

---

## Helaman 14 — A Day, and a Night, and a Day — The Signs of His Coming and His Death

*Helaman 14: Samuel, still on the wall, gives the great signs. Five years more, he says, and the Son of God comes to redeem all who believe — and the sign of his birth will be a night with no darkness: a day, a night, and a day as if it were one long day, the sun setting and rising but the night never darkening, and a new star arising such as was never seen. Then the sign of his death: at the day he yields up the ghost, the sun shall be darkened and give no light for three days; thunders and lightnings for many hours; the earth shaking, the solid rocks rent into seams and cracks and broken fragments; mountains laid low and valleys raised; highways broken, cities made desolate; graves opened and many saints appearing. Samuel grounds it all in doctrine: Christ must die to bring the resurrection, which redeems all mankind from the first death — the spiritual death of being cut off from God's presence by the fall of Adam — and brings them back into the presence of the Lord; and the resurrection brings to pass the condition of repentance, so that whoever repents escapes the second death and whoever repents not is cut off again. And he closes on agency: 'remember, remember... ye are free; ye are permitted to act for yourselves; for behold, God hath given unto you a knowledge and he hath made you free.' The signs are given, Samuel says, 'to the intent that there should be no cause for unbelief.' The chapter is the Book of Mormon's great prophecy of the signs of the Nativity and the Crucifixion — and its clearest statement that the whole purpose of those signs, and of the Atonement they announce, is to make men free to choose life.*

This is the chapter of signs — the great prophecy, given by a Lamanite on a wall five years before it happened, of exactly what the heavens and the earth would do at the birth and death of Jesus Christ. It is one of the most remarkable predictive passages in all of scripture, and it is also far more than a list of wonders. Samuel does not give the signs as spectacle; he gives them, he says explicitly, *to the intent that there should be no cause for unbelief among the children of men... that whosoever will believe might be saved* (vv. 28–29). The signs are an act of mercy — God announcing his Son's coming so loudly, so unmistakably, across the very sky and ground, that no one could honestly say they were never told. And wrapped inside the signs is the deepest doctrine of the chapter: *why* the Son must come and *why* he must die, and what his death and resurrection actually accomplish for every human being who has ever lived. The signs point to the Atonement, and the Atonement, Samuel insists, exists to make men *free*.

## Hebrew Word Studies

**karat** (כָּרַת) — "to cut, cut off, cut down" — **karat**, to cut, sever, cut off; used for cutting down a tree, cutting off a person from the people (the *karet* penalty of exclusion), and — strikingly — for cutting a covenant (*karat berit*, "to cut a covenant," from the cutting of sacrifices that sealed it). The same verb names both being severed and being bound vv. 16–18 (by the fall of Adam being cut off from the presence of the Lord... they are cut off again as to things pertaining to righteousness). Samuel's doctrine of the two deaths turns on the idea of being *cut off*, and the Hebrew *karat* carries that idea with a depth and an irony that illuminate the whole passage. *Karat* means "to cut" — and its range is remarkable. It is used for cutting down a tree, for cutting off a limb, and crucially for the *karet* penalty in the Law: *that soul shall be cut off (nikhretah) from among his people* (Lev. 18:29; Num. 15:30) — the most severe sentence short of death, exclusion from the covenant community and from the presence of God. To be *cut off* is to be severed from the source of life, exiled from belonging, separated from God. And this is exactly Samuel's word for the *first death*: *by the fall of Adam being cut off from the presence of the Lord* (v. 16). The Fall *cut off* all humanity from God's presence — the *karet* of the whole race, every soul born already severed, exiled from the presence of its Maker. That is the spiritual death: not annihilation but *separation*, the cutting-off of the creature from the Creator. But here is the profound irony hidden in the Hebrew, and it preaches the gospel. The very same verb, *karat*, is the word for *making a covenant*: in Hebrew you do not "make" a covenant, you *cut* one — *karat berit*, "to cut a covenant" — because covenants were sealed by *cutting* sacrificial animals in two and passing between the pieces (Gen. 15:9–18). So *karat* means both *to be cut off* (severed, exiled, spiritually dead) and *to cut a covenant* (bound, joined, brought into relationship). The same act of cutting that *severs* is the act that *binds*. And this is precisely the shape of the Atonement Samuel describes. Mankind was *cut off* (*karat* as severance) from God's presence by the Fall — and Christ restores them by a *covenant cut* (*karat* as covenant) in his own blood, the new covenant sealed not by a slain animal but by the slain Son. The cutting that severed us is healed by a cutting that binds us — the body broken, the blood shed, the covenant *cut* in Christ's own death, which *bringeth them back into the presence of the Lord* (v. 17). The first death cuts off; the covenant-cutting of Calvary joins back. And then the second death: those who, freely restored, refuse the covenant *are cut off again* (v. 18) — but this *karet* they choose for themselves, severing themselves a second time from the God who had bound them back. The whole drama is in that one Hebrew root: cut off by Adam, cut back into covenant by Christ, and — for those who refuse — cut off again by their own hand. And the staggering grace is that the only cutting-off that can finally hold is the one a soul performs on itself, for the covenant that Christ *cut* in his blood has already brought everyone, freely, back from the first severance into the presence of the Lord.

**ba<sup>■</sup>ar** / "choose life" (בָּחַר) — "to choose, select, prefer" — **ba<sup>■</sup>ar**, to choose, pick out, decide for; the verb of deliberate election between alternatives. In its most famous use, the verb of Moses' charge to Israel to choose between life and death, blessing and cursing vv. 30–31 (ye are free... God hath given unto you that ye might choose life or death). Samuel ends the whole prophecy on *freedom*, and his phrase *choose life or death* (v. 31) reaches straight back to one of the great climactic moments of the Torah — Moses' final charge to Israel — built on the Hebrew verb *ba<sup>■</sup>ar*, "to choose." At the end of Deuteronomy, having laid out the whole covenant, Moses sets the alternatives before the people in words that Samuel echoes almost exactly: *I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose (uva<sup>■</sup>arta) life, that both thou and thy seed may live* (Deut. 30:19). *Ba<sup>■</sup>ar* is the verb of deliberate, weighed choice — not drift, not fate, but a genuine decision between two real options. And Moses' whole point, like Samuel's, is that the choice is *truly the people's own*: God has set both paths before them, made the consequences clear, and then — astonishingly — *left the choosing to them*. He even tells them which to pick (*choose life!*), but he will not pick for them. The dignity and terror of being human is exactly this *ba<sup>■</sup>ar*, this freedom to choose life or death with one's own will. Samuel makes the same point with the same structure: *ye are free; ye are permitted to act for yourselves... he hath given unto you that ye might choose life or death* (vv. 30–31). And he grounds the freedom in knowledge: *God hath given unto you a knowledge, that ye might know good from evil* (vv. 30–31) — for there is no real *ba<sup>■</sup>ar*, no real choosing, without knowing what the options are. This is why the signs matter so much: they are God *informing* the choice, removing ignorance, so that when each soul chooses, it chooses *knowing*, with *no cause for unbelief* (v. 28). The deep theology here is that God's entire work — the Fall reversed, the Atonement wrought, the signs given, the knowledge supplied — all of it exists to *make the choice free and fair*, and then to leave it genuinely in human hands. God will not compel love; a coerced choice is no choice, and a coerced righteousness is no righteousness. So he clears every obstacle, gives every warning, redeems freely from the death no one chose — and then sets life and death before each soul and says, as Moses said and as Samuel says, *choose*. The whole Book of Mormon, and the whole gospel, finally rests on this one verb. *Ba<sup>■</sup>ar* — you are free; you must choose; choose life. And the freedom is real all the way down: God has done everything except the one thing he will never do, which is choose for you.

---

## From the Chapter's Architecture

```cross-references Deut. 30:15–19 (I have set before you life and death... therefore choose — ba<sup>■</sup>ar — life — Moses' charge that Samuel echoes, vv. 30–31); Lev. 18:29; Num. 15:30–31 (the soul cut off — karat — from among his people — the severance that names the spiritual death, v. 16); Gen. 15:9–18 (the covenant cut — karat berit — by passing between the divided pieces — the covenant-cutting that heals the cutting-off, vv. 16–18); John 8:12; 9:5 (I am the light of the world — the birth-sign of a night with no darkness, the death-sign of a day with no light, vv. 3, 20); Matt. 2:2 (the new star the wise men followed — there shall a new star arise, v. 5); Matt. 27:45, 51–53 (the darkness at the crucifixion, the earthquake, the rocks rent, the graves opened and saints appearing — the death-signs fulfilled, vv. 20–25); 1 Cor. 15:21–22 (as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive — the first death from Adam, the resurrection from Christ, vv. 16–17); Rom. 5:18 (as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men — the universal redemption from the first death, v. 17); Rev. 20:14; 21:8 (the second death for those cut off by their own refusal, vv. 18–19); 2 Ne. 2:27 (they are free to choose liberty and eternal life... or to choose captivity and death — Lehi's agency doctrine, the same freedom, vv. 30–31); 3 Ne. 1:15–21 (the night with no darkness and the new star fulfilled at Christ's birth, vv. 3–5); 3 Ne. 8:5–23 (the three days of darkness, tempest, and earthquake fulfilled at Christ's death, vv. 20–27); Hel. 5:9–12 (the remember, remember and the rock of the Redeemer — the charge Samuel reprises, v. 30). ```