

# HELAMAN 1-16

FAITH: Mormonism | TEXT: The Book of Helaman | VOLUME: 1830 | AUTHOR: Joseph Smith

## OVERVIEW

The Book of Helaman, covering a period roughly from 52 B.C. to 1 B.C., serves as a theological bridge between the war-torn era of Alma and the catastrophic events preceding the arrival of Christ in 3 Nephi. The narrative is dominated by the 'Pride Cycle': the Nephites prosper, become proud, persecute the humble, are chastened by war or famine, repent, and prosper again. A central theme is the rise of 'Gadianton Robbers,' a secret combination bound by oaths to murder and get gain, which eventually infiltrates the government. The text features significant miraculous events, including the supernatural deliverance of Nephi and Lehi from a Lamanite prison encircled by fire, and the ministry of Nephi (son of Helaman), who is granted the 'sealing power' to command the elements. The book concludes with the prophecies of Samuel the Lamanite, who predicts the specific signs of Christ's birth (a night without darkness) and death (three days of darkness), while condemning the Nephites for seeking 'slippery treasures' and rejecting the prophets.

## KEY FIGURES

Helaman (son of Helaman), Nephi (son of Helaman), Lehi (son of Helaman), Gadianton, Kishkumen, Pahoran, Pacumeni, Paanchi, Samuel the Lamanite, Cezoram

## DOCTRINES ANALYZED

### 1. THE SEALING POWER

**Assertion:** A prophet can be granted power such that whatever he commands on earth (including famine or physical destruction) is ratified by God in heaven.

*"Behold, I give unto you power, that whatsoever ye shall seal on earth, shall be sealed in heaven... if ye shall say unto this temple, It shall be rent in twain, and it shall be done. (Helaman 10:7-8)"*

**Evangelical Comparison:** In Evangelical theology, God retains sovereignty over creation and judgment. While believers pray for intervention (James 5:17), they do not possess an inherent 'power' to command elements or seal destruction at their own discretion. Helaman 10 elevates the prophet to a vice-regent status where God obeys the prophet's voice ('all things shall be done unto thee according to thy word'), blurring the Creator-creature distinction.

### 2. CONDITIONAL GRACE

**Assertion:** Grace is restored to individuals proportional to their works.

*"May God grant... that men might be brought unto repentance and good works, that they might be restored unto grace, for grace according to their works. (Helaman 12:24)"*

**Evangelical Comparison:** Helaman 12:24 offers a precise definition of the text's soteriology: 'grace according to their works.' In Evangelical theology, grace (charis) is by definition unmerited. If it is according to works, 'grace is no more grace' (Romans 11:6). This doctrine suggests that works are the prerequisite to access grace, reversing the biblical order where works are the fruit of grace (Ephesians 2:8-10).

### 3. SECRET COMBINATIONS

**Assertion:** Satan inspires secret, oath-bound societies to murder and seize government power, which is the primary cause of societal destruction.

*"And behold, it is he [the devil] which is the author of all sin. And behold, he doth carry on his works of darkness and secret murder... (Helaman 6:30)"*

**Evangelical Comparison:** The text posits that the destruction of nations is primarily driven by 'secret combinations' (Helaman 2:13-14). While the Bible acknowledges conspiracies (Psalm 2), it locates the root of evil in the fallen human heart (Jeremiah 17:9) rather than specific oath-bound organizations. This doctrine shifts the focus of spiritual warfare from personal sin to external political enemies.

## COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

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### Divergence Status: Yes

**Theological Gap:** The Book of Helaman illustrates a fundamental theological gap in its Soteriology and Christology. While it uses Christian terminology (Redeemer, Faith, Repentance), the mechanism of salvation is distinctly different. In Helaman, human effort is the engine of salvation; the 'Pride Cycle' demonstrates that human righteousness is what secures God's favor, and human failure brings immediate cursing. This is a covenant of works. Evangelicalism posits that while works evidence faith, the believer's standing is secured by the imputed righteousness of Christ (Romans 4:5), not their own ability to maintain humility. Furthermore, the text depicts a pre-incarnate 'Christian' church with baptism and revivalism 50 years before Christ, flattening the distinction between the Old and New Covenants.

### Shared Values:

The necessity of repentance; The reality of judgment; The danger of pride and materialism; Faith in Christ (terminologically)

### Friction Points:

1. [Major] Theology Proper – Elevates a human prophet to a status where he commands God's power over nature and salvation (Sealing Power).
2. [Critical] Sola Fide – Explicitly states grace is 'according to works' (Helaman 12:24).
3. [Major] Sola Scriptura – Introduces extra-biblical prophets (Zenos, Zenoch) and claims the Bible is insufficient without these 'lost' records.
4. [Minor] Anthropology – Attributes societal evil to 'secret combinations' (conspiracies) rather than the universal fallen nature of man (Total Depravity).

### Semantic Warnings:

#### "Grace"

**In Text:** A power or blessing restored to man 'according to their works' (Helaman 12:24).

**Evangelical:** Unmerited favor given to the undeserving (Ephesians 2:8-9).

**Example:** *In Helaman, you work to get grace. In the Bible, you get grace to do works.*

#### "Faith"

**In Text:** Often portrayed as the result of seeing signs (Helaman 9:36-41) or a force utilized to control elements (Helaman 10).

**Evangelical:** Trust in the finished work of Christ and God's character, independent of sight (2 Corinthians 5:7).

**Example:** *The people believed Nephi was a prophet because he solved a murder mystery (Helaman 9), equating faith with forensic proof.*

## SOTERIOLOGY

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**Salvation Defined:** Being 'redeemed from sins' (Helaman 5:10) and escaping the 'everlasting gulf of misery'.

**How Attained:** Through a cycle of repentance, good works, and enduring to the end, which qualifies one for grace.

**Basis of Assurance:** Low assurance; dependent on current state of humility/pride. The text emphasizes the 'unsteadiness of the hearts of men' (Helaman 12:1).

**Comparison to Sola Fide:** Helaman 12:24 ('grace according to their works') is the antithesis of Romans 11:6 ('if by grace, then is it no more of works').

## MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

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### Explicit Commands:

1. Repent and cry unto the voice (Helaman 5:41)
2. Build your foundation on the rock of our Redeemer (Helaman 5:12)
3. Hide up treasures unto the Lord (Helaman 13:18)
4. Believe on the name of Jesus Christ (Helaman 14:12)

**Implicit Obligations:**

1. Accept the prophet's political and social warnings as absolute truth
2. Avoid all secret oaths and covenants
3. Recognize prosperity as a test of spiritual fidelity

**Ritual Requirements:**

1. Baptism unto repentance (Helaman 5:17)

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**EVANGELISM TOOLKIT**

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**Discovery Questions:**

1. In Helaman 12:24, it says we are restored to grace 'according to our works.' How does that make you feel about your chances of eternal life if you have a bad week?
2. The 'Pride Cycle' in Helaman shows people constantly failing. Do you think God provided a way to break that cycle that doesn't depend on our own steadiness?
3. Helaman 10 gives Nephi power to control the weather and seal things in heaven. How does this compare to how Jesus taught the apostles to pray ('Thy will be done')?

**Redemptive Analogies:**

1. The Rock of the Redeemer – This is a beautiful truth. We need a foundation outside of ourselves because we are 'unsteady' (Helaman 12:1). [1 Corinthians 3:11 - 'For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.]
2. The Prison of Darkness – We are all imprisoned by sin and darkness. We cannot fight our way out; we must simply 'cry unto the voice' of Jesus. [Colossians 1:13 - 'Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son.]

**Spiritual Weight:**

1. Uncertainty/Fear [Moderate] – The 'Pride Cycle' creates a worldview where prosperity is dangerous and peace is temporary. The believer is constantly waiting for the other shoe to drop, fearing that their comfort is a sign of impending apostasy.
2. Works-Righteousness [Severe] – Believing that grace is distributed 'according to works' places the entire burden of salvation on the believer's performance. This leads to either despair (when failing) or self-righteousness (when succeeding).
3. Paranoia [Mild] – The focus on 'secret combinations' and hidden enemies can foster a conspiratorial mindset, where the believer feels constantly threatened by unseen, organized evil forces in society.

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**EPISTEMOLOGY**

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**Knowledge Source:** Sign-seeking and Prophetic Clairvoyance

**Verification Method:** Adherents are given forensic evidence (the murder of the judge) or astronomical signs (night without darkness) to validate truth.

**Evangelical Contrast:** Biblical faith is 'the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen' (Hebrews 11:1). While biblical miracles confirmed the message, Jesus rebuked those who primarily sought signs (Matthew 12:39). Helaman relies heavily on dramatic, physical signs as the primary epistemological anchor.

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**TEXTUAL CRITICISM**

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**Dating:** Published 1830; Narrative setting 52 BC - 1 BC.

**Authorship:** Joseph Smith (claimed translation of Mormon's abridgment).

**Textual Issues:** Use of 'Christ' and 'Jesus' (Greek/English terms) in a pre-Christian Semitic setting. The phrase 'Son of God' is used in a context that suggests Modalism (Helaman 14:12 'Jesus Christ... the Father of Heaven and of earth').