, solemn rituals, oaths of innocence, and special purification of all the men in the village had to be performed (see Deuteronomy 21:1-9). Things will turn out differently in Seantum's case, however, for he will soon be exposed in a way that opened the door to an exceptional rule of evidence that justified his conviction.

Nephi will first reveal to the people that Seantum was the murderer, that they would find blood on the skirts of his cloak, and that he would say certain things to them when they told him, "We know that thou are guilty" (see verse 34). Indeed, Seantum will immediately confess his guilt (see verses 37-38). Ordinarily Seantum's confession would not be admissible in a Jewish court of law. But there was an earlier biblical precedent by which confessions could be admissible (see the execution of Achan—Joshua 7; the execution of the man who admitted that he had killed Saul—2 Samuel 1:10-16; the two assassins of Ishbosheth, the son of Saul—2 Samuel 4:8-12; and the voluntary confession of Micah, the son who stole from his mother—Judges 17:1-4). The conditions by which these confessions were admissible (which are all fulfilled in the case of Seantum) include: (1) The confession is corroborated by an ordeal—a trying experience in which the divine will is manifest. In Seantum's case, the evidence of God's will was supplied through Nephi's prophecy. (2) The confession occurred spontaneously before a formal trial before a judge. (3) The confession was corroborated by *corpus delicti* (the physical evidence of the crime). In Seantum's case tangible evidence was present in the blood found on Seantum's cloak. These factors, under biblical law, would override the normal Jewish concerns about the use of self-incriminating confessions to obtain a conviction. Given the complicated and important ancient legal issues uniquely presented by the case of Seantum, it is little wonder that the Book of Mormon makes special note of the fact that Seantum himself was legitimately "brought to prove that he himself was the very murderer" (verse 38) (John W. Welch, "A Steady stream of Significant Recognitions," in *Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon*, 361-64).

**7 And behold the people did gather themselves together unto the place of the judgment-seat—and behold, to their astonishment they saw those five men who had fallen to the earth.**

**8 And now behold, the people knew nothing concerning the multitude who had gathered together at the garden of Nephi; therefore they said among themselves: These men are they who have murdered the judge, and God has smitten them that they could not flee from us.**

9 And it came to pass that they laid hold on them, and bound them and cast them into prison. And there was a proclamation sent abroad that the judge was slain, and that the murderers had been taken and were cast into prison.

10 And it came to pass that on the morrow the people did assemble themselves together to mourn and to fast, at the burial of the great chief judge who had been slain.

**verse 10** It is instructive to note that the Nephites, like their Israelite ancestors, fasted in connection with mourning for their dead. In ancient Israel, the day after the death of a political leader was traditionally a day of fasting, mourning, and burial (see 1 Samuel 31:13; 2 Samuel 1:12). The Book of Mormon gives no reason for these fasts, but they may have been to obtain solace for the living rather than mercy for the dead.

11 And thus also those judges who were at the garden of Nephi, and heard his words, were also gathered together at the burial.

12 And it came to pass that they inquired among the people, saying: Where are the five who were sent to inquire concerning the chief judge whether he was dead? And they answered and said: Concerning this five whom ye say ye have sent, we know not; but there are five who are the murderers, whom we have cast into prison.

13 And it came to pass that the judges desired that they should be brought; and they were brought, and behold they were the five who were sent; and behold the judges inquired of them to know concerning the matter, and they told them all that they had done, saying:

14 We ran and came to the place of the judgment-seat, and when we saw all things even as Nephi had testified, we were astonished insomuch that we fell to the earth; and when we were recovered from our astonishment, behold they cast us into prison.

15 Now, as for the murder of this man, we know not who has done it; and only this much we know, we ran and came according as ye desired, and behold he was dead, according to the words of Nephi.

16 And now it came to pass that the judges did expound the matter unto the people, and did cry out against Nephi, saying: Behold, we know that this Nephi must have agreed with some one to slay the judge, and then he might declare it unto us, that he might convert us unto his faith, that he might raise himself to be a great man, chosen of God, and a prophet.

17 And now behold, we will detect this man, and he shall confess his fault and make known unto us the true murderer of this judge.

**verse 17** To “detect” in this context means to catch or discover his misdeed.

**18 And it came to pass that the five were liberated on the day of the burial. Nevertheless, they did rebuke the judges in the words which they had spoken against Nephi, and did contend with them one by one, insomuch that they did confound them.**

**19 Nevertheless, they caused that Nephi should be taken and bound and brought before the multitude, and they began to question him in divers ways that they might cross him, that they might accuse him to death—**

**verse 19** “they began to question him in divers ways that they might cross him” Their effort was to try to “cross him,” that is, get him to contradict himself.

**20 Saying unto him: Thou art confederate; who is this man that hath done this murder? Now tell us, and acknowledge thy fault; saying, Behold here is money; and also we will grant unto thee thy life if thou wilt tell us, and acknowledge the agreement which thou hast made with him.**

**verse 20** “Thou art confederate” Here the judges are accusing him by saying, “We know you have an accomplice with whom you plotted this murder.”

**21 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?**

**verse 21** The “uncircumcised of heart” are those who have spiritual impurities which need to be cut away. These fail to yield their hearts to God. It was father Lehi’s contemporary, Jeremiah, who commanded the Israelites to “circumcise yourselves to the Lord, and take away the foreskins of your heart” (Jeremiah 4:4).

**22 O ye ought to begin to howl and mourn, because of the great destruction which at this time doth await you, except ye shall repent.**

**23 Behold ye say that I have agreed with a man that he should murder Seezoram, our chief judge. But behold, I say unto you, that this is because I have testified unto you that ye might know concerning this thing; yea, even for a witness unto you, that I did know of the wickedness and abominations which are among you.**

**verse 23** Nephi says, “The reason you have accused me of conspiring to murder the chief judge is that you resent my exposing “the wickedness and abominations which are among you.” You are angry with me and wish to destroy me.

**24 And because I have done this, ye say that I have agreed with a man that he should do this thing; yea, because I showed unto you this sign ye are angry with me, and seek to destroy my life.**

**25 And now behold, I will show unto you another sign, and see if ye will in this thing seek to destroy me.**

**verse 25** Nephi says, “I will show you another sign, and I will see if you are still convinced that I am guilty.”

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

**27 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?**

**verse 27** Nephi instructs those who go to the house of Seantum to say, “Has Nephi, the pretended prophet, conspired with you in your plot to murder Seezoram your brother?”

**28 And behold, he shall say unto you, Nay.**

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

**30 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.**

**verse 30** “**wist not what to say**” *Wist* is the preterit or past tense of *wis* which means to know. Seantum, when asked this question, will not know what to say—he will be stuck for an answer.

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

**32 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?**

**verse 32** “**Do we not know that it is the blood of your brother?**” An interesting Hebraism in the Book of Mormon that has not received much attention is the Hebrew use of negative rhetorical questions. When an emphatically positive meaning is intended, sometimes a negative question will be asked. In other words, when the questioner is completely certain of the answer and wishes to convey positive or even emphatic force, he may ask a negative question. A couple of biblical examples will serve to illustrate. In Judges 4:14 Deborah wishes to say to Barak, “The Lord is indeed going out before you,” but instead she asks him, “Is not the Lord gone out before thee?” In Deuteronomy 11:30, the intended meaning is, “As you know, these mountains are across the Jordan.” Instead, the author asks, “Are they not on the other side [of the] Jordan?”

In this particular verse, the reader intends to say, “We know that this blood on the skirts of your cloak is the blood of your brother.” Instead, he uses the peculiar Hebraism and asks, “Do we not know that it is the blood of your brother?”

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

34 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.

35 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.

36 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.

37 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.

38 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.

39 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.

40 And now there were some among the people, who said that Nephi was a prophet.

41 And there were others who said: Behold, he is a god, for except he was a god he could not know of all things. For behold, he has told us the thoughts of our hearts, and also has told us things; and even he has brought unto our knowledge the true murderer of our chief judge.

**verse 41** Excessive and inappropriate religious zeal is just as incorrect as stubbornly failing to believe the truth. Any virtue overdone may become a vice. To make the Lord's servants objects of worship is to pervert the message those servants bring.

## Helaman Chapter 10

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### Scripture Mastery

**Helaman 10:4-7** Remarkable promise to prophet Nephi: All things shall be done unto thee according to thy word, for thou shalt not ask that which is contrary to my will.

**1 And it came to pass that there arose a division among the people, insomuch that they divided hither and thither and went their ways, leaving Nephi alone, as he was standing in the midst of them.**

**2 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.**

**verse 2** “Nephi went his way . . . pondering upon the things which the Lord had shown unto him” Consider for a moment the benefits of pondering the things of the Lord. Nephi, the son of Lehi, pondered the words of his father, and an exceptional vision of the condescension of God was revealed to him. As Joseph Smith pondered James 1:5, he was motivated to pray and the sublime vision of the Father and the Son was opened to him. President Joseph F. Smith received D&C 138 as he pondered the scriptures and the Savior’s atonement.

**3 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:**

**verses 4-7** It seems clear that in these next four verses, this magnificent prophet has his calling and election made sure. 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, Bruce R. *Mormon Doctrine*. 2nd edition. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1979). This topic is seldom discussed in church settings, perhaps because of its unusually sacred nature. I will provide only a few comments here. Please see a more complete discussion of this topic in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, chapter 16, *Calling and Election Made Sure*. I have also drawn from a helpful article by Andrew C. Skinner (“Nephi’s Ultimate Encounter with Deity: Some Thoughts on Helaman 10,” *The Book of Mormon: Helaman through 3 Nephi 8, According To Thy Word*, 115-127).

Joseph Smith, in referring to this principle, said: “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” (*TPJS*, 149). Other scriptural expressions for having one’s

calling and election made sure include, “sealed up unto eternal life,” receiving the “Second Comforter,” and receiving “the more sure word of prophecy.”

We have been taught that the doctrine of *election* means that in our premortal existence certain individuals were designated (elected) to receive certain gifts or blessings in mortality. To be *called* is virtually synonymous with being elected. Both are closely related to foreordination. Please review the commentary for Alma 13:3.

Many are elected or called by being foreordained in the premortal world, probably as hands are laid upon spirit heads. We may assume that all of God’s children are foreordained to one day return to the celestial presence of God.

Obviously premortal calling or election is a conditional or contingent blessing. Before this foreordination can be “made sure,” each individual must prove his worthiness by consistent dedication to the gospel principles even in the face of adversity. In referring to the grand key whereby an individual’s premortal conditional election to eternal life may be made sure and unconditional, Joseph Smith wrote:

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).

What about Nephi, the Son of Helaman? How did he qualify himself to receive this glorious blessing? An overview of his life makes it plain that he was a model of consistent righteous living and service in the face of significant opposition. As we have already read, Nephi yielded up the judgment seat, the office of chief judge, to another so that he could devote his full time and energies to the service of the Lord (Helaman 5:1-4). Because of his efforts eight thousand Lamanites in the land of Zarahemla were converted and baptized (Helaman 5:18-19). He was cast into prison (Helaman 5:21-22) and there endured much privation and hardship by going many days without food while awaiting his execution. Eventually he was rescued by the Lord, transfigured, heard the voice of the Lord, and was ministered to by angels (Helaman 5:36, 44-48; 6:1). He served a mission in the land northward (as previously reviewed, probably the land Bountiful and surrounding lands) for six years and was roundly rejected by virtually everyone (Helaman 7:3). He returned discouraged and heart-sick over the wickedness of his people. Shortly thereafter he was confronted by a group of judges seeking his destruction. He responded to their threats by boldly prophesying to them and by rebuking them. His life was characterized by unfailing loyalty to the Savior’s cause.

One other point regarding being sealed up to eternal life is worthy of discussion. Some scriptural exegetes have concluded that having one’s calling and election made

sure means that the Lord has offered to him the unconditional guarantee that his probation is over—that he surely will be exalted almost regardless of his subsequent actions. The only way, they feel, that such an individual can lose this “guarantee” is by committing the unpardonable sin or shedding innocent blood. There is no question that the individual who achieves the high level of spiritual progress required in order to be sealed up to eternal life is unlikely to commit serious sin. His soul has been refined to the point where worldliness has little power over him, and all of his inclinations are to continue to obey and continue to progress. It would seem, however, to this author, that any mortal can still lose his place in the celestial heaven by succumbing to the temptations of the world while he is here on earth. If the individual who has entered into the sacred covenant of being sealed up to eternal life, does not persist in his obedience or commits major sin, it is illogical to assume he would not lose his calling and election. This sacred covenant is not a license to commit sin or rest on one’s spiritual laurels.

**4 Blessed art thou, Nephi, for those things which thou hast 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.**

**verse 4 “thou hast with unwearyingness declared the word”** Perhaps the most important aspect of the virtue of “unwearyingness” is consistency. A sign of spiritual maturity is the tendency to be consistent and steadfast in righteousness and in service. This is in contrast to the “unsteadiness of the hearts” of others (see Helaman 12:1). One illustration of the unfailing consistency and unquestioned obedience is seen in verse 12 of this chapter. As taught by Joseph Smith, Nephi was “thoroughly proved” as he served the Lord “at all hazards” (*TPJS*, 150).

In illustrating the “unwearyingness” of some of the Lord’s servants, Elder Neal A. Maxwell wrote a charming anecdote: “President Spencer W. Kimball exhibited the same ‘unwearyingness’ as the Lord commended in Nephi (Helaman 10:4-5). One of the author’s last real conversations with President Kimball included his wistful comment concerning his ministry: ‘I should have done more!’ How he could have done more none of us knows, but this comment is indicative of his unwearyingness. He endured so well the unusual number of afflictions life placed upon him while serving so many so incessantly” (*A Wonderful Flood of Light*, 124).

**“And thou hast not feared them”** Nephi has preached the gospel boldly and without allowing himself to be intimidated by any person or situation. There can be no mistake about the Lord’s commandment to each us to screw up our courage and be bold in proclaiming the gospel. The Lord said to the prophet Joseph Smith: “But with some I am not well pleased, for they will not open their mouths, but they hide the talent which I have given unto them, because of the fear of man. Wo unto such, for mine anger is kindled against them” (D&C 60:2).

**“thou . . . hast not sought thine own life”** Nephi has been motivated only by the Lord and his cause. He has given no thought to any personal aggrandizement or any other personal concerns, for that matter (Matthew 10:39).

**5 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.**

**verse 5** What a remarkable blessing! The Lord has extended to Nephi an invitation to ask for anything he wishes—for knowledge, power, and blessings up to and including eternal life. We will learn that this gift is part of the sealing power (for a discussion of the sealing power, see the commentary for verse 7). This blessing was granted at least in part because the Lord knew the mind of Nephi and knew that he would ask for nothing amiss. Elder Marion G. Romney taught: “The time will come when we shall know the will of God before we ask. Then everything for which we pray will be ‘expedient.’ Everything for which we ask will be ‘right.’ That will be when as a result of righteous living, we shall so enjoy the companionship of the Spirit that he will dictate what we ask” (*CR*, October 1944, 56). The Lord said, “He that asketh in the Spirit asketh according to the will of God; wherefore it is done even as he asketh” (D&C 46:30). Also, “And if ye are purified and cleansed from all sin, ye shall ask whatsoever you will in the name of Jesus and it shall be done. But know this, it shall be given you what you shall ask” (D&C 50:29-30). It is this kind of empowerment that will enable Nephi to command that a great famine occur among his people in order to humble them and bring them to repentance.

The particular blessing contained in this verse tends to accompany the covenant of having one’s calling and election made sure (see also D&C 132:40, 49). Elder Neal A. Maxwell wrote: “There is a . . . line in our spiritual progress that, if crossed by means of ‘unwearied diligence’ and righteousness, yields both renewal and reward. We will not even ask amiss in our petitions, and, therefore, our prayers will be granted even as we ask (D&C 50:29-30; 46:30)” (*We Will Prove Them Herewith*, 101).

Apparently one of Nephi’s wishes, like the younger Alma (Alma 45:18), was to maintain his opportunities to serve the Lord here on earth after his mortal life was over, for he was apparently translated (see 3 Nephi 1:2-3).

**6 Behold, thou art Nephi, and I am God. Behold, I declare it 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 destruction, according to the wickedness of this people.**

**verse 6** **“Behold, thou art Nephi, and I am God.”** Since it is reasonable to assume that Nephi knew who he was, and since we know that if the Lord speaks no

words in idleness, such a statement must have profound meaning. It appears to be an acknowledgment, 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 acknowledgment of a special covenant which the Lord was confirming with Nephi” (Andrew C. Skinner, *The Book of Mormon: Helaman through 3 Nephi 8, According To Thy Word*, 120).

“Behold, I declare it unto thee in the presence of mine angels” It obvious that the Lord is entering into a covenant with Nephi.

**7 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.**

**verse 7** Students of the New Testament will recognize the wording of this verse as being almost identical to Matthew 16:19 and 18:18. In Matthew 16:19 the Lord said to Peter, “I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” This may seem like a question with an all-too-obvious answer, but what precisely is the sealing power? Apparently there are three distinct correct answers to this question. The general sealing power consists of three separate parts, each with a distinct definition:

1. In the first, the root “seal” in “sealing power” is interpreted as meaning *connect*. The sealing power is the power to connect people together in families for eternity. Specifically, “sealing” refers to the marriage of a husband and wife and to the joining together of children and parents in relationships that are to endure forever. The sealing together of husband, wife, and children in eternal family units is the culminating ordinance of the priesthood, to which all other ordinances are preparatory. It must be performed by one holding the “sealing power.”

2. In the second definition, to “seal” does not mean to connect. Rather it means to certify as authentic. Signets and “seals” have been used for centuries to indicate authenticity or proper authority. In the secular world today licenses, diplomas, legal documents, and the like bear seals that officially attest to their authenticity. So it is with matters of the eternities. This sealing power is the priesthood power given to the Lord’s authorized servants to perform certain acts on earth and have them recognized (sealed) or validated in heaven. In this context, the word “seal” appears many times in the scriptures. Jesus Christ was “sealed” by God the Father (John 6:27). Paul reminded ancient saints that God had anointed and “sealed” them (2 Corinthians 1:21-22) and told others they “were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest [assurance] of our inheritance until the redemption” (Ephesians 1:13-14). John spoke of the servants of God being sealed in their foreheads (Revelation 7:3). This is the

authority by which “all covenants, contracts, bonds, obligations, oaths, vows, performances, connections, associations, or expectations” can be “made and entered into and sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise” and receive “efficacy, virtue, or force in and after the resurrection of the dead” (D&C 132:7). Elder Bruce R. McConkie said, “All things that are not sealed by this power have an end when men are dead. Unless a baptism has this enduring seal, it will not admit a person to the Celestial Kingdom . . . All things gain enduring force and validity because of the sealing power” (*Mormon Doctrine*, 615-16).

3. But there is even more to this sealing power! Consider the account in this particular verse of the Lord giving to Nephi, the son of Helaman, the “sealing power.” Just exactly what is this power that the Lord is bestowing upon Nephi? It is defined in the verses which follow: “And thus, if ye shall say unto this temple it shall be rent in twain, it shall be done. And if ye shall say unto this mountain, be thou cast down and become smooth, it shall be done. And behold, if ye shall say that God shall smite this people, it shall come to pass. And now behold, I command you, that ye shall go and declare unto this people, that thus saith the Lord God, who is the Almighty: Except ye repent ye shall be smitten, even unto destruction (Helaman 10:8-11). So what is this awesome power? It is simply the power possessed by its recipient to ask for anything he feels is appropriate, and it shall be brought to pass by divine mandate. And how did Nephi qualify to receive this great blessing? The Lord previously explained to him: “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 [I know that] thou shalt not ask that which is contrary to my will” (Helaman 10:5, italics mine). The bestowal of this power is a manifestation of the Lord’s ultimate confidence in its recipient that the power will not be misused. In this context, the prophet Elijah, who also possessed the sealing power at the time of the wicked Israelite king Ahab, sealed up the heavens so that there would be no rain: “As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word” (1 Kings 17:1).

In modern times this sealing authority, in its entirety including all three of its distinct parts, was restored to the earth in the Kirtland Temple on April 3, 1836, by the prophet Elijah, who was the ancient custodian of this power (D&C 110:13-16). The president of the Church holds and exercises the keys and power of sealing on earth, including all of its three vital parts. The president can designate parts of this power to others for the purpose of the administration of the Kingdom of God on the earth. For example, general authorities of the Church, the presidencies of temples, and a limited number of officiators in each temple receive part of this sealing power during their tenure. After one is approved by the First Presidency to receive the sealing power, the president of the Church, one of his counselors, or a member of the Twelve specifically designated by the president confers the sealing power upon him by the laying on of

hands. This is the specific authority to perform the temple sealing ordinances, the eternal connecting together of families.

It makes sense that such power would have been given to faithful prophets in the Old Testament and among the Nephites as well as apostles of the New Testament. One might well wonder if the original and unspoiled Old Testament may have contained such promises. We know that our present Old Testament does not.

Is Nephi actually receiving here the keys of the priesthood? Apparently he is. Is Nephi the first Nephite prophet to receive the keys of the priesthood? This is after all the first mention of such a bestowal in the Book of Mormon. It is likely that other Nephite prophets also held the keys of presidency though it was not mentioned. One might expect that Lehi, Nephi, Jacob, Mosiah, Alma, Mormon, and Moroni might also have held these keys. It is likely that any righteous man who has the blessing of receiving the sealing power has also had his calling and election made sure, he has received the “more sure word of prophecy.”

**8 And thus, if ye shall say unto this temple it shall be rent in twain, it shall be done.**

**9 And if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou cast down and become smooth, it shall be done.**

**10 And behold, if ye shall say that God shall smite this people, it shall come to pass.**

**11 And now behold, I command you, that ye shall go and declare unto this people, that thus saith the Lord God, who is the Almighty: Except ye repent ye shall be smitten, even unto destruction.**

**12 And behold, now it came to pass that when the Lord had spoken these words unto Nephi, he did stop and did not go unto his own house, but did return unto the multitudes who were scattered about upon the face of the land, and began to declare unto them the word of the Lord which had been spoken unto him, concerning their destruction if they did not repent.**

**verse 12** “he did stop and did not go unto his own house, but did return unto the multitudes” Even when being given the daunting task of calling a rebellious people to repentance, Nephi obeys immediately. He demonstrates what it really means to have an eye single to the glory of God, to have one’s own will swallowed up in the will of the Lord.

**13 Now behold, notwithstanding that great miracle which Nephi had done in telling them concerning the death of the chief judge, they did harden their hearts and did not hearken unto the words of the Lord.**

**verse 13** It should not be surprising to learn that Nephi’s miraculous prophesying of the death of the Nephite Judge Seezoram and the identifying of his

murderer did not result in the wholesale conversion of those who witnessed it. “Faith cometh not by signs, but signs follow those that believe” (D&C 63:9).

**14 Therefore Nephi did declare unto them the word of the Lord, saying: Except ye repent, thus saith the Lord, ye shall be smitten even unto destruction.**

**15 And it came to pass that when Nephi had declared unto them the word, behold, they did still harden their hearts and would not hearken unto his words; therefore they did revile against him, and did seek to lay their hands upon him that they might cast him into prison.**

**16 But behold, the power of God was with him, and they could not take him to cast him into prison, for he was taken by the Spirit and conveyed away out of the midst of them.**

**verse 16 “for he was taken by the Spirit and conveyed away out of the midst of them”** Elder Bruce R. McConkie has written of other instances in which others have been bodily transported from place to place by the power of the Spirit:

Ezekiel was lifted up and carried by the Spirit (Ezekiel 8:2-3). Nephi “was caught away in the Spirit of the Lord, yea, into an exceeding high mountain,” upon which he “never had before” set his “foot” (1 Nephi 11:1). Mary herself “was carried away in the Spirit” at the time of the conception of Jesus (1 Nephi 11:19-21). . . . After Philip baptized the eunuch, “the Spirit of the Lord caught [him] away,” and he was carried to Azotus (Acts 8:39-40). It is not an unheard-of thing for the Lord, by the power of the Spirit, to transport mortals from place to place (*The Mortal Messiah*, volume 1, 413-14).

**17 And it came to pass that thus he did go forth in the Spirit, from multitude to multitude, declaring the word of God, even until he had declared it unto them all, or sent it forth among all the people.**

**18 And it came to pass that they would not hearken unto his words; and there began to be contentions, insomuch that they were divided against themselves and began to slay one another with the sword.**

**19 And thus ended the seventy and first year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi.**

## Helaman Chapter 11

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This chapter illustrates a typical example of the so-called prosperity–pride–destruction cycle we see repeatedly in the Book of Mormon (see the commentary for Jacob 2:14).

1 and now it came to pass in the seventy and second year of the reign of the judges that the contentions did increase, insomuch that there were wars throughout all the land among all the people of Nephi.

2 And it was this secret band of robbers who did carry on this work of destruction and wickedness. And this war did last all that year; and in the seventy and third year it did also last.

**verses 1-2** Brother Hugh Nibley wrote in response to the questions, “Who was left for the Gadianton Robbers to loot if everybody belonged? And who was fighting against whom?”

There were levels of control and profit-taking, as in a modern franchise set-up; at the heart of everything was the original band of charter members, a sort of central committee, whose meetings and manipulations were top-secret (Helaman 6:22-24). But there is no love lost among criminals, “the devil will not support his children at the last day,” says Mormon, “but doth speedily drag them down to hell” (Alma 30:60). Inevitably interests and ambitions conflict, and so with criminal interests fighting each other “there were wars throughout all the land among the people of Nephi. And it was this secret band of robbers who did carry on this work of destruction and wickedness” (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 8, 361-62).

3 And it came to pass that in this year Nephi did cry unto the Lord, saying:

4 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, to stir them up in remembrance of the Lord their God, and perhaps they will repent and turn unto thee.

5 And so it was done, according to the words of Nephi. And there was a great famine upon the land, among all the people of Nephi. And thus in the seventy and fourth year the famine did continue, and the work of destruction did cease by the sword but became sore by famine.

6 And this work of destruction did also continue in the seventy and fifth year. For the earth was smitten that it was dry, and did not yield forth grain in the season of grain; and the whole earth was smitten, even among the Lamanites as well as among the Nephites, so that they were smitten that they did perish by thousands in the more wicked parts of the land.

**verse 6 “in the season of grain”** Those familiar with the seasons of Mesoamerica, the likely location of the Book of Mormon story, know that the only two seasons are the rainy season (May to October) and the dry season (October to May) (see also verse 13). The “season of grain” is dependent upon the season of rain.

**7 And it came to pass that the people saw that they were about to perish by famine, and they began to remember the Lord their God; and they began to remember the words of Nephi.**

**verse 7 “the people saw that they were about to perish by famine, and they began to remember the Lord their God”** In that charming way that suggests a twinkle in his eye and is so characteristic of him, Brother Hugh Nibley wrote concerning this verse: “The famine was horrendous and put a stop to everything, so finally the people were willing to give up their stocks and bonds and settle for just their lives” (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 8, 362- 63).

Joseph Fielding McConkie and Robert L. Millet commented on famines in the scriptures: “Famine is one of heaven’s most eloquent sermons. When virtually all else has failed to get the attention of the rebellious and turn them to God, famines have succeeded. Famines can strip men of every sense of self-sufficiency and turn their eyes and ears to the voice of heaven (see Isaiah 51:19; Jeremiah 14:13-18; Amos 4:6)” (*Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, volume 3, 390).

**8 And the people began to plead with their chief judges and their leaders, that they would say unto Nephi: Behold, we know that thou art a man of God, and therefore cry unto the Lord our God that he turn away from us this famine, lest all the words which thou hast spoken concerning our destruction be fulfilled.**

**9 And it came to pass that the judges did say unto Nephi, according to the words which had been desired. And it came to pass that when Nephi saw that the people had repented and did humble themselves in sackcloth, he cried again unto the Lord, saying:**

**10 O Lord, behold this people repenteth; and they have swept away the band of Gadianton from amongst them insomuch that they have become extinct, and they have concealed their secret plans in the earth.**

**verse 10** Were the Gadianton robbers a secular group of thieves, or were they in fact an organization akin almost to a fraternal or “religion”? They probably were in fact the latter. Consider the following points. We are told in this verse that after they were abolished as a group, they “concealed their secret plans in the earth.” Are you reminded of any other records that were sealed up in the earth by religious groups? How about the Dead Sea scrolls? Even the records of the Book of Mormon were buried by the Nephite remnants.

11 Now, O Lord, because of this their humility wilt thou turn away thine anger, and let thine anger be appeased in the destruction of those wicked men whom thou hast already destroyed.

12 O Lord, wilt thou turn away thine anger, yea, thy fierce anger, and cause that this famine may cease in this land.

13 O Lord, wilt thou hearken unto me, and cause that it may be done according to my words, and send forth rain upon the face of the earth, that she may bring forth her fruit, and her grain in the season of grain.

14 O Lord, thou didst hearken unto my words when I said, Let there be a famine, that the pestilence of the sword might cease; and I know that thou wilt, even at this time, hearken unto my words, for thou saidst that: If this people repent I will spare them.

15 Yea, O Lord, and thou seest that they have repented, because of the famine and the pestilence and destruction which has come unto them.

16 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.

17 And it came to pass that in the seventy and sixth year the Lord did turn away his anger from the people, and caused that rain should fall upon the earth, insomuch that it did bring forth her fruit in the season of her fruit. And it came to pass that it did bring forth her grain in the season of her grain.

18 And behold, the people did rejoice and glorify God, and the whole face of the land was filled with rejoicing; and they did no more seek to destroy Nephi, but they did esteem him as a great prophet, and a man of God, having great power and authority given unto him from God.

**verse 18** Brother Hugh Nibley comments: “The end of the famine saw a great improvement in spiritual matters, the more part of the people, both the Lamanites and Nephites, belonging to the church. A period of economic expansion and much building also followed, and yet within a scant three years ‘there began to be much strife’ again, certain groups of dissenters taking to murder and plunder in the old style, building up great strength in the mountains and the wilderness” (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 6, 388-89).

19 And behold, Lehi, his brother, was not a whit behind him as to things pertaining to righteousness.

**verse 19** The fact that the Book of Mormon account gives most of its attention to Nephi and relatively ignores his brother Lehi may be less the result any inadequacies had by Lehi and more the result of the editor Mormon’s arbitrary decision.

20 And thus it did come to pass that the people of Nephi began to prosper again in the land, and began to build up their waste places, and began to multiply and spread, even until they did cover the whole face of the land, both on the northward and on the southward, from the sea west to the sea east.

21 And it came to pass that the seventy and sixth year did end in peace. And the seventy and seventh year began in peace; and the church did spread throughout the face of all the land; and the more part of the people, both the Nephites and the Lamanites, did belong to the church; and they did have exceedingly great peace in the land; and thus ended the seventy and seventh year.

22 And also they had peace in the seventy and eighth year, save it were a few contentions concerning the points of doctrine which had been laid down by the prophets.

23 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.

24 And it came to pass that in the eightieth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi, there were a certain number of the dissenters from the people of Nephi, who had some years before gone over unto the Lamanites, and taken upon themselves the name of Lamanites, and also a certain number who were real descendants of the Lamanites, being stirred up to anger by them, or by those dissenters, therefore they commenced a war with their brethren.

25 And they did commit murder and plunder; and then they would retreat back into the mountains, and into the wilderness and secret places, hiding themselves that they could not be discovered, receiving daily an addition to their numbers, inasmuch as there were dissenters that went forth unto them.

**verses 24-25** This group of robbers and murderers will soon assume the identity of—no surprise here—the Gadianton robbers. Their methods of operation are typical examples of guerrilla warfare like, for example, Fidel Castro in the mountains of Cuba. Guerrillas hide in the mountains and come out of the mountains to make sorties down into the low lands, only when they think they can be successful. When they are hiding, as the Gadianton robbers did in the wilderness, they cannot be defeated. They are fighting on their own terms and on their own turf. The iron clad principles of guerrilla warfare are: Never fight on the other guy's terms, fight only on your own terms. Never try to hold territory. Simply continue making lightning attacks then retreat. If the enemy pursues, wipe them out. If you don't think you can win, hide. You're not out to prove your bravery. You can't afford to lose any battles. You don't have enough soldiers or weapons. These are the basic rules which the Gadianton robbers follow in the following verses, and these rules lead to their success (see verses 28 and 29

below). It is interesting that later the Gadianton robbers will violate these rules, and when they do, they are annihilated (see 3 Nephi 4).

It is interesting that it was not until the twentieth century when the principles of guerrilla warfare were laid out in writing. Joseph could have known nothing of guerrilla warfare when he translated the Book of Mormon, yet he has accurately described a form of warfare that he could have known nothing about from his environment in rural New York in 1829.

Permit me to digress for a moment and express to you, the reader, that as I have studied the Book of Mormon for the past several years, I cannot begin to estimate how many times I have had the Spirit of the Lord wash over me and cause me to think, and even say aloud, "There is no way Joseph could have written this book." Indeed, I know by the power of the Spirit that it is true!

**"receiving daily an addition to their numbers, inasmuch as there were dissenters that went forth unto them"** Obviously this guerrilla-warfare style of life had a romantic and adventurous appeal to some of the younger generation of Nephites who went off and joined up with the bands in significant numbers.

**26 And thus in time, yea, even in the space of not many years, they became an exceedingly great band of robbers; and they did search out all the secret plans of Gadianton; and thus they became robbers of Gadianton.**

**27 Now behold, these robbers did make great havoc, yea, even great destruction among the people of Nephi, and also among the people of the Lamanites.**

**28 And it came to pass that it was expedient that there should be a stop put to this work of destruction; therefore they sent an army of strong men into the wilderness and upon the mountains to search out this band of robbers, and to destroy them.**

**29 But behold, it came to pass that in that same year they were driven back even into their own lands. And thus ended the eightieth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi.**

**30 And it came to pass in the commencement of the eighty and first year they did go forth again against this band of robbers, and did destroy many; and they were also visited with much destruction.**

**verse 30** Hugh Nibley comments: "Within a year the mountains and the wilderness became so infested with the robbers as to be closed entirely to Nephite occupation. The bands were well organized and defied both Nephite and Lamanite military power, making themselves an object of terror to the whole land by their raids and onslaughts. Still the people continued to forget the Lord and to ripen again for destruction for another five years" (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 6, 388-89).

Hugh Nibley has also added to our insight regarding the bands of robbers in the Book of Mormon:

These bands of robbers [in the Book of Mormon] are not some exotic invention of romantic fancy, but a major factor in world history. We think of the age-old traditions of Seth and his robber bands in the Egyptian literature, of Pompey's Pirates or the Algerians, the Vikings, the Free Companies of the fourteenth century, the Kazaks, the Robber Barons, the Assassins, the Bagaudi, the Druze, the militant orders that imitated them (Templars, Knights of Rhodes, and so on), the Vitalian Brothers, the Riffs, and finally the Medellin drug lords of the south, whose long arm can constrain the leaders of nations. All of these operators were terrorists, and they held whole armies at bay and overthrew kingdoms. The best and perhaps the earliest description of such bands in action is from the Amarna Letters, where we find Lehi's own ancestors, the wandering, plundering Khabiru of the fourteenth century BC, actually overthrowing city after city in Palestine and disrupting the lives of nations (*Prophetic Book of Mormon*, 556).

**31 And they were again obliged to return out of the wilderness and out of the mountains unto their own lands, because of the exceeding greatness of the numbers of those robbers who infested the mountains and the wilderness.**

**32 And it came to pass that thus ended this year. And the robbers did still increase and wax strong, insomuch that they did defy the whole armies of the Nephites, and also of the Lamanites; and they did cause great fear to come unto the people upon all the face of the land.**

**33 Yea, for they did visit many parts of the land, and did do great destruction unto them; yea, did kill many, and did carry away others captive into the wilderness, yea, and more especially their women and their children.**

**34 Now this great evil, which came unto the people because of their iniquity, did stir them up again in remembrance of the Lord their God.**

**35 And thus ended the eighty and first year of the reign of the judges.**

**36 And in the eighty and second year they began again to forget the Lord their God. And in the eighty and third year they began to wax strong in iniquity. And in the eighty and fourth year they did not mend their ways.**

**verse 36** Brother Nibley comments:

The prophets in the Book of Mormon marvel at how soon a righteous people can become wicked, and the speed of the reverse process is even more surprising. It is a common fallacy to think of things happening very slowly in history, and especially in ancient history. But the student has only to compare any two consecutive decades of history to realize that things do not move slowly at all—history moves at breath-taking speed. . . . [Here] as the result of a single famine, a wicked nation becomes a righteous nation. . . . If the hardened criminals in a Lamanite prison could suddenly be “encircled about, yea every soul, by a pillar of fire . . . and . . . filled with that joy which is unspeakable and full of glory” (Helaman 5:43-44) and then go forth as missionaries to convert “the more part of the Lamanites” (Helaman 5:50)—if all such changes seem

rather sudden, we have only to think of countless parallels in our own history. How long did it take millions of Germans and Italians, individually and collectively, to change completely from one state of mind to another? As a single speech could turn thousands of mild and sober citizens into ranting fanatics, so with the disappearance of the leader, dangerous men of war reverted just as quickly to well-meaning and sympathetic human beings. Does it take fifty years for great nations to change from fast friendship to bitter enmity? Twenty-four hours is enough (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 7, 345-46).

**37 And it came to pass in the eighty and fifth year they did wax stronger and stronger in their pride, and in their wickedness; and thus they were ripening again for destruction.**

**verse 37** For a discussion of the concepts of “pride” and “ripening . . . for destruction, see “Pride” in volume 1, chapter 5, *The “Natural Man” and “Spiritual Man” in Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*.

**38 And thus ended the eighty and fifth year.**

## Helaman Chapter 12

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### Scripture Mastery

**Helaman 12:3** Except the Lord doth chasten his people with many afflictions, yea, they will not remember him.

Do wealth and prosperity invariably lead a person away from things of the spirit? Helaman chapter 12 is a discourse on just this subject. When the Lord blesses a people with material blessings, does that people always come to overlook the role of the Lord in their material successes? Perhaps not invariably, but certainly man has had this tendency. This scenario plays itself out repeatedly in the Book of Mormon. It would seem that an abundance of riches virtually guarantees the spiritual destruction of a people. If such is the case, then why doesn't God withhold the dangerous wealth from man? The reason, of course, is that this life is intended as a probationary state, and for it to be a real probation, these must be "an opposition in all things" (2 Nephi 2:11).

This entire chapter is an editorial by the prophet Mormon in which he comments upon the spiritual blindness of the Nephites and warns of the great destructions to occur among them prior to the Lord's visit to them. His warning is, of course, pertinent to us today as we have been taught of the great destructions to occur among us just prior to the Lord's second coming. Mormon not only warns of the destruction but he specifies the main reasons for it: pride and especially lusting after material things.

**verses 1-3** It is interesting and instructive to compare the accounts of history written by secular historians with the history written by the prophet Mormon. Secular historians, most often lacking any spiritual insight, tend to report history and analyze historical events purely in terms of tangible and scientifically measurable factors that influence the events of history. A secular historian is more likely to describe a people's material successes or failures and attribute them to known social, political, or economic phenomena. Any possible divine influences on the course of history will be ignored because they cannot be verified or measured. This approach of writing history with attention mainly to visible achievements tends to completely ignore any spiritual or religious values of a culture.

Thomas W. Mackay has observed:

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” (“Mormon’s Philosophy of History” in *The Book of Mormon: Helaman through 3 Nephi 8, According To Thy Word*, 137).

Mormon not only has the benefit of personal revelation, but he also has access to the written prophecies of many inspired prophets. Mormon accepted as truth all the words of the prophets before him. Additionally, he lived during the days when the annihilation of the Nephites, according to previous dire prophetic warnings, actually took place. He is able to witness that destruction, that fulfillment of prophecy, first hand. Mormon views the historical evolution of the Book of Mormon peoples as simply the results of their righteousness and wickedness and the consequent blessings or punishments of a just God. He likely regarded as particularly poignant the prophecies of Samuel the Lamanite who not only called his contemporaries to repentance but also prophesied of the time when the Nephites’ disobedience and internal dissension would result in their extinction, with the Lamanites merely supplying the physical means of that extinction. Samuel’s prophecies are poignant to Mormon because Mormon was a personal witness to the fulfillment of those prophecies. For Mormon the issue of a people’s righteousness is the only issue, and he minimizes the importance of their material “progress” or “growth” or the physical trappings of their civilization. As might be expected, Mormon also acknowledges Satan’s evil influences in the course of history (Helaman 2:21, 25-2).

Thomas W. Mackay has also commented on the lack of correlation between material and spiritual achievements of a people:

Prosperity [does not] 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. . . . 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. . . . For example, to a prophet, a particular people [may be] already in a moral decline before its “zenith” as interpreted by an uninspired secular historian (*Ibid.*, 136, 138).

It is likely that as Mormon was abridging the records of this highly volatile period of Nephite history, he became increasingly frustrated over the erratic and unreliable behavior and spiritual commitment of the Nephites. In Helaman 12 Mormon departs from his historical account to vent his exasperation over the Nephites’ irresponsibility and spiritual immaturity. One can easily sense his disappointment and anger in this chapter’s first few verses.

**1 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.**

**verse 1** “thus we can behold how false . . . the children of men” “False” means being untrue to what one purports to be—indeed, hypocritical.

“the unsteadiness of the hearts of the children of men” To be *unsteady* is to be inconsistent and erratic in convictions and behavior. This is in contrast to the “unwearyingness” which the Lord attributed to the prophet Nephi (Helaman 10:4). Another adjective for the opposite of “unsteadiness” used in the scriptures is *steadfastness*.

“we can see that the Lord in his great infinite goodness doth bless and prosper those who put their trust in him” This is simply a reiteration of the now well-known “promise/curse” of the Book of Mormon.

**2 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.**

**verse 2** “then is the time that they do harden their hearts” Here is a universal foible. “In the day of their peace they esteemed lightly my counsel; but, in the day of their trouble, of necessity they feel after me” (D&C 101:7-8). See also the discussion of hard-heartedness in the commentary for Alma 10:6.

“they . . . do trample under their feet the Holy One” To “trample” God under foot means to set aside his counsels and to be disobedient to his commands.

**3 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.**

**verse 3** For the meaning of *chasten*, see the commentary for Mosiah 23:21.

**verses 4-6** Here Mormon itemizes in plain language the almost universal weaknesses of fallen man that are so offensive to God. The Book of Mormon does not teach the doctrine of human depravity, but it does teach that mortal man has a “fallen” nature.

4 O how foolish, and how vain, and how evil, and devilish, and how quick to do iniquity, and how slow to do good, are the children of men; yea, how quick to hearken unto the words of the evil one, and to set their hearts upon the vain things of the world!

5 Yea, how quick to be lifted up in pride; yea, how quick to boast, and do all manner of that which is iniquity; and how slow are they to remember the Lord their God, and to give ear unto his counsels, yea, how slow to walk in wisdom's paths!

6 Behold, they do not desire that the Lord their God, who hath created them, should rule and reign over them; notwithstanding his great goodness and his mercy towards them, they do set at naught his counsels, and they will not that he should be their guide.

7 O how great is the nothingness of the children of men; yea, even they are less than the dust of the earth.

**verse 7** This verse may seem puzzling since it seems to debase mankind, and we know that man is supremely important to God (See Moses 1:39). Actually the verse is not meant to be demeaning to man. Rather, it emphasizes his utter dependence upon the Lord—thus the “nothingness of the children of men.” Another idea is also implied. The *earth itself* is more obedient to God's commandments than is man. The next several verses make explicit this latter idea.

**verses 8-18** Notice in these verses that God accomplishes his purposes by communicating with the elements. Implicit in this idea is that the “inanimate” elements of the earth are combined with intelligences who control the elements and who maintain and exercise their agency. God would never deny any intelligence its free exercise of agency. Hence when God *commands*, he really *requests*. Those intelligences controlling the elements obey because they know, love, and honor him.

8 For behold, the dust of the earth moveth hither and thither, to the dividing asunder, at the command of our great and everlasting God.

9 Yea, behold at his voice do the hills and the mountains tremble and quake.

10 And by the power of his voice they are broken up, and become smooth, yea, even like unto a valley.

11 Yea, by the power of his voice doth the whole earth shake;

12 Yea, by the power of his voice, do the foundations rock, even to the very center.

**verses 13-20** These verses contain a series of conditional “if-then” statements. In English, a typical conditional clause would be “if you come, then I will come,” with *then* being optional. The first part of such sentences is the “condition.” The second part

is the consequence. In Hebrew this same clause is expressed as “if you come *and* I will come.” It is instructive to note that in the original text of the Book of Mormon, there were at least fourteen occurrences of this non-English expression. One occurrence was accidentally removed in 1 Nephi 17:50 as Oliver Cowdery was producing the printer’s manuscript by copying from the original manuscript: “if he should command me that I should say unto this water be thou earth and it shall be earth.” The remaining thirteen occurrences were all removed by Joseph Smith in his editing for the second edition, including one from the famous passage in Moroni 10:4: “and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart with real intent having faith in Christ and he will manifest the truth of it unto you.” Verse 13 of this chapter was rendered in the original edition: “yea, if he saith unto the earth, Move, *and* it is moved (italics added).” Joseph’s use of the more typical Hebrew construction in his original translation supports the idea that Joseph’s translation was a literal one and not simply a reflection of his own dialect. It is extraordinarily doubtful that Joseph, or any other native English speaker, would have ever spoken this way. An “if-and” conditional sentence grates on our ears. If someone were to use it in our presence, we would find it very odd. . . . (Royal Skousen, *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*: “The Original Language of the Book of Mormon: Upstate New York Dialect, King James English, or Hebrew?” 34).

**13 Yea, and if he say unto the earth—Move—it is moved.**

**14 Yea, if he say unto the earth—Thou shalt go back, that it lengthen out the day for many hours—it is done;**

**15 And thus, according to his word the earth goeth back, and it appeareth unto man that the sun standeth still; yea, and behold, this is so; for surely it is the earth that moveth and not the sun.**

**verses 14-15** “surely it is the earth that moveth and not the sun” These verses likely refer to the biblical account in which Joshua commanded the sun and the moon to stand still so that his army might complete their rout of the Amorites (Joshua 10:12-14). However Mormon makes a technical correction to that account. The biblical account assumed that the earth was stationary and that the sun revolved around it. It is fascinating to learn that Mormon knew that the earth revolves around the sun, and not vice versa. This is known as a heliocentric (sun at the center) view of our planetary system. Obviously the Book of Mormon people knew something about astronomy (see the commentary for Alma 30:44). They apparently had a more accurate understanding of the nature of the earth’s movement than did their Greek contemporaries who at that time predominantly believed in a stationary earth.

**16 And behold, also, if he say unto the waters of the great deep—Be thou dried up—it is done.**

17 Behold, if he say unto this mountain—Be thou raised up, and come over and fall upon that city, that it be buried up—behold it is done.

18 And behold, if a man hide up a treasure in the earth, and the Lord shall say—Let it be accursed, because of the iniquity of him who hath hid it up—behold, it shall be accursed.

19 And if the Lord shall say—Be thou accursed, that no man shall find thee from this time henceforth and forever—behold, no man getteth it henceforth and forever.

20 And behold, if the Lord shall say unto a man—Because of thine iniquities, thou shalt be accursed forever—it shall be done.

**verses 18-20 “accursed”** From *Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language*, we read the definition of *accursed*: “Doomed to destruction or misery; separated from the faithful; cast out of the church; excommunicated; worthy of the curse; detestable; execrable [pronounce execrable with the accent on the first syllable—‘ex’].”

21 And if the Lord shall say—Because of thine iniquities thou shalt be cut off from my presence—he will cause that it shall be so.

**verses 22-26** After strongly denouncing the wicked and inconsistent tendencies of mankind, Mormon now lovingly reminds us that through the gift of repentance man may be saved.

22 And wo unto him to whom he shall say this, for it shall be unto him that will do iniquity, and he cannot be saved; therefore, for this cause, that men might be saved, hath repentance been declared.

23 Therefore, blessed are they who will repent and hearken unto the voice of the Lord their God; for these are they that shall be saved.

24 And may God grant, in his great fulness, that men might be brought unto repentance and good works, that they might be restored unto grace for grace, according to their works.

**verse 24 “that they might be restored unto grace for grace”** To receive “grace for grace” is to receive incremental blessings from the Father as we obey him and selflessly serve others. These incremental blessings are gifts of the Spirit that result in our continued sanctification or growth toward acquiring the character of God. They are “restored” to the process of spiritual growth when they repent of their sins and return to the fold.

**25 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;**

**verse 25 “there are some who shall be cast out, yea, who shall be cast off from the presence of the Lord”** The expression “cast off” means to suffer spiritual death. It is synonymous with being cast out of the Lord’s presence. This broad group would include those who inherit the terrestrial and telestial kingdoms and those who become sons of perdition.

**26 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.**

**verse 26** Those who receive “everlasting life” are not just those who will live forever. *All* will *live* forever. These are the ones who inherit the celestial kingdom. “Everlasting damnation” is that punishment handed out by God to all those not in the celestial glory. The word *damnation* implies that there will be a limit placed on the spiritual progress which they can make in their assigned eternal realm.

We should not assume that those “who shall be consigned to a state of endless misery” will in fact feel miserable for all eternity. We are taught in the Doctrine and Covenants that the words “endless” and “eternal,” when applied to punishment, don’t refer to the duration of the punishment. Rather they refer to the source or instigator of that punishment—God himself—who is endless and eternal (D&C 19:10-12). In other words, endless and eternal are other words for God. *Eternal* punishment is *God’s* punishment.

## Helaman Chapter 13

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**The prophecy of Samuel, the Lamanite, to the Nephites. Comprising chapters 13 to 15 inclusive.**

### Scripture Mastery

**Helaman 13-16** The preaching and prophecies of Samuel the Lamanite from the wall around Zarahemla

It is suggested that the reader review the principle of “leitwörter” in the commentary for Helaman 5:5-12. Here in Helaman 13 Mormon gives an account of the preaching of the Lamanite prophet Samuel to the people of Zarahemla. In doing so, Mormon uses the principle of “leitwörter” by including repetitively a few theme words and phrases which give emphasis to the essence of his message. Those theme words or phrases (“leitwörter”) are: “saith the Lord,” “a curse,” “riches,” and “your destruction is made sure.” The salient theme of Samuel’s message is obvious: Samuel’s message is not his own message, it is the Lord’s. Those who set their minds upon the material riches of the world will be cursed, and lest they repent, their destruction is made sure.

**1 And now it came to pass in the eighty and sixth year, 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.**

**verse 1 “in the eighty and sixth year”** This date references the reign of judges which began about 91 BC. Thus the date is about 5 or 6 BC.

**2 And it came to pass that in this year there was one Samuel, a Lamanite, came into the land of Zarahemla, and began to preach unto the people. And it came to pass that he did preach, many days, repentance unto the people, and they did cast him out, and he was about to return to his own land.**

**3 But behold, the voice of the Lord came unto him, that he should return again, and prophesy unto the people whatsoever things should come into his heart.**

**verse 3 “the voice of the Lord came unto him”** In his book *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World*, biblical scholar David E. Aune sets forth the various formulaic expressions that characterize prophetic speech in the Old Testament (see Donald W. Parry, “Thus Saith the Lord: Prophetic Language in Samuel’s Speech,” *JBMS* 1/1 [1992]:181-83). These expressions serve to formally introduce vital, sacred utterances and to announce that the Lord is the source behind them. The Book of Mormon prophets used the same formulas in their prophetic discourse. This particular expression, “the voice of the Lord came unto him,” is called

the revelation formula (e.g., 1 Samuel 15:10; Zechariah 7:1). This expression indicates the origin of the message and the authority of the speaker. For other uses in the Book of Mormon, see verses 5, 7; Jacob 2:11; and Alma 43:24.

**“whatsoever things should come into his heart”** Here is an acceptable definition of revelation to a prophet of God. Personal revelation is, of course, available to each of the honest in heart as well as to the Lord’s prophets. Unlike the prophet, however, the individual is entitled to revelation concerning issues of his own stewardship. The prophet is entitled to revelations regarding all of the people.

**4 And it came to pass that they would not suffer that he should enter into the city; therefore he went and got upon the wall thereof, and stretched forth his hand and cried with a loud voice, and prophesied unto the people whatsoever things the Lord put into his heart.**

**5 And he said unto them: Behold, I, Samuel, a Lamanite, do speak the words of the Lord which he doth put into my heart; and behold he hath put it into my heart to say unto this people that the sword of justice hangeth over this people; and four hundred years pass not away save the sword of justice falleth upon this people.**

**verse 5** It is characteristic of the Lord that he never destroys a people without giving them every chance to return to him. As had been his pattern in times past, he sent a prophet (at other times, many prophets) to plead with them to repent and to warn them of the inevitable consequences if they refuse to hear his message.

**“four hundred years pass not away save the sword of justice falleth upon this people”** While the Book of Mormon account does not end until AD 421 (Moroni 10:1), the destruction of the Nephite people and culture will begin in earnest in AD 385 and will be virtually complete by AD 400 (Mormon 6; 8:2, 6).

**6 Yea, heavy destruction awaiteth this people, and it surely cometh unto this people, and nothing can save this people save it be repentance and faith on the Lord Jesus Christ, who surely shall come into the world, and shall suffer many things and shall be slain for his people.**

**verse 6** **“Yea, heavy destruction awaiteth this people”** What period of destruction is referred to here? We will learn from 3 Nephi 8 that one period of significant destruction is just prior to the advent of the resurrected Jesus on the western hemisphere which will occur about forty years hence. Apparently, however, Samuel’s warning refers mainly to the great final battles of the Nephites in about AD 385 when they were virtually annihilated by the Lamanites (see the previous verse).

**verses 5-6** Some have been bothered by what seems to be a repetitious and poor literary style of these two verses because of the frequent use of the term “this people.”

**7 And behold, an angel of the Lord hath declared it unto me, and he did bring glad tidings to my soul. And behold, I was sent unto you to declare it unto you also, that ye might have glad tidings; but behold ye would not receive me.**

**verse 7** The “glad tidings” are, of course, that Jesus Christ would come into the world, suffer many things, be slain for his people, and make available to all mankind the opportunity of forgiveness from sin and the opportunity to return again to their celestial home (see also Mosiah 3:5).

**8 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.**

**verse 8 “Therefore, thus saith the Lord”** Apparently these are the Lord’s own words which were put into Samuel’s heart (see verse 5). These words of the Lord extend through verse 20.

There are actually six different expressions or forms of speech used by prophets in the Book of Mormon to indicate prophetic authority and prerogative. In other words, when a prophet delivers the word of the Lord, he will announce it as such using one of these speech forms. These have been identified and categorized by Donald W. Parry (Journal of Book of Mormon Studies 1/1 [1992], 181-83). They include “Thus saith the Lord” (the messenger formula); “Listen to the words of Christ” (the proclamation formula); “As the Lord liveth” (the oath formula); “Wo be unto” (the Woe formula); “I say unto you” (the announcement formula); and “The word of the Lord came unto me saying” (the revelation formula).

Here the Lord outlines the immediate consequences of the Nephites’ recalcitrance, the withdrawal of the Spirit and the visitation of destruction upon them in battle. In the next verse he defines the long term consequence of their disobedience—their eventual annihilation.

**9 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.**

**10 Yea, I will visit them in my fierce anger, and there shall be those of the fourth generation who shall live, of your enemies, to behold your utter destruction; and this shall surely come except ye repent, saith the Lord; and those of the fourth generation shall visit your destruction.**

**verse 10 “there shall be those of the fourth generation who shall live, of your enemies, to behold your utter destruction”** This verse may be a bit confusing set in its present context. It actually has reference to a 166-year period following the

Lord's appearance to the Nephites on the western hemisphere. Following the Savior's appearance there were many years of general righteousness among the people. This was the "golden age" of the Nephites which lasted until AD 200 (three generations). During this idyllic period men "did deal justly one with another" and "there were not rich and poor, bond and free" (4 Nephi 1:2-3). This period has been referred to as the Nephite "mini-millennium." Following this period (in the "fourth generation") the people began to wax strong in iniquity, and the Lord began to visit them with destruction (3 Nephi 27:32).

**11 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, blessed are they who will repent and turn unto me, but wo unto him that repenteth not.**

**12 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, yea, even the more part of this great city, that will harden their hearts against me, saith the Lord.**

**13 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.**

**14 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; yea, wo be unto this great city, because of the wickedness and abominations which are in her.**

**verse 14 "it is for the righteous' sake that it is spared"** One is reminded of Abraham's bartering with the Lord over the destruction of Sodom (Genesis 18:23-32).

**"when ye shall cast out the righteous from among you, then shall ye be ripe for destruction"** The negative metaphor of "ripening" occurs frequently in the Book of Mormon and refers to a fruit's going from ripe to overripe to rotten.

Richard D. Draper has summarized the specific criteria found in the Book of Mormon by which a people may be found by the Lord to be "ripe": (1) when "the voice [the majority] of this people should choose iniquity" (Alma 10:19); (2) when the people "turn aside the just for a thing of naught and revile against that which is good, and say that it is of no worth" (2 Nephi 28:16); (3) when they reject "every word of God" (1 Nephi 17:35); and (4) "when [they] shall cast out the righteous from among [them]" (*Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*: "Hubris and Ate: A Latter-day Warning from the Book of Mormon," 24).

**15 Yea, and wo be unto the city of Gideon, for the wickedness and abominations which are in her.**

**verse 15** Samuel is preaching on the wall of Zarahemla, yet he specifically condemns the neighboring city of Gideon. One need not doubt that Gideon deserved this special condemnation.

**16** Yea, and wo be unto all the cities which are in the land round about, which are possessed by the Nephites, because of the wickedness and abominations which are in them.

**17** And behold, a curse shall come upon the land, saith the Lord of Hosts, because of the peoples' sake who are upon the land, yea, because of their wickedness and their abominations.

**18** And it shall come to pass, saith the Lord of Hosts, yea, our great and true God, that whoso shall hide up treasures in the earth shall find them again no more, because of the great curse of the land, save he be a righteous man and shall hide it up unto the Lord.

**verse 18** The great sin of the Nephites in Zarahemla was that they substituted the love of riches for the love of God.

**“whoso shall hide up treasures in the earth shall find them again no more”**

There was apparently a well-established Hebrew tradition of burying sacred things in times of peril to keep them safe. For example, the Torah itself was buried when Israel sinned, to be dug up in later times. The Dead Sea Scrolls are another example of how in times of dire peril all those sacred things that had been dedicated, including the holy writings, were buried for safety (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 2, 151-52). We may summarize Samuel's message: Those who set their hearts upon their riches will lose them.

**“save he be a righteous man and shall hide it up unto the Lord”** Here we gain the impression that the riches are not evil in and of themselves. Rather the evil is in the hearts of those who come to love riches more than they love God. Brother Hugh Nibley observed:

The righteous can be entrusted with unlimited wealth because they do not put their hearts upon it. To his highly prosperous subjects King Benjamin announced, “I . . . have not sought gold nor silver nor any manner of riches of you” (Mosiah 2:12). And his even more prosperous son was never guilty of “seeking for gain, yea, for that lucre which doth corrupt the soul” (Mosiah 29:40). Riches are to be accepted gratefully as a fringe benefit, in the Book of Mormon, but never to be the object of our search: “But the laborer in Zion shall labor for Zion; for if they labor for money they shall perish” (2 Nephi 26:31). The condemnation of the Nephites in the days of wickedness and vengeance is ever that “they have set their hearts upon their riches.” “Ye are cursed because of your riches,” says Samuel the Lamanite, “and also are your riches cursed because ye have set your hearts upon them.” At the very beginning Nephi declares, “But wo unto the rich . . . their hearts are upon their treasures; wherefore, their treasure is their God” (2

Nephi 9:30). And another Nephi at the time of Christ repeats the refrain: “O, how could you have forgotten your God in the very day that he has delivered you? . . . Ye have set your hearts upon the riches and the vain things of this world” (Helaman 7:20-21) (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 7, 356).

**19 For I will, saith the Lord, that they shall hide up their treasures unto me; and cursed be they who hide not up their treasures unto me; for none hideth up their treasures unto me save it be the righteous; and he that hideth not up his treasures unto me, cursed is he, and also the treasure, and none shall redeem it because of the curse of the land.**

**verse 19** “Treasures” here may be interpreted in a literal sense as one’s material possessions or in a figurative sense as those things, both animate and inanimate, that are most highly prized by an individual. In a figurative sense, then, to “hide up” one’s treasures to the Lord is to dedicate one’s life to him.

As mentioned in the prior verse, Brother Hugh Nibley has found evidence that the hiding up of treasures is an ancient Israelite practice:

In 2 Baruch we read an interesting thing. All the treasures of Israel, he says, must be hid up unto the Lord so that strangers may not get possession of them. And in Helaman, where people are rebuked for hiding their private treasures, we read, “They shall hide up their treasures unto [the Lord].” It’s a commandment. . . . Later Baruch tells us how “they hid all the vessels of the sanctuary, lest the enemy should get possession of them.” Though this writing was published only since [the Book of Mormon’s publication], a more recent find gives it solid historical dimensions—the famous Copper Scroll, found in Cave Four at Qumran. The significance of this, an important record written on copper alloy sheets and hidden up, is that it was in fact written and prepared with the express purpose of its being hidden up. That’s why it was written, for it contains a record of all the other treasures hidden up to the Lord. Here we have a concrete and indisputable example of an ancient Israelite practice (*Temple and Cosmos*, 216-17).

**20 And the day shall come that they shall hide up their treasures, because they have set their hearts upon riches; and because they have set their hearts upon their riches, and will hide up their treasures when they shall flee before their enemies; because they will not hide them up unto me, cursed be they and also their treasures; and in that day shall they be smitten, saith the Lord.**

**verse 20** “cursed be they and also their treasures” Again, if we interpret a man’s “treasures” as those things which are ultimately of most importance to him, then this verse avers that if our lives and resources are not used for righteous purposes, we will lose whatever abilities and possessions we have.

**21 Behold ye, the people of this great city, and hearken unto my words; yea, 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, and have not hearkened unto the words of him who gave them unto you.**

**verse 21** Samuel summarizes two reasons why the unrighteous people of Zarahemla are cursed. First, they have set their hearts upon their riches, and secondly, they have a mind-set that they have earned and are entitled to all their material possessions. They do not acknowledge that all things upon the earth are really the Lord's and he only allows us to utilize them while we are here. As Hugh Nibley succinctly puts it: "They simply refused to regard or treat their riches as gifts, but insisted that they were earnings" (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 9, 136).

**22 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.**

**verse 22** "Ye do not remember the Lord your God in the things with which he hath blessed you, but ye do always remember your riches" Samuel aptly summarizes the materialism of the Nephites in Zarahemla.

"great pride, unto boasting, and unto great swelling, envyings, strifes, malice, persecutions, and murders, and all manner of iniquities" Materialism seems to automatically and inevitably result in a cascade of additional sins that are itemized here. "Great swelling" is an ostentatious life style. The "persecutions," "murders," and "all manner of iniquities" are the crimes committed for the sake of riches.

**23 For this cause hath the Lord God caused that a curse should come upon the land, and also upon your riches, and this because of your iniquities.**

**verses 22-23** Dr. Hugh Nibley, in his writings, often refers to materialism and the acquisition of material things as "the economy." Through the operation of what Dr. Nibley calls "Samuel's Law," Samuel sets forth the interesting rule that when "the economy" becomes the main and engrossing concern of a society—or as the Book of Mormon states it, when "they begin to set their hearts upon their riches"—the economy will self-destruct, that is they will lose their riches. This is how Samuel puts it: "Ye do always remember your riches . . . your hearts are not drawn out unto the Lord, but they do swell with great pride . . . envyings, strifes, malice, persecutions and murders, and all manner of iniquities." Dr. Nibley states, "Note well the sequence of folly: first we are well pleased with ourselves because of our wealth, then comes the game of status and prestige, leading to competitive maneuvers, hatred, and dirty tricks, and finally the

ultimate solution [murders]. Where wealth guarantees respectability, principles melt away as the criminal element rises to the top” (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 8, 349-50).

One may easily notice that considerable attention is given in the Book of Mormon to warnings against the sin of pride or an over-concern with things of the world. Why is this so? Because pride provides incontrovertible evidence that an individual possesses the wrong perspective. Things of the world are all important, and things of the eternities are ignored or worse. Pride is likely the most dangerous trap into which we mortals may fall. Materialism and worldly acquisition is a jealous master who will not be served halfheartedly and will suffer no rival, not even God: “Their treasure is their God” (2 Nephi 9:20). “Ye cannot serve God and Mammon” (Matthew 6:24). There is little reason to doubt that Samuel’s law operates on an individual basis as well in a society of people. That is, one who becomes taken up by his or her material possessions is in danger of losing them—perhaps even before mortal death.

**24 Yea, wo unto this people, because of this time which has arrived, that ye do cast out the prophets, and do mock them, and cast stones at them, and do slay them, and do all manner of iniquity unto them, even as they did of old time.**

**25 And now when ye talk, ye say: If our days had been in the days of our fathers of old, we would not have slain the prophets; we would not have stoned them, and cast them out.**

**verse 25** The Nephites deceive themselves by saying, “Had we lived in earlier days among those earlier true prophets, we certainly would not have slain them or cast them out.” They imply that their evil actions are justified because their contemporary prophets like Samuel and Nephi were false prophets. It has ever been easier to acknowledge the prophets of old more than the contemporary ones.

**26 Behold ye are worse than they; for as the Lord liveth, if a prophet come among you and declareth unto you the word of the Lord, which testifieth of your sins and iniquities, ye are angry with him, and cast him out and seek all manner of ways to destroy him; yea, you will say that he is a false prophet, and that he is a sinner, and of the devil, because he testifieth that your deeds are evil.**

**verse 26** “Behold ye are worse than they” Samuel’s reference here is to those “of old time” mentioned in verse 24 who “cast out the prophets” and mocked them “and cast stones at them” and did “slay them, and do all manner of iniquity unto them.” The people of Samuel’s day claimed to be better than those who persecuted the prophets in past times. But in fact, the Lord, through his prophet Samuel, avers that they are more wicked.

“you will say that he is a false prophet, and that he is a sinner” “Cursed are all those that shall lift up the heel against mine anointed, saith the Lord, and cry they

have sinned when they have not sinned before me, saith the Lord, but have done that which was meet in mine eyes, and which I commanded them. But those who cry transgression do it because they are the servants of sin, and are the children of disobedience themselves” (D&C 121:16-17).

**27 But behold, if a man shall come among you and shall say: Do this, and there is no iniquity; do that and ye shall not suffer; yea, he will say: Walk after the pride of your own hearts; yea, walk after the pride of your eyes, and do whatsoever your heart desireth—and if a man shall come among you and say this, ye will receive him, and say that he is a prophet.**

**verse 27** Here Samuel points out their hypocrisy by describing the type of “prophet” these Nephites were willing to accept. These Nephites were obviously not willing to take the first step of repentance by acknowledging their sins. Instead they assuaged their consciences with the soothing and false counsel of “foolish and blind guides” (verse 29). Anyone who could justify the actions of these wicked Nephites was automatically in their good graces. And he who could sanctify their actions became their prophet.

**28 Yea, ye will lift him up, and ye will give unto him of your substance; ye will give unto him of your gold, and of your silver, and ye will clothe him with costly apparel; and because he speaketh flattering words unto you, and he saith that all is well, then ye will not find fault with him.**

**verse 28** Hugh Nibley comments on this verse: “This is, incidentally, exactly how prophets were treated in Ancient America, where the Chilans (prophets) were held in such high esteem that they were carried on men’s shoulders when they went abroad—lifted up. Another bull’s-eye for the Book of Mormon” (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 8, 344).

**29 O ye wicked and ye perverse generation; ye hardened and ye stiffnecked people, how long will ye suppose that the Lord will suffer you? Yea, how long will ye suffer yourselves to be led by foolish and blind guides? Yea, how long will ye choose darkness rather than light?**

**30 Yea, behold, the anger of the Lord is already kindled against you; behold, he hath cursed the land because of your iniquity.**

**31 And behold, the time cometh that he curseth your riches, that they become slippery, that ye cannot hold them; and in the days of your poverty ye cannot retain them.**

**verse 31** “he curseth your riches, that they become slippery” None of their possessions can be kept safe from slipping away from them in their time of spiritual poverty.

**32 And in the days of your poverty ye shall cry unto the Lord; and in vain shall ye cry, for your desolation is already come upon you, and your destruction is made sure; and then shall ye weep and howl in that day, saith the Lord of Hosts. And then shall ye lament, and say:**

**verse 32 “in the days of your poverty”** The “days of your poverty” refers to the time when an individual comes to realize that he has sinned and wishes it he had done otherwise. Among the pitiful individuals in spirit prison “there shall be weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth, and this because of their own iniquity, being led captive by the will of the devil” (Alma 40:13).

**“your desolation is already come upon you”** Desolation is spiritual and emotional ruin, a feeling of abandonment.

**“your destruction is made sure”** One who has had ample opportunity to hear and accept Jesus and his gospel and yet rejects them has failed the test of mortal probation (see also verse 38). He is sealed up to destruction—spiritual death. One is reminded of the light-minded expression: “His ‘falling and rejection’ is made sure.”

**33 O that I had repented, and had not killed the prophets, and stoned them, and cast them out. Yea, in that day ye shall say: O that we had remembered the Lord our God in the day that he gave us our riches, and then they would not have become slippery that we should lose them; for behold, our riches are gone from us.**

**34 Behold, we lay a tool here and on the morrow it is gone; and behold, our swords are taken from us in the day we have sought them for battle.**

**35 Yea, we have hid up our treasures and they have slipped away from us, because of the curse of the land.**

**verses 34-35** Mae Blanch has written: “It is not surprising that in a society where wealth is more important than God, stealing should be raised to a fine art. Theft, fraud, deception, loss of treasure buried to keep it safe would bring the people to poverty—the loss of their false god” (“Samuel the Lamanite” in *Studies in Scripture, Volume Eight, Alma 30 to Moroni*, 119).

**36 O that we had repented in the day that the word of the Lord came unto us; for behold the land is cursed, and all things are become slippery, and we cannot hold them.**

**37 Behold, we are surrounded by demons, 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.**

**verse 37 “Behold, we are surrounded by demons”** The prophet Mormon, in describing the Nephites of his day as possessing the “sorrowing of the damned,” wrote, “And it came to pass that the Nephites began to repent of their iniquity, and began to cry even as had been prophesied by Samuel the prophet; for behold no man could keep that which was his own, for the thieves, and the robbers, and the murderers, and the magic art, and the witchcraft which was in the land” (Mormon 2:10).

**38 But behold, your days of probation are past; ye have procrastinated the day of your salvation until it is everlastingly too late, and your destruction is made sure; yea, for ye have sought all the days of your lives for that which ye could not obtain; and ye have sought for happiness in doing iniquity, which thing is contrary to the nature of that righteousness which is in our great and Eternal Head.**

**verse 38 “your days of probation are past . . . it is everlastingly too late”** Samuel delivers a most solemn and ominous warning. In essence, “It is too late to repent. Your destruction will surely occur.”

**“ye have sought for happiness in doing iniquity”** The humanistic and hedonistic philosophies of men hold that individuals should be free to gratify their own carnal desires, to set their own moral standards, to live for the pleasure of the moment, and to do all of this without guilt. In order to sin without guilt, of course, one must lower his moral standard to correspond with his behavior. This is exactly opposite the true gospel principle, which is that to remove guilt one must repent and lift his behavior to correspond to the Lord’s standard. And inevitably that lifting involves an element of pain. The humanistic and hedonistic philosophies are more comfortable. Among those who espouse these philosophies of men, there is a significant and profound irony: They can never find true happiness. This fact is expounded so often in the scripture that it has become almost trite, yet can there be a fact more profound and more important (Alma 41:10)? True happiness is God’s goal for all his children and may only be found in living according to righteous principles. It is utterly impossible to find it in iniquity. Even so, man goes on stubbornly trying to find happiness in sin (Mormon 2:3). As Paul said of the Jews in his day, “For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God” (Romans 10:3).

**39 O ye people of the land, that ye would hear my words! And I pray that the anger of the Lord be turned away from you, and that ye would repent and be saved.**

## Helaman Chapter 14

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**1 And now it came to pass that Samuel, the Lamanite, did prophesy a great many more things which cannot be written.**

**2 And behold, he said unto them: Behold, I give unto you a sign; for five years more cometh, and behold, then cometh the Son of God to redeem all those who shall believe on his name.**

**verse 2** It is interesting to note that while the moment of the Savior's *second* coming to the earth is a carefully kept secret, it is obvious that he, the Lord, had no intention of keeping secret the time of his *mortal* birth.

Matthew Roper has raised an interesting question: In view of Samuel's obviously specific knowledge about the time of the coming of Christ, why did king Benjamin and the younger Alma not speak more specifically of this date and of the significance of Lehi's six-hundred-year prophecy (1 Nephi 10:4) in their public discourses in the land of Zarahemla? Brother Roper suggests:

The most likely explanation may be that this information was considered a mystery, reserved for the faithful (Alma 12:9-11). Nephite prophets often concealed certain scriptural information from the public at various times in their history, for diverse reasons (Alma 37:27-29; 45:9; 3 Nephi 28:25; Ether 4:1). I would suggest that Samuel's prophecy was considered significant and unique because it was the first public disclosure of the date of Christ's birth among the people of Zarahemla and not because the information was new. The largely negative reaction of the people (Helaman 16:6-23; 3 Nephi 1:4-10) is reason enough for the prophets to have concealed the information so long (Matthew Roper, *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon*, 366).

**3 And behold, this will I give unto you for a sign at the time of his coming; for behold, there shall be great lights in heaven, insomuch that in the night before he cometh there shall be no darkness, insomuch that it shall appear unto man as if it was day.**

**4 Therefore, there shall be one day and a night and a day, as if it were one day and there were no night; and this shall be unto you for a sign; for ye shall know of the rising of the sun and also of its setting; therefore they shall know of a surety that there shall be two days and a night; nevertheless the night shall not be darkened; and it shall be the night before he is born.**

**5 And behold, there shall a new star arise, such an one as ye never have beheld; and this also shall be a sign unto you.**

**verse 5** Commenting on this verse, Joseph Fielding McConkie, Robert L. Millet, and Brent L. Top wrote:

There is no Old Testament prophecy on this aspect of the Savior's birth that is comparable to that of Samuel the Lamanite. The nearest allusion is found in the prophecy of Balaam, who, speaking of the Messiah himself, said: "There shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel" (Numbers 24:17). This prophecy obviously refers to the first coming of Christ but does not announce itself as indicating a sign of his birth. The only other related passage is in the book of Revelation, where Christ refers to himself as "the bright and morning star" (Revelation 22:16). The appearance of a star, or of a phenomenon of light accompanying the birth of one destined to a significant role in history, is a common motif in the literature of the ancient Near East. Such legends are but the dim recollection of the lost prophecy of the star that was to announce the Messiah's birth (*Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 410).

It is obvious that a prophet or prophets in the Old World had prophesied of this sign, for when the wise men arrived in Judea seeking the Messiah of the Jews, they said, "We have seen his star in the East and have come to worship him" (JST, Matthew 3:2). The implication is that not only they knew of the new star which would bear record of the Messiah's birth, but the Jews in Judea did as well (see also the commentary for 3 Nephi 1:21).

## **6 And behold this is not all, there shall be many signs and wonders in heaven.**

**verses 4-6** The fulfillment of these prophecies of Samuel is recorded in 3 Nephi 1.

**7 And it shall come to pass that ye shall all be amazed, and wonder, insomuch that ye shall fall to the earth.**

**8 And it shall come to pass that whosoever shall believe on the Son of God, the same shall have everlasting life.**

**verse 8** Here is the essence of Samuel's message. All who shall fully accept Christ and his gospel shall be exalted.

**9 And behold, thus hath the Lord commanded me, by his angel, that I should come and tell this thing unto you; yea, he hath commanded that I should prophesy these things unto you; yea, he hath said unto me: Cry unto this people, repent and prepare the way of the Lord.**

**10 And now, because I am a Lamanite, and have spoken unto you the words which the Lord hath commanded me, and because it was hard against you, ye are angry with me and do seek to destroy me, and have cast me out from among you.**

**11 And ye shall hear my words, for, for this intent have I come up upon the walls of this city, that ye might hear and know of the judgments of God which do await**

you because of your iniquities, and also that ye might know the conditions of repentance;

12 And also that ye might know of the coming of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Father of heaven and of earth, the Creator of all things from the beginning; and that ye might know of the signs of his coming, to the intent that ye might believe on his name.

**verse 12 “Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Father of heaven and of earth, the Creator of all things from the beginning”** These twenty-one words seem to be standard sacred terminology used by the Nephites to describe the Savior. Apparently they were derived from the words given to King Benjamin by an angel of God (see Mosiah 3:8). Samuel likely learned these words from Nephi and Lehi during their ministry among the Lamanites (see Helaman 5:50). We know that the words of Benjamin were especially important to these two missionaries. Their father Helaman had charged them especially to “remember, remember, my sons, the words which King Benjamin spake unto his people” (Helaman 5:4). Lehi and Nephi likely used the precise words of Benjamin in their preaching.

The reference here to Jesus as the “Father” should not be surprising. John A. Widtsoe commented upon this usage:

The title “Father” is used in behalf of Jesus Christ who was commissioned by his Father to create the earth and all things on it. Mosiah, a Book of Mormon prophet, speaks of Jesus Christ as “the Father of heaven and earth” because he was the creator of “all things” as pertaining to the earth (Mosiah 3:8; also Helaman 14:12; Ether 4:7; 2 Nephi 25:12). Adam likewise, being the first man, has been called the father (D&C 29:34). This is not an uncommon use of the word. George Washington is called the father of his country. A man who creates a great business is called the father of the institution. The Indians are said to speak of the great father in Washington. The leader of any cause is frequently referred to as its father (*Evidences and Reconciliations*, 54-55).

Another aspect of this verse is worth noting. Let us first recall the method of translation used by Joseph Smith as he brought forth the book of Mormon. He dictated his translation to a scribe pausing only to allow the scribe to complete the recording. Once recorded, he did not go back and review or revise the text. At the beginning of each translation session, he simply began exactly where he had left off in the previous session without going back to review. In this verse, Joseph dictated twenty-one words verbatim found also in Mosiah 3:8. How would he have accomplished this unless the Book of Mormon is indeed a literal translation? Can you quote twenty-one words of King Benjamin without looking? This is yet another example of the remarkable internal consistency in the Book of Mormon.

Author’s note: A second and careful comparison of Mosiah 3:8 and Helaman 14:12 reveals an extra “of” in the twenty-one word phrase here in Helaman 14:12.

Thus, the phrase in Mosiah contains only twenty words. I will let the above commentary stand, though we must qualify our claim to include the idea that this phrase in Helaman is *almost* verbatim with that in Mosiah.

Another note of interest: We previously commented on another twenty-one word phrase quoted by the prophet Alma (see Alma 36:22 and its commentary). It is identical with a phrase originally written by the prophet Nephi, son of Lehi, in 1 Nephi 1:8. In this particular case, the prophet Alma was obviously using a quote from the prophet Nephi that he (Alma) had found on the small plates of Nephi.

**13 And if ye believe on his name ye will repent of all your sins, that thereby ye may have a remission of them through his merits.**

**verse 13** Don't pass by this verse without pausing to fully appreciate the important and profound truth it contains. This verse defines what it means to "believe on his name." One who believes on his name is willing to abandon his sins, repent of them, and obey the Lord's commandments.

**14 And behold, again, another sign I give unto you, yea, a sign of his death.**

**verse 14 "a sign of his death"** This prophesied "sign of his death"—actually multiple signs of his death—are described in verses 20-28 of this chapter.

**verses 15-19** Let us review briefly the fundamental gospel doctrines that allow us to understand these next few verses. The fall of man has a dual nature—two major aspects or features. The first is the fall or transgression of Adam. The second is the fall of each individual as each commits sin. Adam's transgression results in (1) physical death—all men born into mortality will eventually suffer physical death. (2) spiritual death—all men are separated from God while here on earth (the so-called "first death"). Neither of these consequences of Adam's transgression will have permanent consequences for any of God's children. Man is not to blame for them and therefore will not suffer for them, except temporarily. Christ's atonement will automatically do away with these consequences of the fall of Adam. All men will be resurrected, and no one will be excluded from the presence of God eternally because of Adam. The fall of *each individual*, on the other hand, brings about a "permanent" spiritual death, or separation from God, for all men (the so-called "second death"). This separation is permanent at least until each man repents of his sins and receives forgiveness from the Savior. Christ's suffering in Gethsemane and on the cross qualified him to forgive us of our sins, and he will do so on condition of our repentance.

**15 For behold, he surely must die that salvation may come; yea, it behooveth him and becometh expedient that he dieth, to bring to pass the resurrection of the dead, that thereby men may be brought into the presence of the Lord.**

**verse 15** The Savior's atoning suffering and death were an absolute necessity. We do not have the opportunity for exaltation because of his kindness or goodness or sinlessness or even because of his love for us. We have this opportunity only because he was willing to suffer, bleed, and die—indeed to become our Savior by paying the awful price. This verse also implies that no one may be “brought into the presence of the Lord” to live eternally lest they first be resurrected and receive an eternal body. We know from modern revelation that this will be an eternal *celestial* body as opposed to the other types of eternal bodies man may receive.

**16 Yea, behold, this death bringeth to pass the resurrection, and 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.**

**verse 16** As mentioned in the commentary above, the scriptures speak of two spiritual deaths, the “first death” and the “second death.” Here, the term “first death” refers to that spiritual death or separation from God which is due to Adam's transgression. As we have previously stated, Christ's death and atonement “redeemeth *all* mankind from the first death” (italics mine). The consequences of Adam's transgression (both the “first death” and the physical death) are automatically overcome or reversed by the Savior's atonement. The “second death” is the separation from God which occurs as a consequence of a man's own sins. This second death is “permanent” as is discussed above, and also below in verse 18 and its commentary.

**17 But behold, the resurrection of Christ redeemeth mankind, yea, even all mankind, and bringeth them back into the presence of the Lord.**

**verse 17** Is “all mankind” really brought back “into the presence of the Lord” by the Savior's death and resurrection? They are, but only temporarily. All men will at least be ushered into the presence of God for a private audience to be judged of him. This is due to an unconditional consequence of the atonement, the overcoming of the “first death.”

**18 Yea, and it bringeth to pass the condition of repentance, that whosoever repenteth the same is not hewn down and cast into the fire; but whosoever repenteth not is hewn down and cast into the fire; and there cometh upon them again a spiritual death, yea, a second death, for they are cut off again as to things pertaining to righteousness.**

**verse 18** “it bringeth to pass the condition of repentance” The Savior's atonement made repentance possible.

“**second death**” This term is used several times in the Book of Mormon. It implies an eternal separation from God. This “second death” is the spiritual death that

results from man's own sins. This death is permanent except the man repent. On occasion in scripture the term "second death" may refer to that place of eternal damnation where Satan and his sons live, so-called outer darkness (see also Jacob 3:11). From modern revelation, we now know that the second death will be suffered by all who fail to qualify for exaltation in God's celestial presence, including those who inherit the terrestrial and telestial kingdoms. On occasion the eternal banishment of a man to outer darkness is referred to as the "third death"—the third spiritual death.

**19 Therefore repent ye, repent ye, lest by knowing these things and not doing them ye shall suffer yourselves to come under condemnation, and ye are brought down unto this second death.**

**20 But behold, as I said unto you concerning another sign, a sign of his death, behold, in that day that he shall suffer death the sun shall be darkened and refuse to give his light unto you; and also the moon and the stars; and there shall be no light upon the face of this land, even from the time that he shall suffer death, for the space of three days, to the time that he shall rise again from the dead.**

**verse 20** The "sign of his death"—the great destruction, death, and darkness occurring at the time of his crucifixion had been previously prophesied of by Zenos and Nephi (1 Nephi 19:10-11). This specific sign is prophesied to occur only in the New World. A variation of this sign occurred also in the Old World in that there was three hours of darkness following the Savior's death (Matthew 27:45; Mark 15:33).

**21 Yea, at the time that he shall yield up the ghost there shall be thunderings and lightnings for the space of many hours, and the earth shall shake and tremble; and the rocks which are upon the face of this earth, which are both above the earth and beneath, which ye know at this time are solid, or the more part of it is one solid mass, shall be broken up;**

**22 Yea, they shall be rent in twain, and shall ever after be found in seams and in cracks, and in broken fragments upon the face of the whole earth, yea, both above the earth and beneath.**

**23 And behold, there shall be great tempests, and there shall be many mountains laid low, like unto a valley, and there shall be many places which are now called valleys which shall become mountains, whose height is great.**

**24 And many highways shall be broken up, and many cities shall become desolate.**

**25 And many graves shall be opened, and shall yield up many of their dead; and many saints shall appear unto many.**

**verse 25** This prophecy of Samuel's was fulfilled in the Old World. Following the resurrection of Christ, "many" of the faithful saints who had lived and died since the days of Adam were resurrected and appeared as special witness of the resurrection

unto some who were worthy of their ministrations (Matthew 27:51-53). The Book of Mormon provides no record of this prophecy's having been fulfilled in the New World.

There is some evidence that saints might also have been resurrected in the New World at the time of the Savior's resurrection. During the Savior's visit to the New World following his resurrection, he will point out to the prophet Nephi that there was an important omission regarding resurrection of the saints at the time of the Savior's resurrection in the Nephite scriptural record. The Savior will say to the prophet Nephi, referring to the large and small plates of Nephi:

And it came to pass that he said unto Nephi: Bring forth the record which ye have kept. And when Nephi had brought forth the records, and laid them before him, he cast his eyes upon them and said: Verily I say unto you, I commanded my servant Samuel, the Lamanite, that he should testify unto this people, that at the day that the Father should glorify his name in me that there were many saints who should arise from the dead, and should appear unto many, and should minister unto them. And he said unto them: Was it not so? And his disciples answered him and said: Yea, Lord, Samuel did prophesy according to thy words, and they were all fulfilled. And Jesus said unto them: How be it that ye have not written this thing, that many saints did arise and appear unto many and did minister unto them? And it came to pass that Nephi remembered that this thing had not been written. And it came to pass that Jesus commanded that it should be written; therefore it was written according as he commanded (3 Nephi 23:7-13).

The reader may well be confused at this point. Just what exactly was the Savior pointing out to Nephi that was missing from the Nephite scriptural record? There seem to be two possibilities:

1. The Savior may have been pointing out to the prophet Nephi that Samuel's prophecy itself—that saints would be resurrected at the time of the Savior's resurrection was not included in the Nephite record. If this is true then this verse (Helaman 14:25) might not have been added until several years following Samuel's prophesying from the wall around Zarahemla. The account in 3 Nephi says that the error was corrected "according as he [the Savior] commanded."

Some Book of Mormon scholars have suggested that this is the most likely possibility. In other words, they have supposed that the omission the Lord is speaking of in 3 Nephi was this particular verse—Helaman 14:25—the prophecy that saints would be resurrected. They have agreed that this verse was inserted years after the account of Samuel's prophecies were originally recorded (D. Lynn Johnson, *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, "The Missing Scripture," 85).

2. The other possibility is that the Savior was pointing out that this prophecy of Samuel's was fulfilled—also in the New World—but its *fulfillment* was not recorded in the Nephite scriptural record. This possibility is suggested by the fact that in the 3 Nephi account, the Lord's disciples, referring to the words of Samuel, said to the Savior, "they were all fulfilled." If saints had only been resurrected in the Old World, how would

the Lord's disciples have known that this prophecy had been fulfilled. Also, the Lord will say in 3 Nephi to the prophet Nephi, "How be it that ye have not written this thing, that many saints *did arise* and appear unto many and did minister unto them? (*italics added*)." How could the Lord have expected them to know that saints did arise if they only did so in the Old World. One point against this possibility is that the passage in 3 Nephi does say, "Jesus commanded that it should be written; therefore it was written according as he commanded (3 Nephi 23:13). If saints were resurrected in the New World, we don't have record of it in the Book of Mormon.

Some scholars have suggested that this second possibility is the most likely one. They have supposed that the Savior was pointing out to Nephi that the account of the fulfillment of the prophecy was omitted from the record and not the prophecy itself (McConkie, Millet, and Top, *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, volume IV, 159). They suggest that presumably Nephi made the needed correction on the large plates, but we still do not have the account of the fulfillment of this prophecy in the present-day Book of Mormon.

There is yet a third possibility for the "missing scripture." It will be discussed in the commentary for 3 Nephi 23:6-13.

**26 And behold, thus hath the angel spoken unto me; for he said unto me that there should be thunderings and lightnings for the space of many hours.**

**27 And he said unto me that while the thunder and the lightning lasted, and the tempest, that these things should be, and that darkness should cover the face of the whole earth for the space of three days.**

**28 And the angel said unto me that many shall see greater things than these, to the intent that they might believe that these signs and these wonders should come to pass upon all the face of this land, to the intent that there should be no cause for unbelief among the children of men—**

**verses 20-28** The fulfillment of these prophecies of Samuel are recorded in 3 Nephi 8.

**29 And this to the intent that whosoever will believe might be saved, and that whosoever will not believe, a righteous judgment might come upon them; and also if they are condemned they bring upon themselves their own condemnation.**

**verse 29** "a righteous judgment might come upon them" Through the process of the atonement, Christ became the perfect judge, capable of meting out "righteous judgment" upon the children of men. For a further discussion of the concept of "righteous judgment" see the section "Just What did happen in Gethsemane and at Calvary" in volume 1, chapter 5, *The Essence of the Lord's Atonement in Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*.

**30 And now remember, remember, my brethren, that whosoever perisheth, perisheth unto himself; and whosoever doeth iniquity, doeth it unto himself; for behold, ye are free; ye are permitted to act for yourselves; for behold, God hath given unto you a knowledge and he hath made you free.**

**verse 30** “whosoever perisheth, perisheth unto himself” Whosoever dies a spiritual death is completely responsible for his own fate.

“**God hath given unto you a knowledge**” Agency alone does not make an individual accountable. He must also have some concept of what is right and wrong. A basic “knowledge” of what is right and what is wrong is given to all men. An important aspect of this propensity for knowing right from wrong is the spirit or light of Christ (Moroni 7:16).

“**he hath made you free**” The word “free” refers to agency or the doctrine of agency. We often say that God has given to man his agency and that agency is a free gift. Yet, we know that each individual has always possessed agency. It is God’s gift to us in the sense that he has placed us in a situation and setting wherein we may utilize that agency to grow toward godhood. All accountable individuals have their agency and are responsible for their own actions. Speaking of all men, Alma said, “for behold, they are their own judges, whether to do good or do evil” (Alma 41:7). See *Agency and Freedom* in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 13.

There are three conditions that must exist in order for mortals to be accountable before God (see the commentary for Alma 12:14). These are law, adequate knowledge of the law (including the mental competence to know), and agency. Knowledge of the law is essential. Only when a man is accountable to God is he able to grow spiritually.

**31 He hath given unto you that ye might know good from evil, and he hath given unto you that ye might choose life or death; and ye can do good and be restored unto that which is good, or have that which is good restored unto you; or ye can do evil, and have that which is evil restored unto you.**

**verse 31** Here is yet another reference to the “law of restoration.” The reader may wish to review this most important concept in the introductory commentary for Alma 41.

## Helaman Chapter 15

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**1 And now, my beloved brethren, behold, I declare unto you that except ye shall repent your houses shall be left unto you desolate.**

**verse 1 “your houses shall be left unto you desolate”** This terminology seems to have originated with the prophet Isaiah (see Isaiah 15:9; 23:22). The phrase implies that unless the people repent, the day will come when their beautiful and lavishly adorned homes will be uninhabited. This will occur because their land will be cursed by the Lord and become unproductive, desolate, and uninhabitable.

**2 Yea, except ye repent, your women shall have great cause to mourn in the day that they shall give suck; for ye shall attempt to flee and there shall be no place for refuge; yea, and wo unto them which are with child, for they shall be heavy and cannot flee; therefore, they shall be trodden down and shall be left to perish.**

**verse 2** Donna Lee Bowen and Camille S. Williams have commented on the oft-used biblical imagery of God as the husband and his people as wife:

In a sense, the woman is the image of God's people. The biblical imagery of God as husband and his people as wife is continued in the Book of Mormon, mostly from the writings of Isaiah. Decadent Israel is described as devoid of honorable men, in that they valued women as decorative sex objects (2 Nephi 13:16-26; Isaiah 3:16-26). When God's people become unfaithful to him, they are called “the whore of all the earth” (2 Nephi 10:16). When he calls his people to repentance, the Lord asks rhetorically, “Have I put thee away? . . . Where is the bill of your mother's divorcement?” (2 Nephi 7:1; Isaiah 50:1). The images of a mother too weak to nurse her child and a pregnant woman so near term she is unable to flee destruction are used to motivate the Nephites to repent (Helaman 15:1-2); the woman whose children are lost is the image of desolation (1 Nephi 21:20-21). Those who accept “marriage” with the Lord are to experience joy as abundant as that of a barren woman who becomes a mother of many children, and the Lord consoles his people by saying, “For thy maker, thy husband, the Lord of Hosts is his name” (*Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, volume 4, “Women in the Book of Mormon,” 1,577).

**3 Yea, wo unto this people who are called the people of Nephi except they shall repent, when they shall see all these signs and wonders which shall be showed unto them; for behold, they have been a chosen people of the Lord; yea, the people of Nephi hath he loved, and also hath he chastened them; yea, in the days of their iniquities hath he chastened them because he loveth them.**

**verse 3 “they have been a chosen people of the Lord”** For a discussion of what it means to be a chosen people, see the commentary for 1 Nephi 1:19-20.

**“in the days of their iniquities hath he chastened them because he loveth them”** In this last dispensation, the Lord said to his people through Joseph Smith: “Verily, thus saith the Lord unto you whom I love, and whom I love I also chasten that their sins may be forgiven, for with the chastisement I prepare a way for their deliverance in all things out of temptation, and I have loved you” (D&C 95:1).

**4 But behold my brethren, the Lamanites hath he hated because their deeds have been evil continually, and this because of the iniquity of the tradition of their fathers. But behold, salvation hath come unto them through the preaching of the Nephites; and for this intent hath the Lord prolonged their days.**

**verse 4 “the Lamanites hath he hated because their deeds have been evil continually”** In our modern terminology, it would be more accurate to say, “The Lord has withdrawn his Spirit from the Lamanites because their deeds have been evil continually.” There is also some scriptural precedent for the idea that if an individual is not obedient, the Father’s love will be withdrawn from him: “If you keep not my commandments, the love of the Father shall not continue with you, therefore you shall walk in darkness” (D&C 95:12). Also, “If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1 John 2:15). But, is not the Lord’s love for us unconditional? Let us consider this interesting question.

Divine love has recently become a subject of some discussion and, I believe, some misunderstanding both in and out of the Church. One round of this discussion seems to have begun with the publication of an article entitled “Divine Love” by Elder Russell M. Nelson (*Ensign*, February 2003, 20). In his excellent article, Elder Nelson made the point that divine love is, at least in some sense, conditional. He wrote, “While divine love can be called perfect, infinite, enduring, and universal, it cannot correctly be characterized as unconditional” (*Ibid.*). His article met with considerable criticism from those without the Church who lack a complete understanding of the concept of divine love.

Most all of us carry the intuitive notion that God’s love for us is unconditional. Indeed we have been so taught by apostles and prophets. For example, President Gordon B. Hinckley wrote, “In moments of quiet, we reflect upon [Christ’s] matchless life and His unconditional love for each of us” (*LDS Church News*, 11 December 1993, 4). Elder Neal A. Maxwell wrote, “[Christ’s] duties have long been galactic, yet He noticed the widow casting in her mite. I am stunned at His perfect, unconditional love of all” (*Even As I Am*, 115). Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin added, “Faith [in the Lord’s will] turns us toward the Savior, his life, and his unconditional love for us” (*Finding Peace in Our Lives*, 177). The *Family Home Evening Resource Book* counsels families to: “Have a scripture search for examples of unconditional love. As you find scriptural examples, draw parallels for your own family so that family members can see how divine unconditional love can be applied in their own lives” (Lesson 17: “Love At Home,” 74).

And in an *Ensign* editorial: “To love completely with a wholeness even as Christ loved, to manifest a mature and unconditional love in all human relations, would minimize many fears” (Editorial: “With an Eye Single to His Glory,” *Ensign*, December 1971, 153).

And yet, Elder Nelson teaches in his article that it is important to acknowledge a part of God’s love as conditional and contingent upon our obedience to the Lord’s commands.

At first these teachings seem to create an enigma. Is Christ’s love unconditional or conditional? The solution to this seeming mystery is a simple one. To completely understand God’s love for us, one must recognize and understand two separate types of love under the umbrella of “divine love.” These are charity and grace.

**Charity.** The Book of Mormon prophet Moroni addressed the Lord, “And now I know that this love which thou hast had for the children of men is charity” (Ether 12:34). Christ possesses this attribute, this love called charity, to perfection, and he has commanded that we also strive to acquire it. “A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another” (John 13:34). Moroni continues: “Wherefore, except men shall have charity they cannot inherit that place which thou hast prepared in the mansions of thy Father” (Ether 12:34).

Charity is a concern for others that grows and grows and eventually comes to displace our concern for ourselves (Matthew 10:39). Previously, I suggested a test for charity: When you are concerned about the temporal and spiritual welfare of others as much as you are concerned for your own, you have charity.

God’s (the Father’s and the Son’s) charity for us exceeds our ability to comprehend (1 John 4:8). He is our exemplar, the epitome of charity. This is a love he feels passionately. By virtue of this charity he yearns for our spiritual and eternal success. He longs to spend eternity with each of us in his celestial presence (Moses 1:39). This aspect of God’s love for us is aptly called unconditional, perfect, infinite, enduring, and universal. It is extended to all humankind (Matthew 5:45; 2 Nephi 26:33; 3 Nephi 12:45). “This is my commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you” (John 15:12). A clear example of charity here on earth is parental love, perhaps especially maternal love.

**Grace.** The scriptural passages referring to divine love can be confusing if one does not distinguish clearly between those referring to his charity and those referring to his grace. Grace is God’s love for us. It is particularly that aspect of his love that impels him to extend to us blessings we do not actually merit. The concept of God’s grace is intimately associated with his responsibility to eventually judge each of us. We often refer to his grace using the closely related word *mercy*.

In his judgment of us, God (Jesus Christ) is bound by the law of justice which decrees eternal fairness in all eternal matters. When he extends his grace to us, he does so in the form of blessings. He is able to extend to us these blessings by virtue of

his atoning sacrifice. When he does this, he extends to us the blessings of his atonement.

While Christ has the capacity to extend infinite grace to us his creatures, he is bound by his sense of justice to extend his grace, his blessings, to us according to our obedience and worthiness. Not everyone will receive a full measure of his grace and become exalted. Some will, according to their worthiness, receive the blessings of his grace to a more limited extent.

We may thus accurately say that this aspect of his love, the blessings we receive according to his grace and mercy, are given conditionally and not unconditionally. We may wish to refer to his grace as infinite because it is wrought by virtue of his infinite atonement. His grace is not, however, infinite in the sense that all of God's children receive it unconditionally and in full measure.

In the scriptures we also encounter passages that reference this particular aspect of his love, his grace: "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him" (John 14:21, emphasis added). "Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him" (John 14:23, emphasis added). "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love" (John 15:10). "If you keep not my commandments, the love of the Father shall not continue with you, therefore you shall walk in darkness" (D&C 95:12). "And he loveth those who will have him to be their God. Behold, he loved our fathers, and he covenanted with them, yea, even Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and he remembered the covenants which he had made; wherefore, he did bring them out of the land of Egypt" (1 Nephi 17:40). "I love them that love me; and those that seek me early shall find me" (Proverbs 8:17).

Other scriptural passages emphasize that his divine blessings to us, given by virtue of his grace and mercy, are conditional (see 1 Kings 3:14; 6:12; Malachi 3:10; Mosiah 2:22; 3 Nephi 24:10; D&C 85:3; 119:4-5).

God will always love us (extend his charity to us) unconditionally, "regardless." But he cannot bless us (extend his grace to us) unconditionally.

**"the iniquity of the tradition of their fathers"** See the commentary for Enos 1:14 and Mosiah 10:12-17. See also verses 7 and 15 of this chapter.

**verses 1-4** David E. Bokovoy has proffered an explanation for Samuel's use of the words *hate* and *love* in these verses (FARMS *Insights*, volume 22, 2002). A literary genre found in ancient Hebrew writings is based on the "suzerainty treaty" of ancient Israel (pronounced with emphasis on the first syllable—soo' za rin tē). This is a treaty that exists between a vassal Lord, the suzerain, and his subjects. In this relationship the subject was required to love the suzerain with all his heart. This love implied more of a political commitment rather than an emotional attachment. Loving the suzerain with

all one's heart signified the severance of all other political allegiances. In writing of the relationship of Yahweh to Israel, prophet writers sometimes utilized the idea of the "suzerainty treaty" in which Yahweh was the suzerain Lord and the people of Israel were his subjects. Scholars in recent decades have shown that in the biblical world the word *love* often represented a covenantal devotion to one's superior, while its opposite, namely *hate*, at times signified the status of an individual outside of this affiliation. While the connotation of these words for Westerners usually signifies an intense emotional charge, in the ancient Near East, love and hate often carried the aforementioned unique covenantal connotation (for an example, see Hosea 9:15). The words love and hate in the biblical world often carried a deliberate connotation of political alliance (or lack thereof). In these verses wherein Samuel the Lamanite describes God's love and hatred, there seems to be conveyed a specific nuance derived from the world of antiquity. When Samuel presents his inspired message to the people of Nephi, he declares, "They [the Nephites] have been a chosen people of the Lord; yea, the people of Nephi hath he loved" (verse 3). With these words, Samuel attempts to remind the Nephites that they have traditionally served as God's covenant people. In this relationship, the Lord has acted as the Nephite suzerain from whom the people of Nephi have received reciprocal "love." In contrast, Samuel presents his own people, the Lamanites, as those whom God "hath hated because their deeds have been evil continually" (verse 4). Significantly, Samuel uses the verb *hate* in the same context in which it appears in the book of Hosea (see again, Hosea 9:15). God hated the Lamanites in a parallel manner to the way he hated the Ephraimites: their evil acts had placed them outside the boundary of his covenantal relationship. While some modern readers have expressed concern regarding this apparently harsh statement preserved in the Book of Mormon, Samuel's message relates perfectly to the context of "love" and "hate" in the ancient sense of alliance.

**verses 5-9** In these verses Mae Blanch has found evidence of the Lamanites' true repentance according to the criteria set forth by President Spencer W. Kimball ("Samuel the Lamanite" in *Studies in Scripture, Volume Eight, Alma 30 to Moroni*, 121-22). These criteria include: (1) sorrow for sin (verse 9); (2) abandonment of sin (verse 5); (3) confession of sin; (4) restitution for sin (verses 6, 9); and (5) doing the will of the Lord (verses 5, 7).

**5 And I would that ye should behold that the more part of them are in the path of their duty, and they do walk circumspectly before God, and they do observe to keep his commandments and his statutes and his judgments according to the law of Moses.**

**verse 5 "they do observe to keep his commandments and his statutes and his judgments according to the law of Moses"** The righteous Lamanites and the

righteous Nephites will be observers of the law of Moses until that law is superseded at the time of the Savior's personal visit to the Book of Mormon people in the land Bountiful. During his visit the Lord will declare that the law (the Mosaic law) had been given by him (3 Nephi 15:4-5).

**6 Yea, I say unto you, that the more part of them are doing this, and they are striving with unwearied diligence that they may bring the remainder of their brethren to the knowledge of the truth; therefore there are many who do add to their numbers daily.**

**verse 6** Regarding the concept of “unwearied diligence,” Elder Neal A. Maxwell wrote: “With enduring comes a willingness . . . to ‘press forward’ (2 Nephi 31:20) even when we are bone-weary and would much rather pull off to the side of the road” (*Men and Women of Christ*, 70). Elder Maxwell taught further: “Few balances are more difficult to strike than achieving equipoise between the counsel of the Lord to guard against running faster than we have strength and means (Mosiah 4:27; D&C 10:4), and his counsel to display ‘unwearied diligence’ in our discipleship. It would be both foolish and untrue to suggest that discipleship is free of physical fatigue—clearly it is not. There are unmistakable times when ‘the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak’ (Matthew 26:41). However, part of enduring well to the end includes moving forward, even when we are truly physically fatigued. Even so, it includes as well those moments when the need for renewal through rest, repose, or respite calls for ‘sacred idleness’” (*We Will Prove Them Herewith*, 100).

**7 And behold, ye do know of yourselves, for ye have witnessed it, that as many of them as are brought to the knowledge of the truth, and to know of the wicked and abominable traditions of their fathers, and are 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—**

**8 Therefore, as many as have come to this, ye know of yourselves are firm and steadfast in the faith, and in the thing wherewith they have been made free.**

**9 And ye know also that they have buried their weapons of war, and they fear to take them up lest by any means they should sin; yea, ye can see that they fear to sin—for behold they will suffer themselves that they be trodden down and slain by their enemies, and will not lift their swords against them, and this because of their faith in Christ.**

**verse 9** “they have buried their weapons of war, and they fear to take them up lest by any means they should sin” Presumably Samuel makes reference here to the Anti-Nephi-Lehies (see Alma 23 and 24), though this same pattern of conversion might have occurred with other Lamanites, including those converted by Nephi, the son

of Helaman, and his brother Lehi, even down to the time of Samuel. This pattern consists of accepting the prophesied Christ, rejecting their former lifestyles, taking upon themselves a covenant of pacifism, and burying their weapons and renouncing warfare.

**10 And now, because of their steadfastness when they do believe in that thing which they do believe, for because of their firmness when they are once enlightened, behold, the Lord shall bless them and prolong their days, notwithstanding their iniquity—**

**verse 10** “the Lord shall bless them and prolong their days, notwithstanding their iniquity” This statement of Samuel’s is a future reference to the Lamanites and their descendants as a people. It does not refer to any individual Lamanite, since any individual who accepts Christ and truly repents of his sins is forgiven of those sins and does not have to be blessed “notwithstanding [his] iniquity.”

**11 Yea, even if they should dwindle in unbelief the Lord shall prolong their days, until the time shall come which hath been spoken of by our fathers, and also by the prophet Zenos, and many other prophets, concerning the restoration of our brethren, the Lamanites, again to the knowledge of the truth—**

**verse 11** We know the Lord will never completely abandon the remnants of the Lamanites and allow them to be annihilated. Zenos did prophesy of the time in the latter days when all of the rebellious Israelites, including the remnants of the Lamanites would return to the fold (1 Nephi 19:15- 17).

**12 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.**

**verse 12** “in the latter times” This expression refers to our dispensation, the dispensation of the fulness of times.

**13 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.**

**14 Therefore I say unto you, it shall be better for them than for you except ye repent.**

**verse 14** The Lord’s covenants contain great blessings for those who enter into and continue faithful to them. They also include cursings for those who do not live up to them. The greater the blessings offered, the more grave the cursings. The Nephites had been promised by the Lord that if they were faithful, nothing on earth could in any

way ever mar their liberty, security, prosperity, and happiness: “And now there was nothing in all the land to hinder the people from prospering continually, except they should fall into transgression” (3 Nephi 6:5). This lofty promise was matched by a promise of total extinction in case they should fail to comply with the conditions of the covenant.

**15 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.**

**16 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.**

**verses 15-16** We have previously discussed the fact that the Lamanites will never be completely destroyed from off the earth (see the commentary for Helaman 7:24). Here is reiterated at least part of the reason. Because they had not the same spiritual advantages as the Nephites (prophets, scripture, righteous traditions of their fathers) they are not under the same condemnation as the Nephites. Not only will they not be destroyed, but in the latter days (“the day of my wisdom”), some of them will repent and join the Church of Jesus Christ.

**17 And now behold, saith the Lord, concerning the people of the Nephites: If they will not repent, and observe to do my will, I will utterly destroy them, saith the Lord, because of their unbelief notwithstanding the many mighty works which I have done among them; and as surely as the Lord liveth shall these things be, saith the Lord.**

**verse 17 “as the Lord liveth shall these things be”** The Lord swears a solemn oath to destroy the Nephite people and culture lest they repent.

## Helaman Chapter 16

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1 And now, it came to pass that there were many who heard the words of Samuel, the Lamanite, which he spake upon the walls of the city. And as many as believed on his word went forth and sought for Nephi; and when they had come forth and found him they confessed unto him their sins and denied not, desiring that they might be baptized unto the Lord.

**verse 1** “they confessed unto him their sins and denied not” They truly repented.

2 But as many as there were who did not believe in the words of Samuel were angry with him; and they cast stones at him upon the wall, and also many shot arrows at him as he stood upon the wall; but the Spirit of the Lord was with him, insomuch that they could not hit him with their stones neither with their arrows.

3 Now when they saw that they could not hit him, there were many more who did believe on his words, insomuch that they went away unto Nephi to be baptized.

4 For behold, Nephi was baptizing, and prophesying, and preaching, crying repentance unto the people, showing signs and wonders, working miracles among the people, that they might know that the Christ must shortly come—

5 Telling them of things which must shortly come, that they might know and remember at the time of their coming that they had been made known unto them beforehand, to the intent that they might believe; therefore as many as believed on the words of Samuel went forth unto him to be baptized, for they came repenting and confessing their sins.

**verse 5** “Telling them of things which must shortly come” Nephi explained to the people the signs of the Lord’s coming—those miraculous happenings which foretold the imminent birth of the Savior.

“that they might know and remember at the time of their coming that they had been made known unto them beforehand” We might rephrase this passage for clarity, “that the people who witness the signs of the coming of the Lord might recall that Nephi had prophesied of them.” Thus, those people would recognize them—the signs—for what they are.

6 But the more part of them did not believe in the words of Samuel; therefore when they saw that they could not hit him with their stones and their arrows, they cried unto their captains, saying: Take this fellow and bind him, for behold he hath a devil; and because of the power of the devil which is in him we cannot hit him with our stones and our arrows; therefore take him and bind him, and away with him.

7 And as they went forth to lay their hands on him, behold, he did cast himself down from the wall, and did flee out of their lands, yea, even unto his own country, and began to preach and to prophesy among his own people.

8 And behold, he was never heard of more among the Nephites; and thus were the affairs of the people.

**verse 8** One interesting fact we may derive from this verse is that Samuel did not write the account of his own story in the Book of Mormon record. He could not have since he jumped from the wall, fled, and was never seen again among the Nephites. The account was somehow retrieved and recorded by the prophet Nephi onto the large plates of Nephi.

9 And thus ended the eighty and sixth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi.

10 And thus ended also the eighty and seventh year of the reign of the judges, the more part of the people remaining in their pride and wickedness, and the lesser part walking more circumspectly before God.

11 And these were the conditions also, in the eighty and eighth year of the reign of the judges.

12 And there was but little alteration in the affairs of the people, save it were the people began to be more hardened in iniquity, and do more and more of that which was contrary to the commandments of God, in the eighty and ninth year of the reign of the judges.

13 But it came to pass in the ninetieth year of the reign of the judges, there were great signs given unto the people, and wonders; and the words of the prophets began to be fulfilled.

14 And angels did appear unto men, wise men, and did declare unto them glad tidings of great joy; thus in this year the scriptures began to be fulfilled.

15 Nevertheless, 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, saying:

16 Some things they may have guessed right, among so many; but behold, we know that all these great and marvelous works cannot come to pass, of which has been spoken.

**verses 15-16** Here is a typical reaction of a spiritually unresponsive individual to the fulfillment of prophecy. He says, in effect, "We can account for these few things by mere coincidence—the prophets simply "guessed right" in a few instances. Wait and see. Not all of the prophecies will come to pass."

17 And they began to reason and to contend among themselves, saying:

**18 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?**

**verse 18** “it is not reasonable that such a being as a Christ shall come”

These unrighteous Nephites feel that the prophecies of Christ’s birth are simply absurd and unscientific.

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

**verses 18-19** Though these unbelievers had been told that Christ would appear to the Nephites, they appear to be unaware of that fact. This selective inattention is also typical of the spiritually unresponsive.

**20 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.**

**verse 20** “behold, we know that this is a wicked tradition, which has been handed down unto us by our fathers” Part of the Nephite “tradition of the fathers” has become the prophecies of the coming of the Savior. Here it is referred to as a “wicked tradition” by the Nephite unbelievers. Their claim of wickedness for this tradition seems based on the fact that since Christ is prophesied to be born in a distant land, then the validity of the “tradition” or prophecy cannot be verified.

**21 And they will, by the cunning and the mysterious arts of the evil one, work some great mystery which we cannot understand, which will keep us down to be servants to their words, and also servants unto them, for we depend upon them to teach us the word; and thus will they keep us in ignorance if we will yield ourselves unto them, all the days of our lives.**

**verse 21** The pronouns “they,” “their,” and “them” refer to the traditions of the Nephite fathers. Obviously the unbelieving Nephites are paranoid about the powers of these traditions. This paranoia likely stems from their ambivalent feelings about these traditions. Deep in their hearts, they have a nagging feeling, indeed a fear, that they are true.

**“thus will they keep us in ignorance if we will yield ourselves unto them, all the days of our lives”** They are saying, “we need to think for ourselves and not just believe blindly in these foolish traditions.”

**22** And many more things did the people imagine up in their hearts, which were foolish and vain; and they were much disturbed, for Satan did stir them up to do iniquity continually; yea, he did go about spreading rumors and contentions upon all the face of the land, that he might harden the hearts of the people against that which was good and against that which should come.

**verse 22** It was likely not difficult for Satan to convince these non-believing Nephites that those signs and wonders that signaled the coming of the Lord were nothing but a plot meant to deceive them.

**23** 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.

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

**25** And thus ended the book of Helaman, according to the record of Helaman and his sons.

**verse 25** The book of Helaman ends just one year before the birth of Christ.