
Helaman 10 — Whatsoever Ye Shall Seal — The Power of Heaven Given to a Trusted Man

Helaman 10: the cornerstone. The multitude, divided over Nephi after the detection of Seantum, disperses and leaves him standing alone. Walking home, cast down and pondering the wickedness of his people, Nephi hears a voice. God blesses him: 'because thou hast with unwearyingness declared the word... and hast not feared them, and hast not sought thine own life, but hast sought my will,' the Lord will make him 'mighty in word and in deed, in faith and in works; yea, even that all things shall be done unto thee according to thy word, for thou shalt not ask that which is contrary to my will.' Then the gift itself: 'Behold, thou art Nephi, and I am God... 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' — power to smite with famine and pestilence, to rend the temple, to level a mountain. The Lord commands him to declare repentance or destruction. And Nephi, in the chapter's quiet proof of why he could be trusted with such power, does not even go home: he turns at once and returns to the scattered multitudes to preach. They harden, revile, and seek to imprison him, but he is 'taken by the Spirit and conveyed away out of the midst of them,' and goes from multitude to multitude declaring the word until the people, refusing it, divide and begin to slay one another. The chapter is the Book of Mormon's great statement of the sealing power — and of the single condition that makes such power safe: a will so surrendered to God that it cannot ask amiss.

This is the chapter where God hands a mortal man the power of heaven, and it is essential to read it slowly, because the Book of Mormon is doing something here that should stop us cold. God says to Nephi: *whatsoever ye shall seal on earth shall be sealed in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven* (v. 7). This is the sealing power — the same power Christ will give Peter at Caesarea Philippi, *whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven* (Matt. 16:19) — the authority to bind in heaven what is bound on earth, the power that stands behind temples and covenants and the marriages and ordinances meant to last forever. And it is given here, in a quiet moment, to a man walking home alone and discouraged. The chapter is one of the towering doctrinal moments of the book. But the deepest thing in it is not the power. It is the *reason* God can safely give the power — and that reason is the key to everything.

Hebrew Word Studies

■**atam** (אָתָם) — "to seal, affix a seal, close up, make secure" — ■**atam**, to seal as with a signet; to close, secure, or authenticate by a seal; to make binding and inviolable. A sealed thing is fixed, ratified, made permanent — what is sealed by authority on earth is held secure v. 7 (whatsoever ye shall seal on earth shall be sealed in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven). The power God gives Nephi — to *seal* — runs on the Hebrew ■**atam**, and the ancient picture behind the word is the signet, the seal pressed into wax or clay to make a thing official, binding, and permanent. To *seal* a document was to *authenticate* it with the authority of the one whose seal it bore, and to make it *secure* — a sealed scroll could not be lawfully opened or altered. So ■**atam** carries two ideas at once: *authority* (the seal of the king ratifies; what is sealed is made official) and *permanence* (the seal closes and secures; what is sealed is fixed). Both are vivid in scripture. Jezebel writes letters *in Ahab's name, and sealed them with his seal* (1 Kgs. 21:8) — the seal makes the king's authority act at a distance. Daniel's prophecy is *sealed... till the time of the end* (Dan. 12:4) — the seal makes a thing secure and fixed until its appointed time. And the redeemed are *sealed* with the Spirit, *the seal of the living God* set upon the foreheads of his servants (Eph. 1:13; Rev. 7:2–3) — the seal marks them as God's own, secured for the day of redemption. Now hold this against what Jesus gives Peter, because Nephi's power is identical: *I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven* (Matt. 16:19). Nephi receives the same authority — *whatsoever ye shall seal on earth shall be sealed in heaven* — the power to bind in heaven what is bound on earth, to make earthly acts *heavenly-permanent*. This is the sealing power, the authority behind every ordinance meant to last beyond death — the covenants, the temple bonds, the relationships sealed *for time and all eternity*. What such a man seals on earth, heaven holds. And the staggering thing is the *reciprocity*: heaven binds itself to the earthly act. God so trusts the sealed servant that he ratifies in heaven what the servant ratifies on earth. Which is exactly why the gift is hedged by the will. Heaven can bind itself to Nephi's word *only because* Nephi's word will never be anything but God's own will (v. 5) — the seal carries the king's authority only because the one who holds it will press it only where the king would. A signet in a faithless hand would forge the king's name; a signet in a faithful hand extends the king's reign. God hands Nephi the signet of heaven *because* Nephi has become a man who will stamp it only where God himself would stamp it. The sealing power is the king's own authority lent to a hand that has become trustworthy enough to wield it as the king would — which is to say, a hand whose will is no longer its own.

aman / amen (אָמֵן / אָמֵן) — "to be firm, faithful, reliable, trustworthy" (**aman**) — the root of **emunah** (faithfulness) and of **amen** ("truly, so be it, it is firm"). To be **aman** is to be solid, dependable, sure — a thing or person that can be leaned on and will not give way; **amen** is the word that ratifies, affirming "it is firm, let it stand" vv. 4–5 (thou hast sought my will... all things shall be done unto thee according to thy word, for thou shalt not ask that which is contrary to my will). Underneath the safety clause of Helaman 10 — *all things shall be done according to thy word, for thou shalt not ask contrary to my will* — lies the great Hebrew root **aman**, "to be firm, faithful, reliable," the root from which we get both **emunah**, faithfulness, and the familiar word **amen**. **Aman** describes what is solid, steadfast, trustworthy — a thing that holds, that does not fail, that can be leaned on with full weight. A faithful servant is *ne'eman*, one who can be entrusted with anything because he will not betray the trust: *Moses... is faithful (ne'eman) in all mine house* (Num. 12:7); the *faithful* witness, the *faithful* steward, the *sure (ne'eman)* covenant. And **amen** — the word we say at the end of prayers — is the same root: it means "it is firm, it is sure, so let it be," an affirmation that something is reliable and may be trusted to stand. When you say **amen** to a prayer, you are saying "this is firm; let it be established." Now see how perfectly this illumines the trust God places in Nephi. God can promise that *all things shall be done according to thy word* only because Nephi has become *ne'eman* — faithful, firm, trustworthy through and through, a man whose will has been so conformed to God's that it has become reliable in the deepest sense: it will not deviate, will not betray, will not ask amiss. In effect, God can say **amen** in advance to whatever Nephi will ask — "so be it, let it stand" — because he knows Nephi's asking will always already be **amen** to God's own will. The servant's word and the Master's will have become so aligned that God can ratify the servant's requests sight unseen. This is the fruit of a lifetime of **emunah**: Nephi served *with unwearyingness*, did not seek his own life, sought God's will and not his own (v. 4) — and the long faithfulness made him *ne'eman*, trustworthy, firm, until God could hand him a power that would destroy a faithless man, knowing it was perfectly safe. There is a profound lesson here about how trust is built, with God and in any relationship: it is the slow accumulation of **aman**, of being found firm and faithful in small things, that finally makes a person trustworthy with great things. *He that is faithful (ne'eman) in that which is least is faithful also in much* (Luke 16:10). Nephi was faithful in the least — the unwearying, unglamorous, rejected preaching, day after day, seeking nothing for himself — and so he could be trusted with the most. The sealing power was not a sudden gift to a stranger; it was the natural extension of trust to a will that had proven, over a lifetime, that it was **aman** — firm, faithful, and so wholly God's that God could say **amen** to it forever.

From the Chapter's Architecture

``cross-references Matt. 16:19 (*I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven — the identical sealing/binding power given to Peter, v. 7*); Matt. 18:18; John 20:23 (*the binding and loosing extended to the apostles — the authority Nephi receives*); Eph. 1:13; Rev. 7:2–3 (*the faithful sealed with the seal of the living God — ■atam, the seal that marks and secures, v. 7*); 1 Kgs. 17:1; 18:41–45 (*Elijah shutting and opening the heavens by his word — the prophet given power over the elements, the model for vv. 6–9 and Hel. 11*); Num. 12:7 (*my servant Moses... is faithful — ne'eman — in all mine house — the trusted servant, the aman that qualifies Nephi, v. 4*); Luke 16:10 (*he that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much — the long faithfulness that earns great trust, vv. 4–5*); James 4:3 (*ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss — the opposite of Nephi, who shall not ask that which is contrary to my will, v. 5*); John 15:7 (*if ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you — the conformed will whose asking is granted, v. 5*); Alma 48:11–17 (*Moroni who sought not for power — the same principle, power safe only in the unambitious, fulfilled in Nephi*); Hel. 5:4 (*Nephi yielding up the judgment-seat — the man who walked away from power now given the keys of heaven*); Hel. 11:3–18 (*Nephi using the sealing power to call down and then lift a famine — the first great exercise of the gift, choosing mercy over destruction*); Acts 8:39 (*Philip caught away by the Spirit — the prophet taken by the Spirit and conveyed away, v. 16*); 3 Ne. 28:13–22 (*the translated disciples conveyed and preserved by the Spirit — the same power of transport, v. 16*). ``