
Helaman 13 — The Lamanite on the Wall — Samuel and the Curse of Slippery Riches

Helaman 13: the eighty-sixth year. The Nephites remain in great wickedness while the Lamanites keep the commandments — and God sends a Lamanite to preach repentance to the Nephites. Samuel comes to Zarahemla, preaches many days, is cast out, and is about to go home when the voice of the Lord sends him back. Refused entry to the city, he climbs the wall and prophesies whatever the Lord puts into his heart. He declares that the sword of justice hangs over the Nephites and will fall within four hundred years unless they repent through faith in Jesus Christ, who shall come and be slain for his people; that the city is spared only for the righteous within it, and when they cast out the righteous they will be ripe for destruction. He pronounces a curse on the land and on their riches: because they have set their hearts on their treasures and not on the God who gave them, their treasures shall become slippery — laid down and gone by morning, hidden and lost — so that in the day of their poverty they cannot hold them. He exposes the great inversion of their hearts: they reject the prophet who testifies of their sins and embrace the flatterer who says 'all is well... walk after the pride of your own hearts,' lifting him up and clothing him in costly apparel. And he names the procrastinated doom: 'ye have procrastinated the day of your salvation until it is everlastingly too late.' The chapter is the great reversal at its sharpest — a despised Lamanite on a wall, crying repentance to a chosen people who will not hear — and the Book of Mormon's most pointed sermon on riches that cannot hold.

The book of Helaman has been building toward a reversal, and here it arrives at its most pointed: God sends a *Lamanite* to preach repentance to the Nephites, and the Nephites throw him out. Sit with how complete that inversion is. For five hundred years the Nephites have been the chosen people and the Lamanites the fallen enemy laboring under the false traditions of their fathers. And now, in the eighty-sixth year, *the Nephites did still remain in wickedness... while the Lamanites did observe strictly to keep the commandments of God* (v. 1), and God's instrument of mercy to his chosen people is a man from the despised nation, standing on a city wall the Nephites won't even let him enter, crying the word of the Lord down at people who are reaching for stones. The whole moral order has flipped. The "cursed" preach; the "chosen" reject. Samuel the Lamanite is the living rebuke of every assumption the Nephites have made about who they are.

Hebrew Word Studies

■*alaaq* / ■*alaaqlaaqqot* (חֲלָק / חֲלָקִים) — "smooth, slippery" (■*alaaq*) and "slippery places" (■*alaaqlaaqqot*) — ■*alaaq*, smooth, slick, free of friction; ■*alaaqlaaqqot*, slippery ground, treacherous footing that gives way. The same root yields "smooth/flattering" (of speech) and "slippery" (of footing) — and a third sense, "to divide, apportion" (of plunder) vv. 31–36 (he curseth your riches, that they become slippery, that ye cannot hold them... all things are become slippery, and we cannot hold them). The curse of *slippery riches* runs on the Hebrew root ■*alaaq*, "smooth, slick" — and this is the same root that has haunted the whole book of Helaman, for ■*alaaq* is also the word for the *smooth, flattering tongue*. Gadianton was *expert in many words*, his speech *smoother than butter* (■*alaaq*); and now the riches the Nephites loved are cursed to become ■*alaaqlaaqqot*, slippery, sliding away in the hand. The same false smoothness runs through both — the smooth words they believed and the smooth wealth they trusted, neither of which gives any footing. And the deepest biblical home of ■*alaaqlaaqqot* is a Psalm that could be a commentary on this whole chapter. Asaph, envying the prosperity of the wicked, almost slips — until he goes into the sanctuary and understands their end: *Surely thou didst set them in slippery places* (■*alaaqlaaqqot*): *thou castedst them down into destruction. How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment!* (Ps. 73:18–19). That is exactly Samuel's prophecy. The wicked who trust their riches are standing on *slippery places* — ground that looks like solid prosperity but offers no footing, and at the appointed moment slides them *down into destruction... in a moment*. Their wealth was never solid ground; it was ■*alaaqlaaqqot* all along, and the curse merely makes visible what was always true: that riches loved instead of God are slippery by nature, impossible to stand on, impossible to hold. The same Psalm-image recurs: *let their way be dark and slippery* (■*alaaqlaaqqot*) (Ps. 35:6); *they are exalted for a little while, but are gone and brought low* (Job 24:24). And there is a haunting precision in the *forms* the slipperiness takes (vv. 34–35): the tool laid down and gone by morning, the buried treasure that slips away, the sword reached for in battle and not there. A people whose security was entirely in their possessions discovers that possessions are smoke — here, then gone, ungraspable. Compare what Jesus says of the *only* treasure that holds: *lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven* (Matt. 6:19–20) — and notice that Samuel anticipates exactly this, for he says the curse spares the man who *hideth up his treasures unto the Lord* (v. 19), the one who lays up treasure in heaven rather than earth. Earthly treasure is ■*alaaq*, slippery; heavenly treasure holds. The whole tragedy of Helaman 13 is a people who spent their lives clutching slippery things — smooth words that flattered and smooth riches that gleamed — and found, in the end, that they had built their lives on ground that could not hold them, and *cast them down into destruction, as in a moment*. You cannot stand on what is smooth. You cannot keep what is slippery. And a heart set on either has set itself on a fall.

■*shalom shalom* (שָׁלוֹם שָׁלוֹם) — "peace, peace" — the doubled word *shalom*, "peace, wholeness, well-being," used by the false prophets to soothe a people who were in fact under judgment: crying "all is well" when all was not well, the comforting lie that flatters a sinner toward destruction vv. 27–28 (he will say... walk after the pride of your own hearts... and he saith that all is well, then ye will not find fault with him). Samuel's portrait of the flatterer the Nephites love — the man who *saith that all is well* (v. 28) — has a precise and damning biblical source in the false prophets of Jeremiah's day, who cried *shalom, shalom* when there was no peace. Jeremiah twice indicts them in identical words: *they have healed the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace (shalom, shalom); when there is no peace* (Jer. 6:14; 8:11). The image is of a physician treating a mortal wound *slightly* — a bandage over a cancer — soothing the patient with "all is well, all is well" while the disease kills him. That is exactly the flatterer Samuel describes: the false prophet who tells a sinning people *do this, and there is no iniquity... walk after the pride of your own hearts... all is well* (vv. 27–28). His message is *shalom shalom*, a counterfeit peace, a comfort that costs the comforter nothing and the comforted everything. And notice the genius of Samuel's analysis: the false *shalom* always *flatters*, and flattery always *sells*. The "all is well" prophet tells people their sins are not sins, their pride is not pride, their desires are holy — and people *love* to hear it, so they *lift him up... give unto him of their gold... clothe him with costly apparel* (v. 28). The lie that *all is well* is the most profitable message there is, because it asks nothing and threatens nothing and lets everyone keep doing exactly what they wanted. Set against it is the true prophet's word, which always *wounds before it heals* — *testifieth of your sins* (v. 26), names the disease, calls for repentance — and so is always hated, because nobody pays for a diagnosis of cancer. Ezekiel uses the same image: the false prophets *daubed the wall with untempered mortar*, a flimsy whitewash over a crumbling wall, *saying, Peace; and there was no peace* (Ezek. 13:10). The whitewash and the *shalom shalom* are the same false comfort — making a doomed thing look sound. And the contrast with the true peace is total. The real *shalom* God speaks (the *dibber shalom* of Alma 58, the peace spoken to Helaman's army in the prison) is a peace given *inside* repentance and faith, a wholeness that comes from being made right with God. The false *shalom shalom* is a peace offered *instead* of repentance, a drug that numbs the patient so he will not seek the cure. The deepest test of any message, Samuel teaches, is not whether it brings peace but *whether the peace it brings is true* — whether it heals the wound or merely cries *all is well* over a wound that is killing you. A people that only

wants to hear *shalom shalom* has chosen the bandage over the cure, the flatterer over the physician, and will die comfortable, told to the last that all was well.

From the Chapter's Architecture

``cross-references Jer. 6:14; 8:11 (the false prophets crying Peace, peace — *shalom, shalom* — when there is no peace — the flatterer's all is well, vv. 27–28); Ezek. 13:10–16 (the false prophets daubing the wall with untempered mortar, saying, Peace; and there was no peace — the whitewash of false comfort); Ps. 73:17–20 (the wicked set in slippery places — ■*alaqlaqqot* — cast down into destruction... in a moment — the slippery riches and the prosperity that cannot hold, vv. 31–36); Ps. 35:6 (let their way be dark and slippery — the treacherous footing of the wicked); Matt. 6:19–21 (lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth... but treasures in heaven... for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also — the earthly treasure that slips vs the heavenly that holds, vv. 19–20); Gen. 18:23–32 (Abraham bargaining for Sodom — the city spared for the righteous within it, vv. 13–14); Luke 13:34 (O Jerusalem... how often would I have gathered thy children... and ye would not! — the rejected prophet's grief over a city that stones its messengers, vv. 24, 39); 2 Ne. 28:21–25 (those lulled into carnal security, all is well in Zion — the same flattery Samuel exposes, v. 28); Hel. 2:4 (Gadianton expert in many words — the ■*alaq*, smooth tongue, whose root names the slippery riches); Hel. 14:1–31 (Samuel's signs of Christ — the continuation of the glad tidings of v. 6); Hel. 7:25–26 (Nephi's earlier wish for the days of the fathers, answered by Samuel's ye are worse than they, vv. 25–26); 3 Ne. 8–9 (the destruction at Christ's death — the fulfillment of the woes Samuel pronounces). ``