

HELAMAN

FAITH: Mormonism | TEXT: Book of Mormon | VOLUME: 2013 | AUTHOR: Joseph Smith

OVERVIEW

The Book of Helaman covers a period of approximately 50 years (52 B.C. to 1 B.C.) preceding the birth of Christ. It marks a significant shift in the Book of Mormon narrative where the traditional 'righteous Nephite / wicked Lamanite' dynamic is inverted; the Lamanites undergo mass conversion and become more righteous than the Nephites. The text details political instability, the assassination of judges, and the rise of the 'Gadianton robbers,' a secret society bound by oaths that infiltrates the government. Central to the spiritual narrative is the ministry of Nephi (son of Helaman), who receives the 'sealing power' from God to bind on earth and heaven, using it to invoke a famine to replace war. The book concludes with the dramatic appearance of Samuel the Lamanite, who prophesies from the city walls of Zarahemla, predicting specific signs of Christ's birth (a day, a night, and a day of light) and death (three days of darkness), while warning that the Nephites are 'ripening for destruction' due to their rejection of the prophets and love of riches.

KEY FIGURES

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

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. THE SEALING POWER

Assertion: A prophet can receive delegated power from God to command the elements and bind/loose souls with divine authority.

"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 (Helaman 10:7)"

Evangelical Comparison: In Helaman 10, Nephi is given power such that 'if ye shall say unto this temple it shall be rent in twain, it shall be done.' In Mormon theology, this 'sealing power' is the authority to perform ordinances that are valid in the afterlife. In Evangelical theology, the 'keys' mentioned in Matthew 16:19 refer to the authority of the church to declare the terms of salvation (the Gospel) and exercise church discipline, not a metaphysical power granted to an individual to control weather, physics, or eternal destiny at their own discretion. Evangelicals view this as an elevation of man to a semi-divine status that infringes on God's sovereignty.

2. CONDITIONAL GRACE

Assertion: Grace is received in proportion to one's works.

"And 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: The phrase 'restored unto grace for grace, according to their works' suggests a transactional model of salvation. In Evangelical theology (based on Ephesians 2:8-9 and Romans 11:6), grace is by definition unmerited favor. If it is 'according to works,' it is no longer grace. This text implies that divine enablement or favor is a response to human effort, whereas the Bible teaches that human ability to do good is a response to preceding divine grace.

3. PRE-CHRISTIAN ECCLESIOLOGY

Assertion: A fully functioning Christian church with baptism and pastors existed in the Americas prior to Jesus' birth.

"And it came to pass that in this same year there was exceedingly great prosperity in the church... even the high priests and the teachers were themselves astonished (Helaman 3:24-25)"

Evangelical Comparison: Helaman describes a 'church of God' (Helaman 3:26) with baptism 'unto repentance' and belief in Jesus Christ operating in 49 B.C. Evangelical historical theology places the inauguration of the Church at Pentecost (Acts 2), following the resurrection. The presence of Christian ordinances and specific

Christological knowledge (the name 'Jesus Christ') before the Incarnation contradicts the progressive revelation seen in the Old Testament.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: Helaman widens the theological gap by introducing the 'sealing power' (Helaman 10), which grants a human prophet control over salvation and the elements, a power Evangelicals reserve for God alone. Furthermore, the soteriology expressed in Helaman 12:24 ('grace for grace, according to their works') fundamentally inverts the Evangelical understanding of Sola Gratia. In the Bible, grace is the unmerited favor that produces works; in Helaman, works appear to be the requisite currency to access grace. Additionally, the text depicts a fully developed Christian church with baptism and specific Christology centuries before the Incarnation, collapsing the distinction between the Old and New Covenants.

Shared Values:

Necessity of Repentance; Jesus Christ as the Son of God and Redeemer; The danger of pride and materialism; The reality of Satan and spiritual warfare

Friction Points:

- 1. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – Adds new canonical books and claims prophets in the Americas had fullness of truth equal to or exceeding OT prophets.
- 2. [Critical] Sola Gratia – States grace is given 'according to works' (Helaman 12:24).
- 3. [Major] Universal Priesthood – Establishes a hierarchical 'sealing power' where a man controls access to heaven.
- 4. [Major] Christology (Historical) – Posits explicit knowledge of Jesus and Christian ordinances before the Incarnation, flattening redemptive history.

Semantic Warnings:

"Redemption"

In Text: Deliverance from spiritual death (separation from God) contingent on repentance; often implies resurrection.
Evangelical: Purchase of the sinner from the slave market of sin through Christ's blood, resulting in justification.
Example: *Helaman 5:10 says the Lord comes to redeem people *from* their sins (through repentance), not *in* their sins. Evangelicals agree one isn't saved *in* sin, but believe redemption is the *cause* of liberation, not the result of self-reformation.*

"Church"

In Text: An organized religious body with high priests and teachers existing in 49 B.C.
Evangelical: The body of Christ formed by the indwelling Spirit, inaugurated at Pentecost (Acts 2).
Example: *Helaman 3:26 mentions the 'work of the Lord did prosper unto the baptizing and uniting to the church of God' decades before Christ.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Being brought into the presence of the Lord, redeemed from spiritual death, and receiving eternal life through faith and repentance.

How Attained: Through the atoning blood of Jesus Christ, but accessed strictly through repentance, baptism, and 'good works' which restore one to grace (Helaman 12:24).

Basis of Assurance: Based on 'firmness' in the faith and yielding the heart to God (Helaman 3:35), but highly unstable due to the 'unsteadiness of the hearts of men' (Helaman 12:1).

Comparison to Sola Fide: Helaman 3:35 mentions 'sanctification cometh because of their yielding their hearts unto God,' which sounds similar to surrender, but the overarching context of 'grace for grace according to works' (12:24) places the burden of maintaining salvation on human performance, contrasting with Romans 8:1 ('no condemnation').

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Repent and cry unto the voice (Helaman 5:41)
2. Build your foundation upon the rock of our Redeemer (Helaman 5:12)
3. Hide up treasures unto the Lord, not for self (Helaman 13:18-19)
4. Do not set hearts upon riches (Helaman 7:21)

Implicit Obligations:

1. Accept the prophetic authority of current leaders (Nephi)
2. Believe in signs and wonders as validation of truth
3. Resist secret combinations and oaths
4. Achieve 'unwearyingness' in declaring the word to receive power (Helaman 10:4)

Ritual Requirements:

1. Baptism unto repentance (Helaman 3:24, 5:17)
2. Fasting and prayer (Helaman 3:35)

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

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 standing with God on a bad day?
2. Helaman 10 describes Nephi having the power to seal things on earth and heaven. Do you see this power as something that points us to Christ, or does it make the prophet a necessary middleman?
3. Helaman 5:12 is a beautiful verse about building on the Rock of Christ. What does 'building' look like to you – is it doing more things, or resting on what He has already done?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Rock as Foundation – Just as Helaman urges his sons to build on the Rock to withstand the storm, the Gospel invites us to rest on the *finished work* of Christ as our only defense against judgment. [1 Corinthians 3:11 - 'For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.']
2. The Prison of Fire – God's presence (fire) protects His own, and the darkness of sin is only removed when we cry out to Christ in faith, not by our own effort to light a fire. [Acts 2:19-21 - '...blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke... whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.']

Spiritual Weight:

1. Performance Anxiety [Severe] – The teaching that grace is 'according to works' creates a treadmill where the believer never knows if they have done enough to merit the necessary grace.
2. Fear of Destruction [Moderate] – The text repeatedly links personal and national safety to strict obedience. Any calamity (sickness, financial loss) can be interpreted as God 'chastening' or withdrawing His Spirit due to lack of righteousness.
3. Dependency on Hierarchy [Severe] – Believing that a human leader holds 'sealing power' creates an immense psychological pressure to conform to leadership to ensure eternal family safety, rather than trusting Christ directly.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Prophetic revelation confirmed by empirical signs and internal spiritual voice.

Verification Method: Observing the fulfillment of specific predictions (e.g., the murder of the chief judge in Helaman 9, the signs of light/darkness in Helaman 14).

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology relies on the fixed Word of God (2 Peter 1:19) and the internal witness of the Spirit regarding the Gospel (Romans 8:16). Helaman places high emphasis on dramatic, miraculous signs as the primary validation of the prophet's message, which Jesus often warned against seeking (Matthew 12:39).

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: Internal chronology: 52 B.C. – 1 B.C. Published: 1830.

Authorship: Attributed to Mormon (abridging records of Helaman and Nephi); Dictated by Joseph Smith.

Textual Issues: The text contains 19th-century revivalist language and KJV New Testament phraseology (e.g., 'grace for grace') appearing in a text purported to be from 50 B.C.