

The Book of Helaman

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I Strenuously Object (Helaman 1)

OK, we're going back to the movies today. Here's some dialogue from a popular movie from some years back. The scene takes place during a trial in a courtroom.

Lawyer 1: "Your Honor, we renew our objection to this testimony, and ask that it be stricken from the record"

Judge: "The objection's overruled, counsel."

Lawyer 1: "Sir, the defense strenuously objects and requests a meeting in chambers so that his honor might have an opportunity to hear discussion before ruling on the objection."

Judge (getting annoyed): "Noted. The witness is an expert and the court will hear his opinion!"

Lawyer 2 (taunting Lawyer 1 when the court recesses): "I strenuously object? Is that how it works? Objection. Overruled. No, no, no, I strenuously object. Oh, well if you strenuously object, let me take a moment to reconsider."

In Helaman 1, the chief judge Pahoran has died and there is an election to appoint his successor. The candidates are three of the sons of the deceased chief judge – Pahoran, Paanchi and Pacumeni. When the votes are counted, Pahoran is the winner and becomes the new chief judge.

Pacumeni readily accepts the outcome of the election. However, Paanchi and his supporters do not. They become very angry and, when their strenuous objections do not change the outcome, they prepare to rebel against the government. Paanchi is arrested for his role in this insurrection and is executed. His followers respond by hiring a hit man named Kishkumen who murders the chief judge!

The drama in this chapter is a result of the mistaken belief that others should accept someone's position as correct simply because that person is willing to show emotion when presenting it. You probably recognize this way of thinking because it's very much in play in our country today with so many people displaying anger to try to get their point across.

As people of God, it's important that we not allow ourselves to be swayed away from the teachings of God by the emotional arguments of people who believe differently. If someone wants to object – or even strenuously object – to the precepts of God, that's their right. They're wrong, but it's their right to feel this way.

The problem that we face with our opposition today is that there are many who feel that their strenuous objection should be reason enough for you to see it their way. And when you don't, they just get angrier. This tactic didn't work in the examples above. We definitely should not let it work when it comes to the things of God.

As the compassionate people we are, it's perhaps natural that we want to diffuse someone's anger. It could even be tempting to start to think these people could have a point since they're so passionate about their position. Don't be drawn in! Be equally as passionate about what God has taught – not in anger but in firmness, knowing that our position is based on the Word of God.

So, as you hear the various messages being circulated today, remember that any message that goes against the Word of God is just as wrong no matter how much anger, passion or emotion accompanies it. It's anybody's right to strenuously object to the teachings of God but the ultimate judge in heaven will eventually overrule the objection. In our own hearts and minds, and in how we teach others, we should do the same.



A Wolf in Sheep's Clothing (Helaman 2)

In Helaman 2, the position of chief judge is still vacant after the murder of the previous two chief judges in the previous chapter. Helaman is elected to fill the position but a plot is immediately fashioned to murder him – the hit man Kishkumen is again hired to do the job.

However, as the planning is proceeding, one of Helaman's servants somehow infiltrates the mob in disguise and learns the details of the plot. This servant offers to escort Kishkumen to the judgment seat to perform the murder but instead he kills Kishkumen en route and foils the plot.

In the above story, the assassination team is fooled by someone who dressed like them, spoke like them and learned how to appear to be one of them. Of course, it was for a good cause in this case but nonetheless shows how an effort can be derailed by someone pretending to be part of the team when they truly are not.

From our perspective as servants of God, we want to be careful that servants of the enemy don't infiltrate our team and try to derail our efforts. As Jesus said, "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves" (Matthew 7:15).

Don't miss the significance of this metaphor! The wolf is not just an animal who is different than a sheep – the wolf's goal is to eat the sheep! Therefore, the wolf is the last animal that the sheep want as part of their flock.

Although we clearly don't want to have a "wolf in sheep's clothing" in our midst, we also don't want to go around suspecting each other of not being a true member of the team. Jesus added to His above statement, "Ye shall know them by their fruits" (Matthew 7:16). Sooner or later, someone who is not really with us will do something that shows their true colors. Even if they don't, the Lord knows who is who and will separate His servants from the enemy's servants at the end as described in the parable of the wheat and tares in Matthew 13:25-40.

Rather than worrying about what others are doing or not doing, let's focus on being true servants of God ourselves. It's not about dressing for a role – it's who we are "inwardly" that's important. Here's a favorite story of mine that illustrates this point:

As the story goes, some executives in an oil company were concerned about the future of their industry since college students were showing no interest in going into the field of geology. The

executives became aware of a geology professor who happened to be a very charismatic speaker so they decided to hire him to go from one university to another to speak to the students and inspire them to choose geology as a field of study. They provided a limousine and a chauffeur to drive him from one school to another.

After several months of this, they were driving to another school one day when the chauffeur said to the professor, “You know, life isn’t fair. You make a high salary for giving that same speech over and over. I’ve heard that speech so many times that I can deliver it the same way and yet, I only get paid to be a chauffeur”. Being a good sport, the professor replied, “OK, at this next school, let’s switch clothes – you give the speech and I’ll be the chauffeur and sit in the back of the room”.

Dressed like the professor, the chauffeur gave a great speech and received a standing ovation at the end. Proud of himself, he started to walk off the stage but the university president stopped him and said, “Wait, we still have a few minutes so I’d like to allow some time for questions from the students”. Confirming the chauffeur’s worst fear, a student came to the microphone and asked, “If you were out in the desert, what would be the pH of the soil three strata below the surface of the earth?”.

The chauffeur thought for a minute and then replied, “You know that’s actually a very easy question. Just to show you how easy it is, I’m going to have my chauffeur come forward from the back of the room to answer that for you”.

As the above story illustrates, it’s not enough to appear to be a servant of God – we have to BE a servant of God! I don’t think any of us are wolves in sheep’s clothing. However, is the fruit we are bringing forth indicative of a servant of God? If not, we can still hurt the effort. Let’s examine our hearts (who we are on the inside) and strive to bring forth the good fruit – whether thirtyfold, sixtyfold or a hundredfold.



It's Astonishing What the Lord Can Do (Helaman 3)

Helaman 3 describes a period of great prosperity in the church. Thousands repent of their sins and are baptized. Untold blessings are experienced by all.

“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” (Helaman 3:25)

Even the church leaders were astonished as they witnessed firsthand what the Lord could do!

Many of us have also been firsthand witnesses of what the Lord can do. It's summarized nicely in the chorus of one of the Songs of Zion:

*He can heal the lame and blind and all afflictions of the mind.
Can bring the sinners out of sin, and all the prodigals back in.
He can show Himself to thee just like He did at Galilee.
Can make a life completely whole, and He alone can save a soul.*

During my lifetime, I have been a witness to many people being healed by the Lord of various afflictions. Some were indeed astonishing to behold.

However, the most astonishing has to be when the Lord comes into someone's life and completely changes the person. To quote the chorus above – He can bring the sinner out of sin, make a life completely whole and save the person's soul. Here's one example of this that I was blessed to witness:

Some years ago, we had a sister in our branch who had a difficult husband. He was often very cruel to her. He didn't like when she spent time on church activities, including Sunday. Sometimes, he wouldn't give her gas money to drive to church (they lived two hours away from church so she needed a full tank of gas to make the trip). In general, he was making her life pretty miserable.

Finally, this man decided that the church was at least partly to blame for the discord in his household. Wanting to take some action, he phoned my house and left a message, saying he was going to make the two-hour drive to Levittown that Sunday and he wanted to meet me in the church parking lot prior to church and have a “talk” with me.

When I arrived at church that Sunday, the only vehicle in the parking lot was a beat-up pickup truck. OK, I guess I know who this is and who he's here to see. As soon as I stepped out of the car, the door of the pickup truck flew open and this gruff-looking man came striding across the parking lot toward me. He came right up to me, threw his arms around me and started crying on my shoulder! Of all the things I anticipated could happen that morning, this was not one of them!

When the man composed himself, he explained to me that he had indeed planned on causing trouble at the church that day. However, he said he had a dream the night before and that God told him he was completely wrong, that he needed to change his life and be a better husband and a better man. He said he hoped this was the place where he could learn to do exactly that. I was indeed astonished!

The man began attending church faithfully and was eventually baptized in the church. He was truly a changed man for the remainder of his life. Sadly, he became seriously ill a few years later and passed away at a relatively early age. However, what a blessing that the Lord came into his life, even at the "eleventh hour"!

As a postscript: At this brother's funeral, I read the parable from Matthew 20 – the one about the people who earn the penny even when they begin their labor at the eleventh hour. When I was done, I walked over to the box that contained his earthly remains, reached in my pocket and placed a shiny penny on top of the box. I said, "Brother, you've earned the penny! Praise God!".

These are the types of things that can happen when God moves His mighty arm. It's astonishing what the Lord can do!



Our Own Strength (Helaman 4)

In Helaman 4, the Nephites lose a series of battles which cost them many lives and many cities. According to the record, this great loss was avoidable:

“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” (Helaman 4:11)

A sinful way of life among the Nephite people, including those who were members of the church, appears to have been the root cause of this tragedy. So, does that mean this was a punishment from God? Not exactly. Due to the wicked conditions, God just withdrew, leaving the people without His blessing and protection – “they were left in their own strength; therefore they did not prosper, but were afflicted and smitten” (verse 13).

In many of the battles we read about in the scriptures, God helps one side to win by providing strength, wisdom, insight and protection or even occasionally by intervening directly in some supernatural way. There are some battles though, especially in the latter part of the Book of Mormon, where God helps neither side – in these battles, whichever side is stronger or fights better on that particular day wins the battle. The winner isn’t helped by God and the loser isn’t punished by God – they all just fight with their own strength.

In the events of everyday life today, the concept is the same. In some cases, God intervenes to help someone; in other cases, He is not involved at all. And, when He is not involved, there will of course still be plenty of things that work out in someone’s favor as well as plenty of times when things don’t work out. In these cases, everyone is just doing the best they can with their own strength. It’s why lots of people who don’t serve God experience success in this life.

To an unbeliever, this might seem like the fairer way to go – the battle goes to the stronger. However, we as believers should shudder at the thought of facing the world armed with just our own strength. We know that our strength is in the Lord.

Imagine facing hard times in life without the Lord at our side, providing peace and comfort. Imagine going through an illness – whether ourselves or our loved ones – without being able to pray about it. Imagine having to make difficult choices in life without any guidance from God whatsoever. Thank God for the strength He gives us – we can’t live without it.

Obviously, this doesn't mean we always "win" – in many instances, God just lets life play out as it will. However, we trust God to know that when He deems it necessary, He will provide the strength we need to win a victory or endure a defeat. One obvious example of a victory is when He gave us the strength to win the greatest battle of all – the one that resulted in giving our life to Christ and having our names written in the Lamb's Book of Life. We will be celebrating that victory for all eternity.

So, let's acknowledge that we need the strength that comes from God in order to live a life for the Lord. And, to the best of our ability, let's not allow sin to interfere with our relationship with God. Now that we've experienced the strength that comes from God, it would be very frightening to have to face the world relying only on our own strength.

First Verse of the Hymn, "O God, Give Strength"

*O God, give strength to all thy saints
And courage give them, too
And, O lend us thy mighty aid
To conquer every foe
Thy saints are weak, but Thou art strong
There's all, there's all we want in Thee
And Thou hast promised us Thine aid
When we united be*



Saved By Fire (Helaman 5)

In Helaman 5, Nephi and Lehi, the sons of Helaman, enter Lamanite territory to preach the gospel. They have much success as 8000 are baptized but some of the Lamanites become angry and cast Nephi and Lehi into prison. The Lamanite guards later enter the prison to kill them but they encounter an unusual sight: “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” (verse 23).

After a series of events in which the walls of the prison tremble and a voice from heaven urges all to repent, Nephi and Lehi are again encircled by a pillar of fire:

“Yea, they were as if in the midst of a flaming fire, yet it did harm them not...and they were filled with that joy which is unspeakable and full of glory. And behold, the Holy Spirit of God did come down from heaven, and did enter into their hearts, and they were filled as if with fire, and they could speak forth marvelous words.” (Helaman 5:44-45)

In the above story, the lives of Nephi and Lehi were saved by the fire that all of the people witnessed that day. Afterward, they were filled with the fire that represents the Holy Ghost which allowed God to speak through them, eventually saving many people from their sins.

The same Holy Ghost is available to each of us today. We receive it after being baptized when the ministry lays their hands on us and prays for us to receive it. At that moment, we should feel as if we are “filled with fire” – ready to live our lives for the Lord, thankful for the gift of salvation and anxious to help others learn the way that they can also be saved from their sins.

As long as we listen to it, the Holy Ghost will also keep us on the “straight and narrow path” that will lead to having our souls saved in God’s eternal kingdom for all time. The world will one day be destroyed by fire but we will be saved by fire in God’s kingdom.

As an added bonus to eternal salvation, the Holy Ghost also allows God to communicate with us in this life. We likely all have testimonies of being saved from going through some type of difficulty as a result of being prompted by God through the Holy Ghost. Past Miracle Monday submissions to the Gospel Blog as well as the Church History Books have recounted some of these occasions, including some where lives were literally saved by heeding the prompting of the Holy Ghost. When reading these accounts, picture the person surrounded by fire as Nephi and Lehi were and being saved by fire that day.

Part of my own personal testimony is a time when my life was saved without a doubt by one word from God through the Holy Ghost:

Driving to work one morning, I exited the highway and prepared to make a left turn to drive up a hill. I looked up the hill and saw a large tractor trailer barreling down the hill at a high rate of speed. In my mind, I did the quick calculations that many of us do as drivers: Truck will reach me in 5 seconds, it will take me 3 seconds to cross the intersection and turn up the hill – plenty of time!

As my foot touched the gas pedal and prepared to press down, it happened – I heard one audible word in the car – “NO”. The word and the meaning were unmistakable and yet there was a part of me that was still thinking, “But I can make it in time!” As if trying to lift a heavy weight with my foot, I struggled against my own will and finally managed to lift my foot from the gas pedal.

I sat there and watched as the truck cruised through the intersection at such speed that the wind in its wake rocked my car back and forth. With the coast now clear, I stepped on the gas, my car proceeded into the intersection and immediately stalled, leaving me right in the path of where the truck had passed just seconds earlier. Clearly, had I proceeded across the intersection in front of the truck, it wouldn't have had time to avoid me and my car would have been crushed, beginning with the driver's seat. My life was saved that day by God speaking to me through the Holy Ghost.

We can all be thankful for the “fire” that God has provided that can save us from trouble, can save our lives and can especially save us from our sins. Let's appreciate and heed the Holy Ghost – our own personal piece of God that He has given us.



Seemed Like a Good Idea at the Time (Helaman 6)

We probably all experience occasions in our lives when negative consequences result from actions we take that may later seem rather questionable. With the benefit of “20/20 hindsight”, someone may even ask us – or we may even ask ourselves – “Why would you do such a thing?” Sometimes, the only answer we can give – as lame as it may be – is, “Well, it seemed like a good idea at the time”.

Sometimes, the consequences of doing something that seemed like a good idea at the time are minimal and can be laughed at later. To see a few short videos depicting this, click on this link:

<https://www.buzzfeed.com/daves4/seemed-like-a-good-idea>

However, when the actions taken are sinful in nature, the consequences may be such that we won’t be laughing when we look back and wonder why we did it. Helaman 6 recalls a few such examples from the scriptures, adding that the devil is the source of these “good ideas”:

- Adam and Eve knew that God had told them not to eat the fruit from the tree of knowledge. However, the serpent told them that if they ate it, they would become as gods, knowing good and evil. It seemed like a good idea at the time. However, the consequences of their actions – expulsion from the Garden of Eden and eventual death – were severe and affected all mankind.
- According to Helaman 6:27, the devil convinced Cain that he could kill his brother and nobody would find out about it. Based on this, it must have seemed like a good idea at the time – perhaps Cain thought his sacrifices would be more acceptable to God if he didn’t have to compete with his brother. However, God cursed Cain such that he was a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth, causing Cain to remark, “My punishment is greater than I can bear”.
- Building a tower tall enough to reach heaven must have seemed like a good idea at the time since the people actually began working on the project. However, any plan to try to get to heaven without serving God is obviously inspired by the devil. God wound up confounding the languages of the people such that they couldn’t understand each other so the project was effectively terminated.

Notice that in all of the above examples, what the people did seemed like a good idea AT THE TIME. Later on, they realized that it really wasn't a good idea at all. This is how the devil works – he entices you to act without thinking it through and without considering the consequences. While it is sometimes tempting to just take a leap without having to always be thinking about what will happen later, remember that if the devil is inspiring the action, you will find out later that it was not a good idea at all and you will regret taking that leap.

How can we tell when a “good idea” is actually coming from the devil? When the associated actions are contrary to what is taught in the Word of God. It doesn't matter if we think something good can come from it – the ends don't justify the means. It doesn't matter if we think we can “get away with it” – God sees all. It doesn't matter if other people – whether family, friends or famous people – say it's OK. God is the one who has defined what is good.

As servants of God, our goal should be to live as God has taught us to live – that was a good idea yesterday, it's a good idea today and it will be a good idea for ALL TIME.



Now is Our Time (Helaman 7)

In Helaman 7, Nephi returns from a missionary trip and is very discouraged. The messages he has preached during the trip were completely rejected. The Nephite people he preached to remain in a state of great iniquity. As he reflects on how the people are “condemning the righteous because of their righteousness [and] letting the guilty and wicked go unpunished” (verse 5), Nephi actually wishes he could have lived during a different period of time:

“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” (Helaman 7:7)

Perhaps we may think the same way sometimes. We sometimes hear about the “blessings of old” and how things seemed to be so much better years ago. People who say these things surely sound like they wish they were back in that period of time. For those of us who weren’t alive at the time being described, it can be tempting to make statements like Nephi did in the verse above, imagining some utopian period of time when everything was better than it is today.

However, just because good memories are associated with an earlier period of time doesn’t automatically make that a “better” time. For example, in the story referenced above, the earlier time being referenced was when the original Nephi and his family traveled to the Americas. The power of God was evident at that time but Nephi was also threatened with death by his own brothers on numerous occasions, finally having to take his followers and flee in the night. So, it wasn’t all smiles and blessings for him.

I have heard testimonies of how the Church grew in the early 20th century. It would appear that people were more open to hearing the Word of God at that time such that the people of God were quick to share their faith, making for blessed memories. However, it was also a time of Great Depression and two World Wars so it was also a challenging time to live. Was it better than today, worse than today, or just different than today?

There’s actually not much point to comparing one period of time to another. God has one plan that encompasses all of time, from the beginning to the end. He enlists different people to oversee each period of time for Him – Now is our time!

- Perhaps the venues we need to use to get out the message today are different than at other times – but the message is the same.
- The attacks we face today may be different than at other times – but the enemy is the same.
- And, most importantly – our God is the same! He has the same power today as He did in any past time and continues to be stronger than the enemy we face.

Instead of bemoaning that we weren't involved in some earlier part of God's plan, let's embrace the part we are involved in. We are seeing prophecies come to life in our time. The level of opposition we are facing means that momentous events are coming in the not too distant future. We should feel honored that God has entrusted us to be the stewards of His work during this period of time.

So, even as we continue to enjoy hearing about the "blessings of old" and even as we benefit from the lessons learned and taught by others in the past, let's accept the responsibility of this era of time that God has assigned to us. Perhaps in the distant future, people will look back and say they wish they could have lived in the 21st century to enjoy that blessed time in God's history. But they'll need to focus on their own time – Now is our time!



Our Actions Illustrate Our Beliefs (Helaman 8)

A crowd has gathered near Niagara Falls where a man has strung a rope across the falls and is standing on the edge of the falls with a wheelbarrow. He tells the crowd he is prepared to push the wheelbarrow along the rope and walk across Niagara Falls. In order to get the crowd stirred up, the man asks, “Who here believes I can cross the falls, pushing this wheelbarrow across this rope?” Some of the people raise their hands.

The man says, “Well, if you don’t really believe I can do it, there’s no point in continuing”. More hands go up and some of the people shout, “Yes, we believe you can do it!” The man says, “Are you sure you believe it? After all, I’m risking my life here”. The people shout their encouragement even louder and one man near the front jumps up and down, shouting, “I believe! I believe!”

The man addresses this enthusiastic believer: “Really, you believe I can do this?” The other man replies, “Yes, yes, I believe!” The first man nods his head and says, “OK, then get in the wheelbarrow”.

Since the above story is fictional, there’s no definitive ending to the story as to whether or not the second man actually got into the wheelbarrow. However, we can pretty safely assume that he didn’t. Unfortunately, there are many occasions when people say they believe something but they are unwilling to take actions consistent with that belief if such actions put themselves at risk. When that happens, the person’s belief is automatically suspect – our actions illustrate our beliefs more so than what we say.

This is especially a consideration when it comes to serving God. Based on our actions (or lack thereof), it might make sense to question ourselves as to what we really believe. For example:

- If I never take time to pray, is it possible that I believe that prayer doesn’t make a difference?
- If my choices in life contradict what God teaches, can I say that I believe that God knows better than I do what choices are best for me?
- If I am constantly complaining about how my life is going, do I believe that God is in control of my life or do I believe He’s lost control?

If I pick up my cell phone and touch a person's name, I absolutely believe that the other person's phone will ring and that I will soon hear the voice of that person come through the phone. So, I hold the phone to my ear in expectation of hearing that voice. If I call upon the Lord, do I believe He will respond? If so, shouldn't I be actively "listening" to hear His voice?

A big part of spiritual maturity is learning how God speaks to you individually – recognizing "the voice of God" in your life. This may require some trial and error for a while but it's important to develop a line of communication between you and God – if you in fact believe that God can speak to you.

Once we are able to hear the voice of God, we should be willing to do what He tells us to do. If we don't, it means that we don't fully believe that it's God speaking. Our actions illustrate our beliefs so if we are completely sure that God has spoken, we shouldn't be hesitant about moving forward with what He has said. But we do need to be completely sure – if it's not the voice of God we're hearing, the results may not be good.

In Helaman 8, the Nephites are reacting angrily to the words of Nephi that he spoke in the previous chapter. Just as the situation is getting ugly, the thought comes into Nephi's head that the chief judge has just been murdered on the judgment-seat. Where did this thought come from? It had to have come from God in whatever way He communicates with Nephi.

Now, what is Nephi to do? If he reveals this thought to the crowd, one of two things will happen. If he's right, it will provide evidence that he is a prophet of God. But, if he's wrong, he will look foolish and the people won't believe anything else he has said or will say in the future.

Knowing of a certainty that this thought came from God, Nephi announces to the crowd that the chief judge has just been murdered. Is he right? You'll have to wait for the next chapter to find out.

OK, if you can't wait – Of course, Nephi is exactly correct. His actions illustrate his belief that God has spoken and the results bear it out.

Recognizing that our actions illustrate our beliefs, what are our actions telling us about we actually believe?



Who Did It? (Helaman 9)

In Helaman 9, five men race to the judgment-seat to see if the chief judge has in fact been murdered – as Nephi had revealed by inspiration at the end of the previous chapter. The five men find the chief judge’s body just as Nephi had described and they faint in astonishment. When they are later discovered at the scene of the crime, they are arrested for the murder! While in prison, they relate how Nephi had described the crime scene so Nephi then falls under suspicion. Yes, he had an alibi for the time of the murder but perhaps he paid someone else to do it.

So, who did it? Was it the five men? Was it Nephi? Was it a hired killer? No, Nephi reveals to the authorities – also by inspiration – that Seantum, the brother of the chief judge, is actually the murderer. When Seantum is found with his brother’s blood on his clothes, he confesses to the murder and the others are cleared of the crime.

About 56 years later, another unjust death occurred – the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Someone was responsible for this horrible death – Who did it? Let’s look at some possible suspects:

1. **Judas Iscariot** – One of the twelve Apostles of Jesus, Judas accepted a bribe of 30 pieces of silver to betray Jesus. At the last supper, Jesus announced that one of the twelve would betray Him and when Judas asked, “Is it I?”, Jesus responded, “Thou hast said”. Later that night, Judas identified Jesus with a kiss after which He was arrested. Is Judas responsible for the death of Jesus?
2. **Peter** – Another of the twelve Apostles of Jesus, Peter assured Jesus that he would never deny Him, that he would die for Him. Jesus replied that Peter would deny even knowing Him three times that very night. Sure enough, Peter did exactly that, even using foul language the third time to try to convince the people that he didn’t know Jesus. Is Peter responsible for the death of Jesus?
3. **Chief Priests and Elders** – When Pontius Pilate offered the people the opportunity to choose between releasing Jesus or releasing Barabbas, the chief priests and elders – the equivalent of today’s “lobbyists” – went about telling the people how to vote. When the vote was taken, the majority (or at least the loudest voices) wanted Jesus to be the one put to death. Are the chief priests and elders responsible for the death of Jesus? How about the people who allowed themselves to be so easily influenced?

4. **Barabbas** – Barabbas was a “notable prisoner”, rightly convicted of murder and other crimes. He was deserving of crucifixion yet he was released and Jesus died in his place (as Jesus died in our place). Is Barabbas responsible for the death of Jesus?
5. **Pontius Pilate** – The governor knew that Jesus had committed no crime worthy of death. His wife warned him of a dream she had regarding Jesus. He lamely tried to have Jesus released by getting the people to vote for him to be released but they instead voted to release Barabbas. In spite of washing his hands before the multitude, he was the one who pronounced the sentence upon Jesus. Is Pilate responsible for the death of Jesus?

So, who did it? Who was responsible for the death of Jesus? Actually, none of the above was responsible. John 3:16 tells us who sent Jesus to His death and what the motive was:

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

God did it! He sent His son to die because He loves us and wants us to have everlasting life. So, we don't need to focus on who in the story participated in the cruel death of Jesus. It was all part of the plan of God with the goal of providing each of us with the opportunity to inherit eternal life. And the plan was successfully carried out – He did it!

How many of us will now take advantage of this great opportunity that's offered to us, giving added meaning to the death of Jesus? Who will do it?



Power of Attorney (Helaman 10)

Power of Attorney – An authorization to represent or act on another's behalf in any matter. The individual authorizing the other to act is the grantor (of the power). The one authorized to act is the agent.

As defined above, “Power of Attorney” is an instrument used to allow someone else to speak or do something on your behalf. There can be various reasons for creating such an arrangement. Perhaps you anticipate that you may be incapacitated for a period of time such that you will be unable to make your own decisions. Whatever the reason, this is an arrangement that you enter into when you find it advantageous to have someone else acting on your behalf.

If you decided to create such an arrangement, what factors would be important to you in selecting an agent to act on your behalf? You would probably seek someone with the following qualifications:

- Good decision-making skills
- Good understanding of the issues involved
- Trustworthy (won't use this power for their own personal gain)
- The ability to put themselves in your place to do things they think you would do
- Will work for you tirelessly

In Helaman 10, God recognizes the above attributes in Nephi:

“Blessed art thou, Nephi...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” (Helaman 10:4)

As a result of the above, God designates Nephi to act as His agent in something similar to a Power of Attorney arrangement:

“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 ye shall have power among this people...And behold, if ye shall say that God shall smite this people, it shall come to pass” (Helaman 10:7,10)

What an honor to be entrusted with this much power from God! Why would God have selected Nephi for this great honor? Was it because he was the best decision-maker or had the highest level of understanding? Nephi did have those attributes but God selected him as His agent because he recognized in him the unique ability to look at things from God's perspective such that God knew that Nephi would only enact things that God Himself would want to do as opposed to things that Nephi might personally want to see done.

If we want to act as God's agent, we need to adapt a similar mindset. Instead of just focusing our prayers and our actions on what we personally want (and perhaps being disappointed when things don't work out as we would like), let's try to get to know God well enough to have a good idea of what He would want to have happen in a certain situation. There are numerous ways we can get to know God in this way – praying for a closer relationship with Him, becoming familiar with the Word of God and observing what types of prayers get answered are a few examples.

The better we know God, the more we will know how to pray and how to act in various situations and the more we will see answered prayers and successful efforts. We may never reach the level of Nephi, receiving a full "Power of Attorney" from God, but we can each be active in praying for the will of God to be done and participating in the unfolding of God's plan in today's world.

As we see our prayers answered and witness the success of God's plan that we are participating in, let's recognize what an honor it is to have been selected as God's agents – empowered to act on His behalf – in this era of time.



Is God Trying to Get My Attention? (Helaman 11)

In Helaman 11, Nephi invokes the “Power of Attorney” privilege that he was granted in the previous chapter. With war raging among the Nephite people and many people dying due to their wickedness, Nephi presents this request to the Lord:

“O Lord, do not suffer that this people should 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” (Helaman 11:4)

As promised, God grants Nephi’s request. For the next three years, there is no rain so the crops don’t grow and there is a great famine throughout the land. Finally, “the people saw that they were about to perish by famine, and they began to remember the Lord their God” (verse 7). When Nephi sees that the people are humbling themselves and turning back to God, he prays for the famine to end and then the rain returns and the crops grow and “the people of Nephi began to prosper again in the land” (verse 20).

In this particular instance, everything worked out as Nephi hoped it would:

- The people recognized that the famine was God’s way of trying to get their attention
- They examined their behavior and realized they were doing something wrong
- They made the necessary adjustments to their behavior
- The “attention-getter” was removed and everything went back to normal

Unfortunately, things often don’t go according to the above script.

First of all, many people either flat out don’t believe in God or else they think of Him as some historical figure from the past – not a living, loving God who is willing to interact with us and help us today. All of these people would scoff at the notion of events in their lives being the result of God trying to “get their attention”.

If we say we believe in God and we understand that God chastens those whom he loves (see Revelation 3:19), then we should be willing to ask the question when things seem to be going wrong – “Is God trying to get my attention?” It’s often difficult to ask this question. After all, I probably feel like I’m a good person, I’m doing the best I can, other people do a lot worse than me, etc. If anything, negative events in the world are a wake-up call for all those other people, not for me.

If God is trying to get our attention, what He wants is for us to examine ourselves. If we're willing to do that, it will give us some idea of whether God is actually trying to bring something to our attention. If we discover something we should be doing better or differently, are we then willing to make the necessary adjustments? Or will we justify the behavior to ourselves, even convincing ourselves that this is not what God is trying to tell us about? Even if God isn't trying to bring something to our attention, self-examination is always a good thing – as long as we're willing to follow through and make the necessary adjustments.

After all of the attention-getting, self-examination and personal adjustments described above, the part that comes next can be hard to accept. In the Nephite story above, the famine ended and everything went back to normal. Sadly, it doesn't always work out that way in our lives. If something like a marriage break-up, job loss or serious injury are used to get our attention, things most likely won't go back to "normal", even if we fully grasp what God is trying to tell us and make all the necessary adjustments. When this happens, it's important to not feel that God hasn't forgiven you or that He doesn't recognize your efforts just because things are not put back to the way they were before. Where you are in life should be considered your "new normal" and God will be with you going forward from there.

One final note: It's very important to understand that just because things are going wrong, it doesn't necessarily mean that God is causing it as a result of something we are doing wrong. Many, many things go wrong in life – it's just the way life on earth works. So, don't take every negative occurrence as a chastisement from God – it's usually not – but just be open to the possibility that God could be trying to get our attention.



The Voice (Helaman 12)

Perhaps you are familiar with a TV show called “The Voice” in which vocalists from across the country engage in a singing competition. Each competition begins with singers trying to enter the contest by auditioning for voice coaches who work for the show – each coach then decides which of the contestants they want to work with to try to help them win the competition. This audition phase is actually called “Blind Auditions” because the coaches don’t get to see the contestants – they have to make their decisions not on appearances but purely based on “The Voice”.

There is a voice that speaks to us as servants of God. This is THE VOICE – the voice of God. Similar to the scenario described above, we don’t get to see the source of the voice. We have to “listen” – whether with our ears, our mind or our heart – and then make our decisions based on having faith that we have heard the voice of God.

For example, we say that we have been “called” into the family of God. How were we called? The voice of God spoke – we heard it and responded favorably. Perhaps we have been called into an ordained office or some other ministry or service in life. Again, we heard the voice of God and accepted the calling. This is one way the voice of God works – it speaks to people and they have the option to either go along with the invitation or to ignore it.

When we pray for direction from God, we should expect to hear His voice respond – typically, the Holy Ghost speaks to us in some way. Again, we have the option to either heed the voice of God – and reap the benefits of following His direction – or we can use our free will to go a different way, perhaps suffering some consequence as a result of ignoring the voice of God.

Although the above would seem to put the voice of God into an advisory capacity, it’s not always that way. There are times when God says something is going to happen – and it just happens! The voice of God is the most powerful voice there is – there is no comparison between His voice and any of the voices you’ll hear on the TV show. Helaman 12 gives some examples of the power of the voice of God, noting that at the sound of His voice:

- Mountains can tremble and quake and be broken up (verses 9-10)
- The whole earth can shake with its foundations rocked (verses 11-12)
- The earth can be moved and then placed back as if nothing happened (verses 13-15)
- Great bodies of water can be dried up (verse 16)
- Cities can be buried (verse 17)

- Treasures of earth can be accursed (verse 18)
- People can be cut off from the presence of God (verses 19-21)

There are many other examples in the scriptures of what happens when God speaks. The Old Testament tells us how God spoke the world into existence. In the New Testament, Jesus speaks the words, “Peace, Be Still” and the stormy sea is calmed. He says, “Lazarus, come forth” and a dead man is restored to life.

Voices singing on a TV show can win or lose a competition. Voices of people speaking can be right or wrong, agreed with or disagreed with. The Voice of God can be ignored if you so choose but it’s never wrong. If the Voice says a certain choice is the best option for you, it is the best option. If the Voice says something is going to happen, it is going to happen.

There are many voices that compete for our attention on a daily basis. Regardless of how authoritative or attractive some of them may sound, we need to push aside the voices that try to influence us in a direction away from God and instead focus on THE VOICE – His voice. When we heed the voice of God, the victory is ours.



A Righteous Man's Reward (Helaman 13)

In Matthew 10, Jesus gives His twelve apostles instructions regarding going out into the various cities to share His gospel. He tells them to preach, heal the sick, cast out devils, etc. He also tells them to stay in the homes of whichever families would be willing to receive them, commenting that such hospitable families would receive “a righteous man’s reward” (Matthew 10:41).

What is a righteous man’s reward and why should people who may or may not be righteous receive it? As used here, a righteous man’s reward would consist of any God-given benefit realized by others – righteous or not – as a result of being in close proximity to the servant of God.

For example, in the scripture above, suppose a natural disaster would have hit one of the cities and God allowed it to miss the house where His disciple was staying. The entire household would then benefit from this intervention intended to preserve the righteous man – they would all have received the righteous man’s reward.

Whether we realize it or not, God’s blessings to each of us can extend to other people who are probably not even aware they are receiving them. For example:

- With the many incidents in recent years of school shootings, many of us regularly pray for the safety of the schools where our children attend. Guess what? As a result of those prayers, ALL of the children who attend those schools are kept safe – whether their families believe in God or not.
- When any of us travels by airplane, we typically have many people praying for us to have a safe flight. Guess what? As a result of those prayers, EVERYONE riding on that plane gets God’s protection. If the other passengers knew this, they would be happy to know you’re on board.

In Helaman 13, a man named “Samuel the Lamanite” is introduced. Samuel has been sent by God to preach to a Nephite nation that has become quite wicked. In the midst of berating the Nephites about casting out the prophets and relying on their riches, he lets them know about a righteous man’s reward they are undeservedly receiving:

“Behold, if it were not for the righteous who are in this great city, behold [God] would cause that fire should come down out of heaven and destroy it. But behold, it is for the righteous’ sake that it is spared.” (Helaman 13:13-14)

In their wickedness, the Nephites likely resented the people trying to live righteously among them. What an eye-opener to be informed that the only thing separating them from fire coming down from heaven was these righteous people. To drive the point home further, Samuel tells them that “when ye shall cast out the righteous from among you, then shall ye be ripe for destruction” (verse 14).

For any of the righteous people hearing the words of Samuel, it had to make them feel good to know that God valued them enough to spare a wicked city just because they were living there. Also, in case they were wondering why God was allowing the wicked to seemingly get away with their wickedness, this gave them the insight that He was in fact sparing the righteous and, in the process, extending a righteous man’s reward to the Nephites which gave them extra time to repent of their sins and save their city.

Hopefully, we can see the parallels to our own time. With sin abounding all about us, we may wonder sometimes why God isn’t raining down destruction upon the land. Although we know there will eventually be destruction as part of the plan of God, let’s be thankful that God is sparing us at this time. And, for the people who are being spared purely as a result of receiving a righteous man’s reward, let’s pray for them and do our best to share the gospel with them such that as many as possible can take advantage of the opportunity to repent and receive salvation in the time that remains.



Sign Language (Helaman 14)

A popular method of communicating with people who are deaf or hard of hearing is through a system known as sign language. In this language, words or expressions are represented by specific hand gestures, known as “signs”. When a person learns what the various signs mean, they are then able to receive messages from other people who know the signs. This communication system allows someone who would otherwise not be in a position to receive messages – whether because of deafness or being across a crowded room or for whatever reason – to still be communicated to.

In Helaman 14, Samuel the Lamanite speaks to the Nephite people in the land of the Americas about the coming of Jesus Christ. Whereas the people living in and around Jerusalem will be in a position to witness the various events in the life of Christ – His birth, His miracles, His preaching, His death and resurrection – the Nephite people on the other side of the world will not be in a position to witness any of it.

God doesn’t want the Nephites to miss out on the very important message about the coming of Christ, especially since they need to take action – specifically, repenting of their sins – before it is too late. So, God speaks through Samuel to define a “sign language” for the Nephites to communicate to them at the appropriate times that Jesus has been born and that He has been crucified.

The sign for the birth of Christ is defined as follows:

“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...the night shall not be darkened; and it shall be the night before he is born” (Helaman 14:4)

The sign for the crucifixion of Christ is defined as follows:

“The sun shall be darkened...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” (Helaman 14:20)

Other signs are defined also – a new star at the time of the birth, destruction on the land at the time of His death. All of these signs are later given at the proper times as God communicates to the Nephites the messages that they would otherwise not be in a position to receive.

God is still using sign language to communicate messages to us today:

- In 3 Nephi 21, Jesus tells the Nephites that when their recorded words (the Book of Mormon) shall be delivered to the Gentiles and the teachings of that book are then shared with the Seed of Joseph, “it shall be a sign...that the work of the Father hath already commenced unto the fulfilling of the covenant which he hath made unto the people who are of the house of Israel” (3 Nephi 21:7).
- In Matthew 24, Jesus shared some signs that would indicate that the end was approaching – wars and rumors of wars, natural disasters in various places, etc. He did however qualify that when these signs were given, it would not be the end yet but rather “the beginning of sorrows” (Matthew 24:6-8).

All of the signs identified above are coming to pass at the current time, indicating that we are indeed living in the latter days. It’s exciting to be witnessing God’s plan unfolding but the primary purpose of the signs is to encourage action – whether repenting of sins, staying close to God or participating in the plan in some way.

Let’s not try to claim ignorance or that we’re somehow not in a position to receive these messages from God. The signs of the times are right in front of us – a sign language designed by God. Let’s make sure to take whatever action God is expecting of us.



God May Prolong Your Days – But Don't Depend on That (Helaman 15)

In Helaman 15, Samuel the Lamanite continues to preach repentance to the Nephites. He points out that the Lamanites, who have historically opposed the things of God, are now in God's good graces as they have repented and are now keeping the commandments of God. He states several times that God "prolonged the days" of the Lamanites in order to allow them enough time for this to occur. In this particular case, he meant that God prolonged their existence as a class of people in order to fulfill His promises (see Alma 9:16) – this prolonging continues to this day as we await the fulfillment of God's promises to Israel.

However, there are instances when God prolongs the days of an individual person – extends their life on earth – in order to fulfill some purpose. It may have happened to you or someone you know. Perhaps you were spared from a catastrophic accident or miraculously healed of a disease that could have been fatal. If so, God has prolonged your days.

OK, so God extended your life. Why did He do this? Did you need more time to prepare for your eternal salvation? If so, thank God for His mercy. Perhaps God wanted to use you to make a difference in the life of another person (or people). Perhaps there was some other unfinished work to be completed. You may not even know the reason yet – it could still be in your future. Whether or not you know why, if God has prolonged your days, there is a reason.

On the other hand, we have all known people whose lives were (sadly) not extended – a disease claimed them at a relatively young age, they died in some type of accident, etc. This doesn't mean that they were no longer needed or that there was nothing more they could have accomplished. God calls people home when He wants to. We don't really understand how He determines who gets prolonged days and who doesn't but since none of us – good or bad – is guaranteed any specific amount of time on earth, we should all feel some urgency to do what God wants us to do while we still have time.

Years ago, I saw the following quote in a comic strip:

"I have been put on earth to accomplish a certain number of things. Right now, I am so far behind that I will never die"

It's funny in its way – especially for those of us who feel like we're always trying to catch up with a long to-do list. However, the harsh reality is that God will choose a day to call us home to meet Him, regardless of how many things remain on our to-do list. Therefore, we need to make sure we are taking care of business here on earth while we still have the opportunity to do so. Here are a few time-sensitive things to focus on:

- **Prepare for Salvation** – “Do not procrastinate the day of your repentance – this day of life...is given us to prepare for eternity” (Alma 34:33)
- **Heal Relationships with Others** – “Let not the sun go down upon your wrath” (Ephesians 4:26)
- **Do the Work You are Called to do** – “Then cometh the night of darkness wherein there can be no labor performed” (Alma 34:33)

If you have things in the above categories that remain undone, don't delay! Yes, in some cases there may be preparation required before jumping right into something. Yes, there are times when the right thing to do is to wait upon the Lord. However, as a general rule, if there is something that you want to do – or that you must do – before you die, don't put it off too long.

You don't know what the future holds. God may prolong your days to give you more time to get something done. But don't depend on that – get it done now!



They May Get Baptized or They May Want to Hurt You (Helaman 16)

One of the parables of Jesus was “The Parable of the Sower” (see Matthew 13, Mark 4, Luke 8). In this parable, the sower scatters seeds with the intention of growing fruit. The seeds are all good but the results vary significantly, depending on where they land. The seeds that fall on good ground grow fruit as intended but the seeds that fall in other places produce less desirable results.

Jesus explains that the seeds in the parable represent the word of God or the message of the gospel. The message is good but the results vary for different people – some will accept it and become part of the family of God; some will seemingly accept it for a time but then slip away; others will reject it outright.

One of the key purposes of the parable is to make sure that we don’t become discouraged from sharing the message. Even if most people reject it, it doesn’t make the message any less valid.

In Helaman 16, Samuel the Lamanite concludes his message to the Nephites, urging them to repent of their sins and look to the Lord. Although everyone has heard the same words, the results vary wildly. On the one hand, “as many as believed on his word went forth and sought for Nephi;...confessed unto him their sins and denied not, desiring that they might be baptized unto the Lord” (verse 1).

However, many of the Nephites reject the message of Samuel. As it is, Samuel has been barred entrance to the city so he has been delivering his message from atop the wall to the city. Now, a memorable scene unfolds as the unbelievers try to silence the messenger:

“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” (Helaman 16:2)

As followers of Christ, we would surely be quick to share the gospel message with others if we knew they would accept the message, repent of their sins and be baptized. Even if they would listen politely and show interest, it would encourage us to share the message. However, our society has developed such an anger toward the things of God that it seems much more likely we

will be hurt in some way – whether verbal abuse, ridicule, loss of friends, loss of job opportunities, perhaps even physical violence at times – if we would dare to say that people need to repent of their sins and look to God.

So, what do we do? Do we keep silent and hide who we are? Do we modify our beliefs to be more in line with cultural norms? Clearly, this is not desirable behavior as people of God.

Perhaps you're not the type of person to get up on a wall and preach about Christ and encourage repentance of sins – we need some people to do that but it's not for everyone. You can still participate in sowing the seeds of the gospel and make an impression on others by being firm in living your faith. You then become a living example of what the Lord can do:

- Let others see that you believe in God – make it clear that you pray for various situations in your life and that you believe that God will answer your prayers in some way.
- Let others see the fruits of the Spirit in your life – that you're different from the average person by showing great love, patience, self-control, joy, etc.
- Let others see that your Church is important to you – by your frequency of attendance and level of support to the goals of the Church.

When others see that you're a sincere servant of God, you will have more opportunities to discuss the various aspects of your faith and even share testimony of what the Lord has done in your life. The results will still vary – some will accept what you say and perhaps eventually be baptized while others will reject what you say and may even seek to hurt you in some way – but the important thing is that each of us participates in sowing the seeds of the gospel in some way. Where the seeds land and whether they take root is in God's hands.