
Helaman 2 — Expert in Many Words — Gadianton Rises and a Servant Saves the Seat

Helaman 2: the forty-second year. With the judgment-seat empty after Pacumeni's death, Helaman the son of Helaman is appointed chief judge by the voice of the people. But Kishkumen — the assassin who murdered Pahoran and escaped — still lives, upheld by his sworn band, and now lays wait to kill Helaman too. The band finds a new leader: Gadianton, a man 'exceedingly expert in many words, and also in his craft, to carry on the secret work of murder and of robbery,' who promises his followers power and authority if they will put him in the judgment-seat. Kishkumen sets out to murder Helaman — but a servant of Helaman, out by night, has secretly learned the band's plans. Meeting Kishkumen and exchanging the band's secret sign, the servant gains his confidence, offers to lead him to the judgment-seat, and on the way stabs Kishkumen to the heart so that he falls dead without a groan, then runs and tells Helaman everything. Helaman sends men to seize the band; but Gadianton, finding Kishkumen gone, flees with his followers by a secret way into the wilderness, beyond reach. Mormon closes with one of his gravest editorial warnings: this Gadianton 'did prove the overthrow, yea, almost the entire destruction of the people of Nephi' — and tells us the full account waits in the book of Nephi from which he is abridging. The secret combination born in the last chapter now has a name, a leader, and a future.

This is a short chapter, only fourteen verses, but it names the enemy that the entire rest of the book — and arguably the rest of the Nephite story — will be fighting. In Helaman 1 a secret covenant was born, a band of assassins sworn by their everlasting Maker to protect each other's murders. Here that band gets a leader, and the leader gets a name, and Mormon stops the narrative to tell us, as plainly as he ever tells us anything, that this name will mean the near-end of his people. *Gadianton*. Remember it, Mormon is saying. This is the one. Of all the threats the Nephites ever faced — the Lamanite armies, Amalickiah, Korihor, the Zoramites — this is the one that finally does it. Not an enemy from outside. A secret society from within.

Hebrew Word Studies

■*almaq* / ■*elqat lashon* (חֶלֶק / חֶלֶק לַשׁוֹן) — "smooth, slippery" (■*almaq*) and "smoothness of tongue" (■*elqat lashon*) — ■*almaq* means smooth, slick, flattering; a ■*elqat lashon* is a "smooth tongue," the polished, slippery speech of the flatterer. The same root yields both "smooth" and "to divide/apportion," so the smooth tongue is also the dividing tongue — speech that flatters in order to split and capture v. 4 (there was one Gadianton, who was exceedingly expert in many words). Mormon introduces the most destructive man in Nephite history by his *speech* — *exceedingly expert in many words* — and the Hebrew Bible has a precise and damning vocabulary for exactly this gift. The key word is ■*almaq*, "smooth," and its derivatives describe the flatterer's tongue with a physical, almost tactile contempt: smooth, slick, oily, frictionless speech that slides past the hearer's judgment. *The words of his mouth were smoother than butter, but war was in his heart: his words were softer than oil, yet were they drawn swords* (Ps. 55:21) — the perfect portrait of Gadianton, soft words wrapping drawn swords. *A flattering mouth (peh ■almaq) worketh ruin* (Prov. 26:28). And most pointedly, the Psalmist prays for deliverance from exactly Gadianton's kind: *the Lord shall cut off all flattering lips (siphtei ■almaqot), and the tongue that speaketh proud things* (Ps. 12:3). The smooth tongue is not a minor vice in scripture; it is the characteristic weapon of the wicked who rise by speech rather than merit. And the deep cunning of the root is that ■*almaq* means both "smooth" and "to divide, apportion" — the smooth tongue is also the *dividing* tongue. The flatterer's smoothness is in service of a split: he flatters a faction in order to peel it off, *flatters away* a people (as Paanchi tried, Hel. 1:7), captures them with sweet words and a sweet promise. Gadianton's promise is the sweetest and oldest of all: *power and authority among the people* (v. 5). That is what the smooth words are *for* — not truth, but capture; he tells the band what their appetite most wants to hear, and the telling binds them to him. This is why the Book of Mormon treats flattery as genuinely dangerous rather than merely distasteful. Sherem used *flattering words* (Jacob 7:2–4); Nehor and the priests of Noah lived by them; Amalickiah climbed a throne on them; and now Gadianton, *expert in many words*, will found a secret society on them that outlasts every army. The pattern is consistent: the great destroyers of this people are almost never the strongest swordsmen. They are the smoothest talkers — men who could make sin sound like liberty and ambition sound like justice. Set against this stands the chapter's nameless servant, of whose words we are told *nothing*; he does not talk, he acts, and he saves the nation in silence. The contrast is the chapter's quiet verdict on the smooth tongue: the man *expert in many words* nearly destroys a people, and the man of no recorded words preserves it. *Let the lying lips be put to silence; which speak grievous things proudly and contemptuously against the righteous* (Ps. 31:18) — the smooth tongue is loud and the faithful hand is quiet, and Mormon knew which one a people should fear.

From the Chapter's Architecture

```cross-references Ps. 55:21 (*the words of his mouth were smoother than butter, but war was in his heart... his words were softer than oil, yet were they drawn swords* — the smooth tongue hiding violence, Gadianton expert in many words, v. 4); Ps. 12:2–3 (*they speak vanity... with flattering lips... the Lord shall cut off all flattering lips* — siphtei ■almaqot — the flatterer's doom); Prov. 26:24–28 (*he that hateth dissembleth with his lips... a flattering mouth worketh ruin* — flattery as the instrument of ruin, vv. 4–5); Prov. 6:16–19 (*the things the Lord hates, including a lying tongue... and he that soweth discord among brethren* — the dividing, smooth tongue of the conspiracy); Jacob 7:2–4 (Sherem, who had a perfect knowledge of the language... used much flattery — the first Book of Mormon master of the smooth tongue, the line Gadianton continues); Alma 46:10 (Amalickiah's rise by his fraud and... cunning words — the demagogue's flattery, the pattern Gadianton repeats); Hel. 1:7, 11 (Paanchi about to flatter away the people, and the assassins' covenant of silence — the soil Gadianton grows in); Hel. 6:21–30 (*the secret combination's satanic genealogy back to Cain* — what Gadianton's band truly is); Hel. 7:4–5 (*the Gadianton robbers later sitting in the judgment-seats* — the seizure of power Gadianton seeks here, v. 5, finally achieved); 3 Ne. 1:29; 2:11–18 (*the robbers grown to a national menace* — the fulfillment of Mormon's warning in v. 13); Ether 8:18–25 (Moroni's later warning that secret combinations have caused the destruction of this people and whatsoever nation shall uphold them — the doom forecast in v. 13 generalized); Matt. 10:16 (*be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves* — the servant's shrewd, faithful use of the band's own methods to save the seat, vv. 6–9). ```