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Stan Johnson

Samuel the Lamanite (Part 1)  
*and*  
The Prophecies of Samuel (Part 2)

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**Summary:**

We do not know a lot about Samuel's background. We do know that he was courageous and fearless. He told the Nephites what the signs of the Savior's coming and mission would be and they rejected him and his prophecies. The signs of the coming of Jesus and the signs of his death bear record of Christ. Johnson discusses the Lord's respective attitudes toward the Nephites and Lamanites, and suggests ways to have the Spirit in our lives.

Transcript  
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## Samuel the Lamanite (Part 1)

Stan Johnson

It's good to be with you. I am Brother Johnson, and I think it might be good for you to know just a little of my background. I grew up in a family where the father wasn't active. I used to sit across the table with him at night, and he told me that I couldn't be baptized because I didn't know the gospel was true. I used to argue with him that I did. I would explain to him how I felt about the Church. He still didn't allow it until I was about eleven years old. Finally, at age eleven, I was able to be baptized, and that was a neat experience for me. They grabbed some Aaronic priesthood bearers—I am sure it was simply someone who didn't have a date that night or something—and said that this little boy in the ward needed to be baptized. The boy's name was David Gunn, and I have always wanted to meet him again. I want him to know that I am doing well and that it meant a lot to me to be baptized.

Without my dad to learn from when I was growing up, I had to depend on the prophets, and I have always made it a practice to read the prophets' words. I think of them as my dad. And I always think, "What do you have to tell me, dad?" I have grown up with that practice.

Now, why all this introduction? Really it's because that is the major message of Samuel. Let me just read a statement from the Old Testament, from 2 Chronicles 20:20: "Believe in the Lord your God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper." I have a firm testimony of that. I believe that if we follow the Lord's prophets, we will prosper.

Now, take a look at Helaman 13:1–2. We really don't know a lot about Samuel's background. He, like Abinadi, shows up on the scene and is just there. As I have pondered through the scriptures, I really have wondered if maybe he was a descendant of the people of Ammon, the Anti-Nephi-Lehies, or maybe he was a little rebellious at one time of his life. Maybe Nephi and Lehi kind of helped through the conversion process, and he had a mighty change of heart. Maybe he just grew up strong under good parents—it's all

possible. We do know one thing for sure: At this point in time, he was courageous. He was fearless.

Let's read verse 1: "And 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." Now, notice we have a flip-flop here. We have the Nephites becoming wicked and the Lamanites becoming righteous. This isn't the norm. You also know they are still living the law of Moses, and if you can picture it as some steps going up, you have, at the lower level, these people who basically in the Old Testament, lived the law of Egypt for all these years. Then all of a sudden they are asked to go to the law of Christ. But it is too big a step for them, and they can't make the change. So the Lord put a little step right in between for them, a step we call "the law of Moses." This helps them from Egypt to Moses, which they could do, and then to the law of Christ.

Verse 2: "And it came to pass that in this same year there was one Samuel, a Lamanite"—I like the way that is stated. I thought about this last night. I was up thinking about it because I was a little nervous, but Samuel was *a* Lamanite, not *the* Lamanite. It just dawned on me that there were a lot of good Lamanites at this time. They really were a covenant-keeping people. So 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."

Now, just to wake you up a touch here, think about this: Why did they reject him? I thought of two or three reasons, but I usually learn more when I teach. Any ideas of reasons?

[Student answer:] One reason was that he was a Lamanite. He was not of their race, and they almost despised him.

I think that was a real problem. We do have a hint of it. Turn to Helaman 14:10, where Samuel is trying to talk to the Nephites. He shows them the signs, explains the signs, and then he starts to tell them why he feels they are rejecting him. Verse 10 reads: "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."

Can you think of any other reasons? Did you hear anything in that verse that suggests why they may have rejected him?

[Student answer:] It's harder to repent than to continue to live the way you were living.

Yes, President Benson used to say it this way: "When you choose to follow Christ, you choose to be changed."<sup>1</sup> It's a big step. I thought about this a long time. I grew up in an area where, honestly, there were no other races, and my mom took me from that area, Covina, California, to Los Angeles to go through a museum. I think it was the Griffith Park Museum, and I was just a little boy. She said I was very young, probably about three. I was there on these stairs and had my little hand on the rail and was going up the rail. There was a little black girl who had her head on the rail and was coming down the other way. We didn't see each other. Mom said we bumped heads. When we bumped heads, I looked up and yelled out, "Mom, she's black." Her mother was right behind her, and my mom was right behind me. Mom said she nearly died. Mom looked up and saw that the mother was really a good girl, because she was laughing. I think she understood. But my mom said, "I took you over to the side and taught you what that was all about. I taught you that in the Lord's eye, that doesn't matter." Now, I want you to know that I don't remember the lecture, but I think that is one thing that, especially in the gospel of Jesus Christ, we must learn: It mattereth not.

Let's go over, 2 Nephi 26:33:

For none of these iniquities come of the Lord; for he doeth that which is good among the children of men; and he doeth nothing save it be plain unto the children of men; and he inviteth them all to come unto him and partake of his goodness; and he denieth none that come unto him, black and white, bond and free, male and female; and he remembereth the heathen; and all are alike unto God, both Jew and Gentile.

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<sup>1</sup> Ezra Taft Benson, *The Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1988), 77.

All are alike. I hadn't quite learned that lesson yet. We really should learn the lesson. Really, the Book of Mormon is the keystone of our religion, and that means, in a powerful way, that it ought to be the keystone of our life. We really ought to understand the doctrines in it. If the doctrines are in place, everything else falls into place.

Now, another thing about Samuel that we can learn from him, as members of the Church, is back in Helaman 13:3–5. Let's just read each verse and discuss it. Verse 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." That emphasizes his heart. What is the difficulty with that? We really ought to think about this. What is going on? What's the difficulty with him going back?

[Student answer:] He had legitimate fear that they would kill him.

Sure. Even prophets, I am sure, love life. I do. Even being a stake president, there have been moments when I have feared. I recall one evening walking into the house and honestly talking to my wife about the fact that I thought someone in the stake could possibly take my life. Sure I know the gospel is true, and sure I know there is life after this one, but I kind of like my family and I like my wife. My children are still young and I want to raise them. So you get that feeling. He is going back.

Verse 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, [Now, I have to suggest that that is courageous. They won't let him into the city, so he gets on the wall!] and stretched forth his hand and cried with a loud voice, and prophesied unto the people whatsoever things the Lord put into his heart." I had a good friend who called me up and said, "Stan, I know you love the prophets. I found something that you have just got to hear. Listen up." Then he read this quotation from Bishop Eyring (now Elder Eyring):

Now, I testify that it is a small voice. It whispers, not shouts. And so you must be very quiet inside. [I love those six words!]. That is why you may wisely fast when you want to listen. And that is why you will listen best when you feel, 'Father, thy will, and not mine, be done.' [I want to add that that is why I tell my boys once in a while to turn down their radios. Then it goes on.]

You will have a feeling of "I want what you want." Then, the still small voice will seem as if it pierces you. It may make your bones to quake. More often it will make your heart burn within you, again softly, but with a burning which will lift and reassure.<sup>2</sup>

So far, so good. You know, it's funny that when we have the Spirit, we don't necessarily hear anything or see anything. We just know what to do. It just happens and you think, "That's it. That's what I've got to do." And usually you have to be very quiet inside. Then Brother Eyring adds this paragraph, six more words I like (Think of Samuel): "You will act after you have listened because when you hear his voice by the Spirit you will always feel that you are impelled to do something."<sup>3</sup>

Notice those six words: You are impelled to do something. He continues, "You mustn't be surprised if the instruction seems accompanied with what you feel as a rebuke."<sup>4</sup> I could even almost imagine the Lord and Samuel arguing. Samuel thinks, "I like life. I'd just as soon keep going." And the Lord says, by his spirit, in his heart, "You are going back." This reminds me of Jonah a little, when he said, "I'd like to keep going that way." But if you feel that Spirit—and again, you must be very quiet inside—you will be impelled to do something.

Let's go on to read verse 5. Does someone else want to read? "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." Let me remind you that he is a prophet, seer, and revelator. Does anybody know out of that title, which is more important?

[Student answer:] Seer.

You bet. We are told in Mosiah 8 that a seer is both a prophet and a revelator. What does a seer do, besides translate? He sees the future. A seer

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<sup>2</sup> Henry B. Eyring, "To Draw Closer to God," *ENSIGN* (May 1991): 67.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

can see the past. And so, here's is a man telling us a little bit about the future and what is going to happen.

I feel impressed to say, before we leave the subject, that one of the great lessons I learned from the Book of Mormon is that the Spirit really doesn't shout and doesn't really tell you to do something. I have to tell you something from my experience as a bishop for five years. I remember going to sleep on the stand one Sunday, which is a bishop's prerogative. (Don't ever make fun of them. If they want to sleep, let them sleep.) And I went to sleep and woke up. When I woke up, I felt impressed as I looked down into the congregation that there was a young man there who needed to see me. I didn't know why. I didn't hear anything. I didn't see anything. I just knew it. I knew it as well as I knew my name. Then I went back to sleep.

Later that day, as a tradition in our family, I was cooking the family dinner, and I hate to be interrupted then, because it is family time. But the phone rang, and it was him. He said that he really needed to see me, and I already knew that. It didn't upset me. I had already been wakened and told that had to happen. And so, we met at the church, and he explained what the problem was, and I was able to help him. The thing that hit me—and I was able to share this with the man—was that the Lord loved him enough to wake up a sleepy bishop and tell him that he needed to be there. Two points came out clearly from this experience: First of all, I was very quiet inside, no question. Second, it impelled me to do something. I knew I had to do something, even though the other man took the action.

Now let's turn the next page to Helaman 13:9, where it is talking about this prophet, seer, and revelator. In verses 9, 10, and 11, Samuel starts to tell us about the future. Verses 9 and 10 read: "And four hundred years shall not pass away before I will cause that they shall be smitten; yea, I will visit them with the sword and with famine and with pestilence. Yea, I will visit them in my fierce anger. . . ."

There is a statement that President Benson used to say when he gave his great talk on pride. He said, "You can either choose to be humble or you can

be compelled to be humble.”<sup>5</sup> And then he said, “Let us choose to be humble.” Well, when my kids want to know if they are breaking a rule in the house, I use that saying quite a bit. I say, “Okay, let me define free agency for you. Are you ready? You can choose to be humble or you can be compelled to be humble.” But I notice that I am joking with them. This verse is not joking. It goes on: “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. . . .” Another word for *repentance* is *change*. So it could say “except you change.” There is something here that has to change. So it says, “except ye repent, saith the Lord; and those of the fourth generation shall visit your destruction.” Verse 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.”

Before we talk a little bit about repentance, I want to talk about one thing that hit me. These prophets really do understand what is going on. I heard Elder McConkie say once that we do not know the day or the hour of the Second Coming, but we do know the generation.<sup>6</sup> I have often thought about that. If there are prophets, seers, and revelators, they must know a lot more than we do. In fact, I can bear firm testimony that they do. I did, however, have my boy come in one day and say, “Dad, I just heard that Christ is going to come back at this time period. What do you think?” It is funny how, if someone asks you that, normally, you just remain calm, but if it is your son, you get all excited. I said, “Wait, don’t get led away on this.”

But I found a statement for him. This is from a prophet, seer, and revelator. I want to share it, because I think these prophets, seers, and revelators do understand. They understand when they were going to be destroyed here, and I think they understand a lot more than we realize about Christ’s second coming. This statement is by Elder Boyd K. Packer. He says:

Teenagers also sometimes think, ‘What’s the use? The world will soon be blown all apart and come to an end.’ That feeling

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<sup>5</sup> Ezra Taft Benson, “Beware of Pride,” *ENSIGN* (May 1989): 6.

<sup>6</sup> Bruce R. McConkie, *The Mortal Messiah* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1980), 3:455.

comes from fear, not from faith. No one knows the hour or the day, but the end cannot come until all of the purposes of the Lord are fulfilled. Everything that I have learned from the revelations and from life convinces me that there is time and to spare for you to carefully prepare for a long life.

One day you will cope with teenage children of your own. That will serve you right. Later, you will spoil your grandchildren, and they in turn spoil theirs. If an earlier end should happen to come to one, that is more reason to do things right.<sup>7</sup>

Now, most of you are older than teenagers, but if you were a teenager, what kind of comfort would that give you? I am trying to have you put yourself in my son Jeff's place. He was definitely upset. Here's a prophet, seer, and revelator saying this. What comfort does it give you? Does it give you any comfort?

[Student answer:] It gives you comfort to know that you can make plans and then strive toward those plans, knowing you will be all right.

Yes. You know that if you are perfect, then you don't need the extra time. Frankly, I need the extra time. It did me good to hear it, even as a little older-than-teenage person. It did me good to hear that doctrine. Can you think of anything else it would do for a sixteen year old? What do you think, Janelle?

[Student answer:] I think if you live in the here and now as righteously as you can, tomorrow will take care of itself.

Yes. He's almost giving them the feeling of, Don't worry about it. Do you sense that? The doctrine is plain. The doctrine is that we have time, right? We've got time. But it's almost like the purpose for this statement was to say, "Relax. Take it one day at a time." I love the words to the song "Come, Come, Ye Saints": "Come, come, ye Saints, no toil nor labor fear; / But with joy wend your way. / Though hard to you this journey may appear, / Grace shall be as your day."<sup>8</sup> I wondered what it means by "grace shall be as your day," and then it occurred to me that what the Lord—or Brother William Clayton, the man who wrote it, rather—is really saying is, "Don't sweat tomorrow. Don't

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<sup>7</sup> Boyd K. Packer, "To Young Women and Men," *ENSIGN* (May 1989): 59.

<sup>8</sup> LDS Hymn no. 30.

sweat yesterday. You will get the grace, the help you need, each day." That has become a favorite song of mine. I love that song.

That is what prophets, seers, and revelators like Samuel do for us. They kind of help us understand the time frame. We understand what's coming on. We even get signs, if you will, and help that way. They kind of help us get through the struggles.

Now, if you will, go to Helaman 13:32 on the next page. The Nephites get in some pretty tough times here. They don't listen to the prophet. Really, I think you've got two choices. If you accept the prophet, you're blessed; if you reject him, you suffer. Of that, I can bear witness. If you accept him, you're blessed; if you reject him, you suffer. Zack, do you want to read verses 32 and 33 for us?

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:

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.

Elder Maxwell once said in conference: "We will end up either choosing Christ's manner of living, or his manner of suffering."<sup>9</sup> We will either live like Christ, or we will suffer like him. It's kind of like that other statement, "you can either choose to be humble, or you will be compelled to be humble." I don't know about you, but I have learned that lesson a couple of times in my life. You can either live like Christ, or you can suffer like him.

Let's read another couple of verse, verses 37 and 38: "Behold, we are surrounded by demons, yea, we are encircled about by the angels of him who hath sought to destroy our souls [That is real. I think you ought to know that. I think you *do* know that]. Behold, our iniquities are great. O Lord, canst thou not turn away thine anger from us? And this shall be your language in those

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<sup>9</sup> Neal A. Maxwell, "Overcome Even as I Also Overcame," *ENSIGN* (May 1987): 72.

days. 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 [That makes me think of Alma's great statement to his son, "Wickedness never was happiness." President Benson said "Wickedness never did, never does, never will bring us happiness"<sup>10</sup>], which thing is contrary to the nature of that righteousness which is in our great and Eternal Head."

I want to bear witness to something. Elder Fyans once said that these scripture should be as comfortable in our hands as worn-out tennis shoes are on our feet.<sup>11</sup> We should study them daily. As they become comfortable in my hands, I learn how to get through this frail existence. Elder Packer said it this way: He said that life is like a three-part play. If you can, picture three circles and imagine that we are in a three-part play. The first circle is the first act of the play, or the premortal existence; the second one is mortality; and the third is life beyond the grave. Then he said we are in the center part of the play. In this part, the center part, we are tested. We are tested by temptation, by trials, and perhaps by tragedy. And then he said this: "How do you get through the test? You have got to know the script."<sup>12</sup> I have never been very good at plays, and I have never really been in one. But I do know that if you didn't know the script, you would be in trouble.

I open up books like this, and I see that these people here are have trouble following Samuel the Lamanite, for whatever reason. Life presents challenges and problems, and I think that as we face those challenges, we have two ways we can react. If you will, turn to Alma 62. Elder Packer mentioned that as we go through this center part of the play, we are all tested by trials and troubles and tribulations. He said: "Some are tested by poor health. Some by a body that is deformed or homely. Others are tested by handsome and healthy bodies [That happens to be my problem]; some by the passion of youth; others by the erosion of age. [Actually, that is more my problem.] Some suffer

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<sup>10</sup> *The Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson*, 71.

<sup>11</sup> See J. Thomas Fyans, "Prepare Now for Your Mission," *ENSIGN* (May 1977): 39.

disappointment in marriage, family problems; others live in poverty and obscurity. Some (perhaps this is the hardest test) find ease and luxury. All are part of the test, and there is more equality in this testing than sometimes we suspect.”<sup>13</sup> I have come to realize that we are all tested. It may not seem like it, but we are all tested. And really, to me, the key to the testing is that if you believe in God, you are established. If you believe in his prophets, you prosper.

Take a look at Alma 62. This is the war-time that has already gone by in the history of the Nephites. Notice that there are two reactions here as they go through some tough times. Verse 41:

But behold, because of the exceedingly great length of the war between the Nephites and the Lamanites many had become hardened, because of the exceedingly great length of the war; and many were softened because of their afflictions, insomuch that they did humble themselves before God, even in the depth of humility.

Notice that the same experience has two different effects. As I said, I grew up with dad not being as strong in the Church as he should have been. During World War II, he was a medic, and his job was to put shots in people, and when they were shot up with morphine, to tell them they were going to live. But they didn’t. Most of them didn’t live. He would come into me as a little boy, and he would start to cry and say, “Stan, I used to tell them they were going to live, but they didn’t.” And then he would break down. I remember, as a little guy, I would put my arms around him and hold him and tell him he would be okay. But he wasn’t okay. I watched him go through five nervous breakdowns because of that experience.

I want you guys to know that that verse is real. All of us are going to be tested, but if we trust—and the key is trust, which means faith—and if you have faith in Christ, trust in Christ, and if you trust his prophets, it just seems to me that those experiences can do what for you? Did you notice, in the verse, the two reactions we can have through a bad experience? What were

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<sup>12</sup> Boyd K. Packer, “The Play and the Plan,” CES Fireside (7 May 1995): 2–3.

<sup>13</sup> Boyd K. Packer, “The Choice,” *ENSIGN* (November 1980): 21.

they? Did you catch them there? The war was a great length of war; sometimes our trials are exceedingly long. How can we react to them?

[Student answer:] Be hardened.

You can be hardened, or you can be softened. Now, I bear witness that that is true. You can be hardened through the experience, or you can be softened. That, in fact, is true of Samuel. I would like to suggest that his job was not easy. He could have been hardened through the experience, or he could have been softened. So let's go back and read Helaman 14:5-9:

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.

And behold this is not all, there shall be many signs and wonders in heaven.

And it shall come to pass that ye shall all be amazed, and wonder, insomuch that ye shall fall to the earth.

And it shall come to pass that whosoever shall believe on the Son of God, the same shall have everlasting life.

And behold, thus hath the Lord commanded me, by his angel, that I should come and tell this thing unto you [that may have given him some courage, by the way, to have that kind of assistance]; 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.

Let me read Matthew 12:38. This is the Savior speaking about sign seekers and how signs affect people.

Then certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees answered, saying, Master, we would see a sign from thee.

But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas [that's Greek; we know him as Jonah]:

For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

Now, let me ask a question. Samuel gives signs here. He explains that there will be signs and wonders, and they will be sore amazed. Why does the Savior speak so strongly against those who seek signs, even referring to them as "an adulterous and evil generation"? Why is it wrong to seek signs? You have had people do it to you. "Prove it!" they say. "Prove it to me."

I remember being at San Antonio College in a class of philosophy, and the teacher said, "How many of you believe in God?" I raised my hand

immediately, and then brought it down really quick, because there were only four of us in a class of forty who believed in God. For the rest of the semester, everybody picked on us. They would sit there—and I remember some of them sitting in the back with their feet up on the desks (I guess they thought they were smart)—and they would say, “Prove it! Prove to us there’s a God.” I didn’t do so well, I think. What is the problem? What is the problem with someone like that?

[Student answer:] Signs don’t provide faith. Faith should proceed any miracle.

What happens if you do have faith, prior to a sign? Is a sign okay then?

[Student answer:] I think having a sign is okay then.

So, it’s all right if you have faith. Any other feelings as to why an adulterous generation would seek for a sign? April?

[Student answer:] If you don’t have faith, even if you do see a sign, it won’t mean anything. People who don’t have faith and say “prove it” are asking for the wrong reason.

Anything else? Let’s look at 3 Nephi 2:1:

And it came to pass that thus passed away the ninety and fifth year also, and the people began to forget those signs and wonders which they had heard, and began to be less and less astonished at a sign or a wonder from heaven, insomuch that they began to be hard in their hearts, and blind in their minds, and began to disbelieve all which they had heard and seen—

Imagining up some vain thing in their hearts, that it was wrought by men and by the power of the devil, to lead away and deceive the hearts of the people; and thus did Satan get possession of the hearts of the people again, insomuch that he did blind their eyes and lead them away to believe that the doctrine of Christ was a foolish and a vain thing.

They became “less and less astonished,” it says. Really, it doesn’t convert. Any other problems with sign seekers, or those that have to be converted through proof? I once had a girl in class say it this way: “An adulterer is unfaithful.” I thought that made sense. An adulterer is unfaithful, and those who have that mind-set are not full of faith. Really—and there is no easier way to say this—an adulterer wants results without responsibility. Isn’t that true? And they almost always don’t get it. It just doesn’t happen. I think we know

that they want results without responsibility. You can't do that in the gospel. They come to you and say that they want the same feeling you have without having to pay the price.

Go with me to Doctrine and Covenants 63:7–9, because I don't want to leave this subject without bearing witness that signs are okay. I am not saying they are bad. "And he that seeketh signs shall see signs, but not unto salvation. Verily, I say unto you, there are those among you who seek signs, and there have been such even from the beginning; But, behold, faith cometh not by signs, but signs follow those that believe." So, signs are okay. This three days of light and darkness that happens with the saints as they prepare for the birth and the death of Christ is okay, if faith is in place. I believe faith does cause things to happen. And then verse 10 says: "Yea, signs come by faith."

There are two kinds of faith. First, faith born by experience. All of you know that. For example, we all have faith the sun is going to come up, but it is not really that big of deal, because it's born by experience. All of us have that kind of faith. The other kind of faith causes things to happen, and I bear witness that we are not going to survive in this world temporally or spiritually without that kind of faith. It is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. I don't mean a positive mental attitude; I mean solid faith in the Lord. We've got to have that kind of faith. Again, look at verse 10. When we have that kind of faith, it says: "Yea, signs come by faith, not by the will of men [notice that], nor as they please, but [here are the five important words:] by the will of God." Signs come because God wills it. But they do come.

I mentioned that I had grown up in a home where I didn't have a father who cooperated with me on the gospel, but I really did, at a young age, know that it was true. When I went on my mission, it became clear to me that, being a teenager and all that, I had lost some feelings—not for the gospel, but I didn't concentrate that hard on my testimony.

One day we were sitting in a house with a family named the Yeagers, and we were teaching the gospel. In the middle of it I was supposed to bear my testimony. So I just bore the testimony that was written in the little book. I said, "I know the gospel is true."

Brother Yeager looked at me and said, "You don't know that."

I said, "I do too."

He said, "No, you don't know that."

I said, "I know the gospel is true." As I said it, I felt it from the crown of my head to the soles of my feet, and I received that witness, or if you will, that sign. That really was a great strength to me for the rest of my mission. So, I bear witness that signs come by faith, and I know up until that time, I had exercised my faith in reading scriptures and praying and doing those things that needed to be done.

Let's go back to Helaman 14. We've talked about how Samuel was a Lamanite. Now, let's read verses 11, 12, and 13. Verse 11 reads: "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." That, of course, is one of the great reasons we have prophets, seers, and revelators. They are to call people to repentance.

I remember when President Benson became prophet, he talked about four things. He urged us (1) to awake and arise, (2) to be morally clean, (3) to start using the Book of Mormon, and (4) to conquer pride. He said the whole reason for prophets is to call people to repentance.<sup>14</sup> And so, we have a prophet here telling people of the conditions of repentance. Just for a moment, I think we know them, tell me the conditions of repentance. We have kind of learned them all our lives. There are five simple ones that were taught, basically as we grew up, and I know there are exact words. I am not looking for exact words. What are those conditions of repentance that Samuel is talking about?

[Student answer:] I think it's the fourth article of faith: first, faith; then, repentance; then, baptism; then the laying on of hands for receiving the Holy Ghost.

That we have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. And baptism. You bet.

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<sup>14</sup> Ezra Taft Benson, "Cleansing the Inner Vessel," *ENSIGN* (MAY 1986): 4-7.

Now let's read the next verse, verse 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." So, the foundation has to be on faith in the Lord. Repentance has to be founded on Christ. Yes?

[Student comment:] I thought she brought up a good point about the Holy Ghost, because that is the cleansing agent. It is essential to the repentance process.

You have got to have the Spirit. It sanctifies. And baptism. I have often thought if people understood the nature and symbolism of baptism, they would never change it. The idea that you come forth out of the grave, or the resurrection, is symbolized by joining the Church. Of course, the promise of the resurrection is for all people, but not the cleansing. Baptism is symbolic of that cleansing, which continues with the Holy Ghost. What other conditions of repentance are there? I must mention this. During a general conference, Elder Richard G. Scott said that we go through the conditions of repentance, but we always miss one important step. "Of all the necessary steps to repentance, I testify that the most critically important is for you to have a conviction that forgiveness comes because of the Redeemer."<sup>15</sup> That is the most important condition. That is what Samuel is saying here. He is preaching repentance, and then he starts talking about Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Father of heaven and earth, the creator of all things.

I am going to keep pushing you. What other conditions of repentance are there? We're going to see them here in these scriptures.

[Student answer:] You have to sincerely feel bad about it and have the desire and be willing to change.

Okay, very good. We have to have a godly sorrow, or remorse, if you will.

[Student response:] Before we do anything, I think we have to recognize that we have done something wrong, and then we can go on to the other steps of repentance.

You know, if these people had just taken time out and thought that the prophet probably had something to say here and had prayerfully pondered their iniquities, they would have started to feel that godly sorrow. Elder Scott, in connection with that reflection process, said you ought to “study and ponder to determine how serious the Lord defines your transgression to be. That will bring healing sorrow and remorse.”<sup>16</sup> We ought to study and ponder about what we’ve done and figure out how serious it is.

I remember coming home from work one day, and I had had it. It had been too long of a day. I walked in the door and saw my son sitting there. As I walked in the door, something went wrong and I swore. It wasn’t a serious swear word, but it was a swear word. I recall as I walked into the kitchen, he walked out the back door, saying, “I can’t believe Dad swore. I can’t believe Dad swore”—He said it three times! “I can’t believe Dad swore.” I got on my knees and, knowing this is one of the conditions of repentance, I studied and pondered to determine how serious that transgression was. Maybe for someone else, that wasn’t that serious. But for me, it was serious, because I had really shaken him. It was serious.

What else? What other conditions of repentance are there? Let’s keep reading. Go to verse 13: “And if ye believe on his name ye will repent of all your sins.” Again, it has to be founded on Christ. If it isn’t, you won’t repent. Can I just add this? It isn’t sorrow for sin that brings repentance. It’s the atonement of Christ that brings repentance. Christ is showing you the foundation. If you believe on his name, you will repent. Can I give you the reverse? If you don’t believe on his name, it won’t really be repentance. You and I know people who stopped sinning because they were afraid of getting some disease or whatever. That’s not repentance. They stopped sinning, but they are still guilty. There is a big difference from stopping sinning, and repenting. Continuing with verse 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.” What other condition?

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<sup>15</sup> Richard G. Scott, “Finding Forgiveness,” *ENSIGN* (May 1995), 76.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

[Student answer:] Forsaking.

Okay, abandonment. Getting rid of the sin. There is a problem with that, and I am going to read about it. "Joseph Smith declared: 'Repentance is a thing that cannot be trifled with every day. Daily transgression and daily repentance is not . . . pleasing to the sight of God.'"<sup>17</sup> I am going to give you another quote, this one from memory because I have it in my journal in my drawer.

Bishop Eyring gave a talk once, and in it, he said: "We need to pray to God to show us our conduct every day. Every night . . . we should review the thoughts, words, and acts of the day and then repent of everything we have done that is wrong or that has grieved the Spirit."<sup>18</sup> Now, do you have that one? Think of that one in contrast to Joseph's statement. Tell me the difference.

[Student answer:] When Joseph Smith said God didn't like daily transgression and repentance, he meant repenting for committing the same sins over and over. Brother Eyring is talking about progressing, so that from day to day, the things we are repenting of hopefully become less and less serious.

Yes, that's right. I love in verse 13 where he says it's through Christ's merits. I would kind of emphasize that it's through his merits. I think if there is anything Samuel is trying to teach here, it is the idea that repentance is through Christ. He's the foundation. Again, it's not abandonment of sins that causes forgiveness. It's not sorrow for sins. It's the atonement of Christ.

Now, what other conditions of repentance can you think of? Before we leave this subject, let me ask you, What if it is a serious sin? What do we have to do?

[Student answer:] Restitution.

Okay, we ought to try to make a restitution. Restitution shows that you are serious about it. Elder Scott says, "Willing restitution is concrete evidence to

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., quoting from Joseph Fielding Smith, comp., *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 148.

<sup>18</sup> Henry B. Eyring, "Because of Your Steadiness," *ENSIGN* (May 1988): 40, quoting George Q. Cannon.

the Lord that you are committed to do all you can to repent.”<sup>19</sup> What else is there?

[Student answer:] Talking to your leaders.

Confession. Listen to this quote: “Please understand that confession is not repentance. It is an essential step, but not of itself adequate.”<sup>20</sup> Look at the verses and listen to the prophets. What did he say? Well, basically he said that confession is not repentance. It helps, but it is not all of it. We receive forgiveness not just through godly sorrow. As it states in verse 13: “And if ye believe on his name ye will repent of all your sins.”

One more statement that Elder Scott makes is that obedience to all the commandments is also absolutely essential to these conditions of repentance. He says: “Full obedience [is] considered part of repentance, such as attending meetings, paying tithing, giving service, and forgiving others.”<sup>21</sup>

So, as we look at the conditions of repentance, I bear witness that it is important for us, first of all, to realize that these things are necessary and that they are good. But, in fact, the bottom line is Christ and his atonement. We are saved by grace “after all we can do,” 2 Nephi 25:23 tells us.

I think the one thing I recall most of all, on the human level of it, is I recall one time with my mom. She was upset with me for something I had done, so she took a little stick and shook it at me. I was as tall as she was, so I thought I was a pretty big guy. I took her stick and broke it on my knee and gave it to her. I recall—and you have to remember that she raised me by herself—she just started to cry. I remember the feeling that came over me. I realized that everything she had done for me was because she loved me, and I recall saying, “I am sorry. I really am sorry, Mom.” I meant it, and I really did try to behave myself.

I think that is really what has happened in this lifetime process of trying to become more Christlike. I realize that all things are provided for me, even though they hurt. And that it really is the Atonement. That is taking care of things. It is important that we experience godly sorrow, but without Christ,

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<sup>19</sup> Scott, “Finding Forgiveness,” 76.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

we really wouldn't get to first base. I leave that witness with you in the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

## **Samuel the Lamanite**

### **The Prophecies of Samuel (Part 2)**

Stan Johnson

You remember last hour we talked about the importance, first of all, of believing in God and being established and second, of believing in his prophets and prospering. Also, we talked about how the people probably rejected Samuel because of the color of his skin (he was a Lamanite) and because he taught the truth ("The wicked take the truth to be hard," [1 Nephi 16:2]). Also, we talked about the importance of following the doctrine that is found in the scriptures. That life is like a three-part play, and we are in the center part of it. This is the part where we are tested by trials and troubles and perhaps by tragedy, and it's through the script (i.e., the scriptures) that we know what we are doing. We have to know the script. And, finally, we finished with the idea that signs don't convert; they are great if you have faith already. Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and the conditions of repentance are great, but they are not, in and of themselves, that which brings the healing power of the Atonement. It is Christ himself who does that.

So, if we could, let's start in Helaman 14. We talked about the conditions of repentance as we ended, and I bore witness to that. Now, in verse 12, we are looking at Christ and a little bit of what we learned about him. "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." Now, some find this fairly difficult to understand because, as we talk about Jesus Christ—and you know, the center part of that script for our play has to be Christ; the whole focus is our Father's plan, and at the center of that plan is Jesus Christ—being the Creator of all things and the Father of heaven and earth. We often refer to him as "the Father." Can you tell me ways in which Christ can be "the Father." You know, that bothers a lot of people as they read that. They think, "Wait a minute. My Father in Heaven is my Father. Jesus Christ is my Savior." Why do we refer to the Savior as "Father"?

Just for a moment, let me ask, How many titles do I have in my family and my extended family? What would be one of my titles?

[Student answer:] Father.

Father! I am a father. I have six children. What else am I?

[Student answer:] Son.

I am a son. I told you a little bit about my mom. When she calls me up, she calls me "son," and she wants to know if I have been taking care of myself. What else am I? I am a husband. I am a brother. My brother just called me. We have different titles, depending on what we are doing.

How could we refer to Christ as "Father"? One way is right there in verse 12. What is it? He is "the Father of heaven and earth." Now, I would like to suggest that the people Samuel was teaching at this time were not spiritually immature. They are well based in the gospel, because this discussion is for those who understand the gospel. Really, Christ has the title of Father because he is the Father of heaven and earth. He created all things. How else would he be the Father?

[Student answer:] Through the Atonement, we are spiritually begotten by him.

We stressed in our last lecture that it is through Christ that we have that second chance. It is through Christ that the spiritual rebirth begins, and if we are successful in it, it can end in eternal life.

Let's take a moment and look at that one. Turn with me to Mosiah 5:7. You know it reminds me of when I was growing up and I was finally able to be baptized. Because of the situation in the family, Mom took me to the bishop to be interviewed. When we got there, the bishop sat me down and said, "Young man, are you morally clean?" I think he had to ask me that because I was eleven years old then. I said, "Yes, but I don't brush my teeth like I should." Wouldn't it be neat if we could be that innocent and not have to worry about life except for brushing our teeth. All of us have done and said things wrong. We've all had evil thoughts, and so forth. Part of Christ's title has to do with this. Look at verses 7 and 8:

And now, because of the covenant which ye have made  
[baptism] ye shall be called the children of Christ, his sons, and

his daughters; for behold, this day he hath spiritually begotten you; for ye say that your hearts are changed through faith on his name; therefore, ye are born of him and have become his sons and his daughters.

And under this head ye are made free, and there is no other head whereby ye can be made free. There is no other name given whereby salvation cometh; therefore, I would that ye should take upon you the name of Christ, all you that have entered into the covenant with God that ye should be obedient unto the end of your lives.

So, we have the title of Father because of spiritual rebirth. Any other reason we can refer to him as having the title of Father? Go with me to 3 Nephi. By the way, I am not smart enough to think of this on my own. It comes from the Brethren. In 1909 they gave an official declaration on this explaining the three ways in which Christ can be the Father and have that title. Let's look at 3 Nephi 11:6-7: "And behold, the third time they did understand the voice which they heard; and it said unto them: Behold my Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, in whom I have glorified my name—hear ye him." Why else do we refer to him as Father? He simply speaks for the Father. And the Brethren called that "divine investiture of authority," which simply means that he speaks and acts for the Father. He will quote the Father, almost like a lawyer who represents me in a court of law can speak for me and talk as if he were me. The Son speaks for the Father, so the Son has the title of Father.

Now, I must add one more thing before we proceed with the account of Helaman. Christ is the Father of heaven and earth. He is the Creator of all things, except when it comes to us. I think this doctrine is so important, because it helps us. We sing: "I am a child of God / And he has sent me here." I was recently reading a statement by Elder McConkie, and I think I'll read it to you before we proceed. He simply stated: "From other sacred sources we know that Jehovah-Christ, assisted by "many of the noble and great ones" (Abraham 3:22), of whom Michael is but an illustration, did in fact create the earth and all forms of plant and animal life on the face thereof. But when it came to placing man on earth, there was a change in Creators. That is, the Father himself became personally involved. All things were created by the Son, using the power delegated by the Father, except man. In the spirit and

again in the flesh, man was created by the Father. There was no delegation of authority where the crowning creature of creation was concerned.”<sup>1</sup>

So, we literally are the children of Father in Heaven, but Christ becomes the Father through divine investiture of authority. He speaks and acts for the father through spiritual rebirth and through being the creator of both heaven and earth. Does that make sense?

Let’s turn the page to Helaman 14:20–21:

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.

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.

Moses tells us that all things bear witness of Christ (see Moses 6:63). I thought about this one day when I was watching my boy’s soccer game. He was losing, so I got a little bored and walked over the hill. As I went over the hill, there was a river there, and all these rocks were everywhere. I remember looking at the rocks and thinking of the Atonement. Even rocks can bear witness of the Atonement. And I thought about what occurred at or around about at the time of the Atonement. Rocks were broken up. Go to the next verse, verse 22: “Yea, they shall be rent in twain, and shall ere 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.” Isn’t that something? All the rocks were broken up. All things bear witness of him.

For a moment, go to Moses 6:63: “Behold, all things have their likeness, and all things are created and made to bear record of me [this is Christ speaking], both things which are temporal, and things which are spiritual; things which are in the heavens above, and things which are on the earth, and things which

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<sup>1</sup> Bruce R. McConkie, *The Promised Messiah* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1978), 61.

are in the earth, and things which are under the earth, both above and beneath: all things bear record of me." Even rocks bear record of him. So, I bear witness that that is a powerful teaching from Moses.

Let's go back to Helaman 14:24–25, where we start to find out the effect of Christ's death and resurrection: "And many highways shall be broken up, and many cities shall become desolate. And many graves shall be opened, and shall yield up many of their dead; and many saints shall appear unto many. 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." Now, I bear witness that Christ did something that, as a sinless man, justice didn't demand him to do. The one who brought light into the world had to face darkness. The one who had no sin took on our sins and suffered for them. He really was the one who should have had peace, but he had anything but that. I bear witness that he did that for us, and even nature responded in the way that the cities, the mountains, the tempests, and all that he created responded to his death and to his resurrection.

Let's move on to Helaman 15:1–4. I have quoted it once before, but President Ezra Taft Benson said: "God will have a humble people. Either we can choose to be humble or we can be compelled to be humble. . . . Let us choose to be humble."<sup>2</sup>

Verses 1–4:

And now, my beloved brethren, behold, I declare unto you that except ye shall repent your houses shall be left unto you desolate.

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.

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.

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<sup>2</sup> Ezra Taft Benson, "Beware of Pride," *ENSIGN* (May 1989): 6.

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.

What do you think he meant by that? We often say that God loves all his children. But here we were told that he loved the Nephites, but he hated the Lamanites because of their deeds that have become evil continually. What is meant by that?

[Student answer:] He had to withhold his blessings because they weren't living righteously.

Does he have to? Is that true doctrine? Does God have to withhold blessings when we don't do what he says? It is true, isn't it?

Is there any other reason he might say that he loves the Nephites and that he hates the Lamanites because of the deeds that they have done? Any other feelings on that? In fact you might remember the scripture, "I, the Lord, am bound when ye do what I say; but when ye do not what I say, ye have no promise" (D&C 82:10). "I, the Lord, am bound," he says. For just a moment, turn to Doctrine and Covenants 82:10. We always read verse 10, but we hardly ever read verses 8 and 9. There is something there. As we have talked about prophets, we've said that if you follow the prophet, you will prosper. In verse 10, of course, the Lord is bound. There is no question. When President Benson says, "You can choose to be humble or be compelled to be humble," I think the doctrine is very clear that God is bound. I don't think he appreciates or enjoys punishing anybody, but he is bound, just like we are, by law.

But watch verses 8 and 9: "And again, I say unto you, I give unto you a new commandment, that you may understand my will concerning you; Or, in other words, I give unto you directions how you may act before me, that it may turn to you for your salvation." When it comes from the Lord or his prophets, commandments and counsel are the same. He says, "I give unto you commandments, or in other words, I gave unto you directions." It is the same.

There is a story—and I never remember it, but it's Church history. Do you remember the story of the Hahn's Mill Massacre? Do you remember what happened there? Many lives of the Saints were taken. What you may not know is that Hahn went to the Prophet Joseph and asked for counsel. He asked the

prophet, "Do you suggest that we come to Far West?" The Prophet replied, "By all means, come to Far West." And Hahn said, after a while, that he felt it would be okay for them to stay at Hahn's Mill, that they could go into the shed and protect themselves, and by staying there, they would be able to keep their lands.

The Prophet said, "Do as you feel, but I counsel you to come in and be with the Saints. I fear you will be slaughtered in a fearful manner if you don't."<sup>3</sup> Hahn left, saying he felt confident they would be protected. Well, you know the rest of the story. We lost a lot of Latter-day Saints through that experience.

Now, when Samuel the Lamanite speaks, or when Gordon B. Hinckley speaks, or Howard W. Hunter, or Joseph Smith, whether it's commandment or counsel, I would suggest that it is the same. And the Lord is bound. If we follow his prophets, we prosper. If we don't, then we are punished.

Let's turn back and read Helaman 15:7:

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—

"A mighty change of heart"—one of the great statements of the scriptures (see also Alma 5:12–14). Really, "when you choose to follow Christ, you choose to be changed."<sup>4</sup> Verse 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." Of course, through Christ we are made free.

Verse 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." Whom are we talking about here? Who were those who buried their weapons of war? Do you recall?

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<sup>3</sup> See Daniel Tyler, "Recollections of the Prophet Joseph Smith," *Juvenile Instructor* 27 (1892): 95.

<sup>4</sup> Ezra Taft Benson, *The Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1988), 77.

[Student answer:] The people of Ammon, the people who were converted from the Anti-Nephi-Lehies.

Continue with verse 9: "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."

You will recall that these were the people of Ammon. They buried their swords deep into the earth so that they wouldn't touch them. It has always been a great strength in my life to learn that if there is a sin that bothers me, I put it far away. I bury it. In my journals I put a little star in my journal and explain little commandments, if you will, like burying the sword, so that I don't even touch it. I don't even get near it.

An example I can think of—and I have received his permission to share it—is when my son once asked me to come downstairs. He was a little boy. I went downstairs, and he said that he had found a car on the floor of the store. I looked at it—and of course, fathers *know*—and I said, "That's a nice little car."

He said, "Yes, I found it on the floor of the store."

I said, "You didn't find it on the floor, did you?"

And he started to cry and said that he had taken it.

I said, "We're going to have to return it."

I picked him up and took him back to the store. If you have done that, you know how painful it is. He started to cry, and he cried so hard that he couldn't catch his breath. I took him into the store and walked up to the girl behind the counter. I said that he had something that he wanted to give you. He held it out and said, "I took your car, and I'm sorry."

She was so sweet. She was about eighteen years old, and she reached out and hugged him. She said, "It's okay, honey. You will be all right."

I remember that on the way home, we had a long talk about how he could prevent it from happening again. We talked about specifically how maybe he could stay with friends and not go in alone. Or that he could be with Mom and Dad. And that way, he would be kept from doing it again. It is interesting that I never told my other children that, because most of them didn't have the

problem. But for him, it was a special rule that he was going to follow. He wouldn't go in stores alone.

Years later, another child—I don't want you to think all my children are dishonest—but another child took something. We didn't know what to do. I saw my son and said, "I have an assignment for you. Would you take her and go down to the store and have her give back what she took?" He knew well how to do it, and he took her back. She gave back what she had taken.

When he came back we took a ride together. As we were riding, he said, "You know, Dad, remember the time I took the car from the store?"

I said, "Yes."

He said, "You know, I've never done it since." He was quite a bit older. He was a teenager. I thought at the time that if we set little rules—and I am not sure that is what prevented it—but if we set little rules, it will help us prevent having to go through repentance over and over. Remember what the Prophet Joseph Smith said about how it is not pleasing to God when we trifle with repentance and when we have to repent of the same thing all the time?<sup>5</sup>

The next verse, let's go to Helaman 16 and start with verse 1. Notice that they go to Nephi, those who do repent, those who choose to be humble and they go to one that holds the proper authority, to be baptized.

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. [It occurs to me that at the first of the book, he said "Samuel, *a* Lamanite." And now it says "Samuel *the* Lamanite." I wonder if perhaps when you fill and magnify your calling, you receive a little more prominence. He is now "Samuel *the* Lamanite."] 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.

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. (Helaman 16:1-2)

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<sup>5</sup> See Joseph Fielding Smith, comp., *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 148.

When we hear the prophet, we have several kinds of options. One is expressed in that verse. Did you hear it? What was the reaction?

[Student answer:] The first reaction would be to follow the prophet's voice and go and do something about it.

We have the choice to follow the prophet. What is the next action?

[Student answer:] Reject him and get angry.

Anger! If you will, turn with me to 2 Nephi 28:20–22. It seems to me there are three different responses we can have to a prophet, seer, and revelator. Let's read verses 20 and 21: "For behold, at that day shall he rage in the hearts of the children of men, and stir them up to anger against that which is good. And others will he pacify, and lull them away into carnal security, that they will say: All is well in Zion; yea, Zion prospereth, all is well—and thus the devil cheateth their souls, and leadeth them away carefully down to hell." Okay, there are two reactions we can have: One is anger; one is to be pacified. When I was called to be bishop (I don't think this individual would mind me sharing this), I was fairly young, and I had six children and was working on my doctorate. I was busy, and I kept wondering why the Lord would call me to be bishop at that age.

One day, one of the older men in the ward walked in and said that he wanted to apologize. I thought, "For what?" He said that he wanted me to know that it had come to him that really it should have been one of the older men in the ward who should have been bishop, but they weren't prepared. They weren't ready. "I want to apologize," he said. And as he said it, I felt it. I felt that what he was saying was true. So, I bear witness that one of the ways we can respond to the prophet, or to the Lord, is to follow him.

We do have other options: First, we can be angry, or second—and I imagine most of us struggle with this one—we can be pacified. We cannot prepare. Coach Edwards, speaking of the BYU team, in a priesthood meeting once, basically said, "The greatest athletes I have are not those who have the

will to win. That is not it. The greatest athletes I have are the ones who have the will to prepare.”<sup>6</sup> So, be careful of being pacified.

Now, let’s find the next way we can react. It’s found in verse 22: “And behold, others he flattereth away, and telleth them there is no hell; and he saith unto them: I am no devil, for there is none—and thus he whispereth in their ears, until he grasps them with his awful chains, from whence there is no deliverance.” Remember, “to be learned is good if [you] hearken unto the counsels of God” (2 Nephi 9:29). That is probably the greatest scripture we could ever get on how Satan flatters us—he makes us feel that we know more than God. To be learned is good—I bear witness to that—as long as we hearken unto the prophets.

There is one more thing I would like to say about Helaman 16:1–3, about when it says they were angered with him, and the Spirit of the Lord was with him, insomuch as they could not hit him. Let’s read verse 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.” I bear witness that when you feel the Spirit and you act upon it—and remember, you have to be very quiet inside when it tells you to do something—that it will cause you to follow the prophet. Years ago, President Heber J. Grant said that there is probably only—he doesn’t worry or concern himself about boys and girls or young men or women who honestly and conscientiously supplicate the Lord twice a day for guidance of the Spirit. In fact, let me read it. He said:

I have little or no fear for the boy or the girl, the young man or the young woman, who honestly and conscientiously supplicates God twice a day for the guidance of His Spirit. I am sure that when temptation comes they will have the strength to overcome it by the inspiration that shall be given to them. Supplicating the Lord for the guidance of His Spirit places around us a safeguard, and if we earnestly and honestly seek the guidance of the Spirit of the Lord, I can assure you that we will receive it.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> See R. LaVell Edwards, “Prepare for a Mission,” *ENSIGN* (November 1984): 44.

<sup>7</sup> Heber J. Grant, *The Utah Genealogical and Historical Magazine* 27 (July 1926): 90–91. See also *The Improvement Era, Gospel Standards: Selections from the Sermons and Writings of Heber J. Grant* (Salt Lake City: The Improvement Era, 1943), 26.

See, the key is this: If you supplicate the Lord twice a day for his Spirit—sincerely, not just going through the motions, but honestly, first, it impels you to do something, and second, it places around you a safeguard. It really is a protection.

Years ago, President Romney gave a talk wherein he said that there is a simple, four-point program for obtaining and keeping the Spirit. He said that if we will do this, we will obtain and keep the Spirit and will go through this life successfully, no matter what other people do or say. I thought, “Gee, I like simple things.” So, I put it to memory. He said: (1) You should pray diligently; (2) you should study and learn the gospel; (3) you should live righteously, which means basically repent and keep following the Lord; and (4) give service in the Church.<sup>8</sup> I put that simple four-point program on a card and kept it in my wallet, and I noticed in my journal writing that things were changing. I felt the Spirit more often. I obtained the Spirit, and it started to help me to change. Again, it helped me, if you will, to prevent me from doing those things in my life that weren’t pleasing to the Lord. The Spirit causes that change, as we learn in Mosiah 5:2:

And they all cried with one voice, saying: Yea, we believe all the words which thou hast spoken unto us; and also, we know of their surety and truth, because of the Spirit of the Lord Omnipotent, which has wrought a mighty change in us, or in our hearts, that we have no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually.

Now, let me ask you a question: What caused the mighty change? Of course, it is the Lord Jesus Christ. We know that. Through Christ we can be born again. We can change. We can change completely, and we can stay changed. But what was the instrument that caused the change? Do you see it? The Spirit. It’s the Spirit of the Lord. That is why it is so critical to obtain and keep the Spirit.

You know how difficult it is to change. The people who listened to Samuel, the ones that changed, had the Spirit. The ones that didn’t have the Spirit didn’t change. As a young boy, I was sitting in conference and was clear

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<sup>8</sup> Marion G. Romney, “Guidance of the Holy Spirit,” *ENSIGN* (January 1980): 5.

in the back next to a girl I kind of liked. We were sitting there listening to conference. You know how your legs sometimes jiggle when you get nervous? You are sitting in a chair, and your legs start to jiggle. Have you ever done that? Well, I had my legs on the back of a chair, and I started to jiggle. The guy in front of me started to jiggle. Pretty soon he stopped and turned around and said, "Young man, would you quit that?" It just embarrassed me to death. I said, "I'm sorry. I am really sorry." Pretty soon, about a minute later, he started to jiggle again. My leg was going again. I didn't mean to. Pretty soon he stopped and turned around and said, "Young man, I asked you to quit that." I am sure I was nervous because of the girl next to me. She was cute. I thought this was terrible, so I quit again. But a minute later, he started jiggling again. This time, he stopped and turned around and looked at me, got his entire family, and moved. I thought I was going to die. It isn't easy to change! I bear witness that it is not easy to change—especially spiritual things. It is not easy to change. But I bear witness that through the Spirit—which is what got them to Nephi when Samuel spoke to them—we can change. We can change completely, and we can stay changed.

Let's go back to Helaman 16:4: "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." Now it's time to get serious. The signs start to be fulfilled. Everything starts to take place that was prophesied. Look at verses 13 and 14: "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. 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." That is a great principle. There is a waiting time between the time that we are obedient—and I am going to speak to those of us who strive to be obedient—and the time the blessings come. There is always a waiting time. Don't get impatient.

Elder Neal A. Maxwell used to say it this way: "Patience is . . . accepting a divine rhythm to life."<sup>9</sup> I think that is critical to remember. In life, there is a divine rhythm. You must accept that and realize that obedience will bring blessings, but it takes time. Go with me to Doctrine and Covenants 98:1–2. This is speaking of the wicked, but it's about the same for the righteous, in fact:

Verily I say unto you my friends, fear not, let your hearts be comforted; yea, rejoice evermore, and in everything give thanks;

Waiting patiently on the Lord, for your prayers have entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth, and are recorded with this seal and testament—the Lord hath sworn and decreed that they shall be granted.

They will be. Obedience brings that. I must say that disobedience also will bring punishment. During that waiting time, the wicked think they are getting away with something. But I promise you they are not. They really are not. So, remember prolonged obedience, folks! Accepting the divine rhythm of life will bring the blessings.

As a young boy, I used to go down to an old wall at the end of my block. The wall was big. It was huge. I remember that it had some words on it that were not very nice, and I recall I used to climb on top of it and watch the trains go by. As the trains would go by—I used to love that—I would wave to the caboose as it went by. But it would scratch me up pretty bad as I tried to climb to the top of the wall. I would bring my arms over, and as a little boy, it used to scratch me up and hurt me. But I loved the trains, so I got up there.

Well, as the years went by, my family moved from the town, and I went on a mission and came back. When I returned, my mom said, "How would you like to go back to the place where you grew up?" I thought, "Gee, that would be wonderful." Of course, I didn't want to see our home. I wanted to see my wall. So, when we got on the block, she went into the home and I went to where the wall was. As I ran down the street, I fully expected to see this huge wall. But when I walked up, the wall came about to my knees. I remember that when I looked at it, I almost laughed at it. I stepped right over the top of

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<sup>9</sup> Neal A. Maxwell, *Notwithstanding My Weakness* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981), 64.

it and looked back at it. I realized that I had grown up, that I, in fact, had become mature, and the wall didn't scrape me up any more. In fact, it was almost funny looking. I bear witness that as we participate in the Atonement, as we follow the prophets, as we do those little things that help us to obtain and keep the Spirit, those problems that seem so significant now we will be able to step over the top of. It won't be that rough.

Let's go back to Helaman 16:15-16:

Nevertheless, the people began to harden their hearts [Remember, you can either harden, or you can soften], 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:

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.

In other words, they are saying, "They are guessing right." I would suggest that those who have the Spirit understand the things of the Spirit. Those who don't think it's just guessing. Let's read the next verse:

And they began to reason and to contend among themselves, saying:

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

Again, those who have the Spirit understand; those who don't think, "It is foolishness. It is not reasonable." Recall when I talked about the simple four-part program for obtaining and keeping the Spirit and those things that will help you to prevent sins instead of having to go through redemption all the time. Those four steps, President Romney said, will have you connect up with the Spirit.<sup>10</sup> Recall, in the Old Testament, the story of the brazen serpent. The prophet put the brazen serpent upon the stick. The children of Israel were rebellious, and they were being bitten by the flying serpents because they were rebellious. Do you remember what they were supposed to do to be healed? All they had to do was look. Do you recall what the Book of Mormon

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<sup>10</sup> Romney, "Guidance," 5.

tells us about their looking? What happened? How many looked? Did they look? They didn't look. Most of them didn't look. Do you recall why?

[Student answer:] It was too easy.

Yes, it was too easy. Can we read that for just a moment. Go to 1 Nephi 17:40:

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.

And he did straiten them in the wilderness with his rod; for they hardened their hearts, even as ye have; and the Lord straitened them because of their iniquity. He sent fiery flying serpents among them; and after they were bitten he prepared a way that they might be healed; and the labor which they had to perform was to look; and because of the simpleness of the way, or the easiness of it, there were many who perished.

Okay, you can see there that the reason they didn't look at the brazen serpent was that it was too simple. And that is the word that President Romney used. It was a simple, four-part program. I was in a lecture one day, and the person who was speaking to us leaned back against the desk and said, "Would you tell me how you obtain and keep the Spirit?" It was a group of doctorate students, and sometimes, if you are not careful, you think you know something. And so as we were talking about how you get the Spirit, I finally thought, "Forget it, I am just going to share." Now, we were all concerned about our grades and didn't want to say the wrong thing, but I raised my hand and said, "Well, I just read in the *Ensign* that there is a simple four-part program for obtaining and keeping the Spirit." I said, first, you pray diligently; second, you study and learn the gospel; third, you live righteously; and fourth, you give service in the Church. President Romney said if you will do those four simple things, you will obtain and keep the Spirit and will go through this life successfully, no matter what people say or do." And I will never forget that he kind of straightened up, shook his head, and, leaning against the desk, said, "No, that's too simple." And I kind of pictured this brazen serpent in the wilderness and the Israelites who didn't look because it was too simple. So I bear witness that from these prophets, seers, and revelators, we learn simple things.

If you will, before we go back to Helaman, go with me to Doctrine and Covenants 64:33. It reads: "Wherefore, be not weary in well-doing, for ye are laying the foundation of a great work. And out of small things proceedeth that which is great." I bear witness that is true doctrine. Out of small things proceeds that which is great. I might add that small acts lead to great consequences. That goes for both righteousness and also for wickedness. Out of small things or acts, lead big consequences.

Now, let's finish reading the last few verses of Helaman 16, beginning with verse 22:

And many more things did the people imagine up in their hearts, which were foolish and vain [meaning "empty"]; 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 [again, remember that you can be hardened or you can be softened] and against that which should come.

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

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

And thus ended the book of Helaman, according to the record of Helaman and his sons.

I hit that last line and it occurs to me that salvation really is a family matter; we really are concerned about each other. And of course, we are all brothers and sisters in the gospel. We are all sons and daughters of our Heavenly Father. And through our mediator, we can be forgiven. It occurs to me that this is our Father's plan, and that, if you remember, we are in the center part of the plan. The center part is where we are tested by trials and temptations and perhaps by tragedy. And it also occurs to me that as we have read the script today, we have learned that it tells us how we can, by small and simple things, have great things happen in our lives. We have the right to be either hardened or softened. By following prophets, seers, and revelators, we can prosper or we can suffer as Christ suffered.

Every morning I get my boys and my girls up, and we have scripture study. We sit them on the couch, and every morning, they go to sleep. I try to

wake them up, and we get to reading scriptures. I have often wondered, "Does it do any good to read the script together, yea, even as they sleep?" Then I remember a quotation I put to memory years ago. President Ezra Taft Benson said: "When individual members and families immerse themselves in the scriptures regularly and consistently, . . . other areas of activity will automatically come. Testimonies will increase. Commitment will be strengthened. Families will be fortified [I like that one]. Personal revelation will flow."<sup>11</sup> I've thought a lot about that. I think it really does help very much if we know the script, even if they are sleeping—at least, they appear to be sleeping. One day I was taking my boy to school, and he perked up and asked a question about what we had studied that morning. He really was concerned about it. The fact is that his eyes were closed, but he really was listening, and he was very concerned about the doctrine.

I really want to bear witness that we need to know the script. It is important that as we do read the script together, we realize that the promises are real, that our commitment will be strengthened, that our testimonies will in fact increase, that our families will be fortified, and that personal revelation will flow. More important is what will happen among our loved ones, our children. Turn to 3 Nephi 9:20. This is Nephi speaking to the Lamanites. We have been working with a whole chapter of Samuel, a Lamanite—or rather, Samuel *the* Lamanite. Nephi says:

And ye shall offer for a sacrifice unto me a broken heart and a contrite spirit. And whoso cometh unto me with a broken heart and a contrite spirit, him will I baptize with fire and with the Holy Ghost, even as the Lamanites, because of their faith in me at the time of their conversion, were baptized with fire and with the Holy Ghost, [and then these five words:] and they knew it not.

When you do those little things that help you obtain and keep the Spirit, it is not earth-shattering. You hardly ever recognize it is happening. It is kind of like grass. You don't see it grow, but it grows. These Lamanites, like Samuel and those who were righteous, really did become converted by following the prophet, by following the promptings of the Spirit, but they knew it not. It is a

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<sup>11</sup> Ezra Taft Benson, "The Power of the Word," *ENSIGN* 16 (May 1986): 81. See also *Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson*, 44.

quiet process. So, I would encourage us to remember that as we believe in God, we will be established. When we believe in his prophets, we will prosper. And I leave that witness with you in the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.