

Helaman 1 & 2**1** *Secret Combinations*

What is the purpose of secret combinations?

Beginning in the days of Cain and continuing through all generations, whenever there have been unrighteous and apostate peoples on earth, Satan has revealed unto them his... secret combinations. Cain first took upon himself the secret oaths as they were administered by Satan; then killed Abel. Murder, plunder, robbery, power, the destruction of freedom, and the persecution of the saints have been the objectives of these societies ever since.

Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 698. See also Ether 8:16; Moses 5:28-32.

2 One week ago Sister Bateman and I were prepared to address this same forum when tragedy struck New York City and the Pentagon. The events of that day have had an impact not only on the United States but on the entire world. Most governments now realize that no one is safe if terrorists are allowed free rein to develop secret networks and plan strikes against innocent people. It reminds one of the Gadianton robbers, who lived in a day long ago. The Book of Mormon indicates that they were experts in wickedness, lived in the wilderness, operated through secret combinations in the steepled parts of the land, and were difficult to find and destroy (see Helaman 2:4, 11:3-23). Could there be a more apt description of the enemy we are now facing?

Merrill J. Bateman, "Lay Hold Upon Every Good Thing," *BYU Speeches of the Year*, 18 Sept. 2001 [Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 2001], 1.

3 The Book of Mormon teaches that secret combinations engaged in crime present a serious challenge, not just to individuals and families but to entire civilizations. Among today's secret combinations are gangs, drug cartels, and organized crime families. The secret combinations of our day function much like the Gadianton robbers of the Book of Mormon times. They have secret signs and code words. They participate in secret rites and initiation ceremonies. Among their purposes are to "murder, and plunder, and steal, and commit whoredoms and all manner of wickedness, contrary to the laws of their country and also the laws of their God" [Helaman 6:23].

If we are not careful, today's secret combinations can obtain power and influence just as quickly and just as completely as they did in Book of Mormon times. Do you remember the pattern? The secret combinations began among the "more wicked part" of society, but eventually "seduced the more part of the righteous" until the whole society was polluted [Helaman 6:38].

The Book of Mormon teaches that the devil is the "author of all sin" and the founder of these secret combinations [Helaman 6:30; see 2 Nephi 26:22]. He uses secret combinations, including gangs, "from generation to generation according as he can get hold upon the hearts of the children of men" [Helaman 6:30]. His purpose is to destroy individuals, families, communities, and nations [see 2 Nephi 9:9]. To a degree, he was successful during Book of Mormon times. And he is having far too much success today. That's why it is so important for us as priesthood

holders to take a firm stand for truth and right by doing what we can to help keep our communities safe.

M. Russell Ballard, Conference Report, Oct. 1997, 51-52; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1997, 38.

4 We must remember that we are dealing here not with the small and peculiar band of professional or congenital criminals, but with the general public gone mad after money—people not really criminal at heart, but unable to resist the appeal of wealth and the things it could buy. Among the Nephites these things actually “... seduced the more part of the *righteous* until they had come down to believe...” in the system of the Gadiantons and “... partake of their spoils...” (Hel. 6:38). Why not? They said, everybody is doing it! And everybody was: soon Gadianton’s Protective Association “... did obtain the *sole management of the government...*” (Hel. 6:39).

If the reader has imagined to himself the Gadianton band as abandoned wretches or street Arabs lurking in dark alleys and fleeing from the light of day in dingy and noisome hideouts let him disabuse his mind of such a concept. They were a highly respected concern that made their handsome profits by operating strictly within the letter of the law, as they interpreted and controlled it. They were the government, the well-to-do, the respectable, and the law-abiding citizens...

And thus we also see what Helaman meant when he made the paradoxical statement that the disreputable Gadianton “... did prove the overthrow, yea, almost the entire destruction of the people of Nephi” (Hel. 2:13). He did it not as a criminal and bandit but as one of the most able and successful men of his time, and entirely with the public’s consent.

Hugh Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon* [Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1957], 321-322.

5 You are acutely aware of the events of September 11 Out of that vicious and ugly attack we are plunged into a state of war... This was not an attack on the United States alone. It was an attack on men and nations of goodwill everywhere....,

Those of us who are American citizens stand solidly with the president of our nation. The terrible forces of evil must be confronted and held accountable for their actions... It is the terrorist organizations that must be ferreted out and brought down.

We of this Church know something of such groups. The Book of Mormon speaks of the Gadianton robbers, a vicious, oath-bound, and secret organization bent on evil and destruction. In their day they did all in their power, by whatever means available, to bring down the Church, to woo the people with sophistry, and to take control of the society. We see the same thing in the present situation.

Gordon B. Hinckley, *Ensign*, Nov. 2001 [Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2001], 72

Self-awareness Groups

6 We again remind Church members to be cautious in seeking help from groups that purport to increase self-awareness, raise self-esteem, or enhance individual agency. Some such groups falsely claim or imply Church endorsement. Some charge exorbitant fees or encourage long-term commitments. Some intermingle worldly concepts with gospel principles in ways that can

undermine spirituality and faith. We call your attention to guidelines regarding self-awareness groups found in the Church Handbook of Instruction, page 157, and reprinted on the reverse side of this letter [see Self-awareness Group Guidelines

There is usually no quick solution to social or emotional difficulties. Those who suffer from such difficulties should exercise great care in choosing appropriate professionals to assist them. As always, members may consult with priesthood leaders for guidance in identifying sources of help that are fully consistent with gospel principles.

Ward and branch councils should consider carefully whether members in their units are being drawn into such groups. If so, the bishop or branch president should take necessary steps to acquaint these members with the foregoing principles and enclosed guidelines. Where appropriate, the guidelines may be published in ward/branch bulletins. Bishops and branch presidents should use them in counseling members as they deem advisable.

Self-Awareness Group Guidelines

Church members should not participate in groups that:

1. Challenge religious and moral values or advocate unwarranted confrontation with spouse or family.
2. Imitate sacred rites or ceremonies.
3. Foster physical contact among participants.
4. Meet late into the evening or in the early-morning hours.
5. Encourage open confession or disclosure of personal information normally discussed only in confidential settings.
6. Cause a husband and wife to be paired with other partners.

“News of the Church,” *Ensign*, Dec. 1999, 70

The First Presidency sent the following letter, dated 21 June 1999, to priesthood leaders in the United States and Canada

“Terrorist organizations... must be ferreted out and brought down.

7

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We are people of peace. We are followers of the Christ, who was and is the Prince of Peace. But there are times when we must stand up for right and decency, for in his day to the defense of their wives, their children, and the cause of liberty (see Alma 48:10)

Gordon B. Hinckley, Conference Report, Oct. 2001, 88; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2001, 72.

8

Our nation will continue to degenerate unless we read and heed the words of the God of this land, Jesus Christ, and quit building up and upholding the secret combinations which the Book of Mormon tells us proved the downfall of both previous American civilizations.

Ezra Taft Benson, *A Witness and a Warning*, p. 6

Let us now list and briefly describe 14 characteristics which we learn from these references from the book of Helaman and 3 Nephi about secret covenants.

1. Secret oaths: Oaths are sworn in secret.
2. Sworn in God's name: Ironically, some oaths are sworn in the name of God, the "everlasting Maker" to give them some false "legitimacy".
3. Goal is to overthrow anyone in authority: One major goal of secret combinations is to overthrow anyone in authority, political or religious.
4. Satan's program includes murder for gain: The enticement of secret combinations is the same promise Satan made to Cain—you can murder and get gain. Satan's plan is always the same.
5. Escape punishment: In overthrowing authority figures, secret combinations seek to murder and escape punishment; maybe to demonstrate that Heavenly Father is powerless as a God of power.
6. Disguised as regular, even exemplary, members of society: Secret combinations use the "wolf in sheep's clothing" principle—they are disguised as regular, even exemplary members of society. For example, just as Satan can appear as an angel of light, these evil groups can appear harmless and even virtuous on the surface. If the Lord's people are indistinguishable from the world in appearance and actions, they are in effect helping to camouflage those who are aligned with Satan.
7. Target any who may expose their evil designs: Secret combinations target any group that may expose their evil designs. Thus, prophets are often attacked. Even, if it isn't a physical attack, as President Kimball states, we mentally stone the living prophets by disregarding their counsel (257; see also 1 Nephi 19:7). When we rationalize and argue that the General Authorities are not really in touch with how things really are, we are aligning ourselves with Satan.
8. Strength in numbers: Secret combinations seek strength in numbers. They are the worst pyramid scheme possible! Their sales pitch is the antithesis of "seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt. 6:33). They say: "Take what you can now, through whatever wicked means, and establish your kingdom here."
9. Temporal security through protection and riches: Rather than focusing on the long-term, spiritual consequences of their actions, they promise temporal security—protection and riches. Their slogan might be, Seek to save your life and get rich, and forget about eternity."
10. Might makes right: When a majority of the people choose iniquity and align themselves with secret combinations, law and justice are replaced by the law of the jungle—"might makes right". Right and wrong are not even an issue; all that matters is that you are smart enough or powerful enough to escape punishment. Ironically, the original promises of security last only until factions form within the secret group, and then a person is more vulnerable than before. Thus, not only are eternal blessings sacrificed, but even the temporal rewards, which had seemed so appealing, are short-lived

11. Counterfeit sets of tokens and signs: Satan's covenants are complete with their own set of tokens and signs in imitation of the Lord's system.
12. Easy acceptance into band: Acceptance into a secret combination is easy compared with acceptance into the Lord's church. For example, look at the example of teenagers—to be accepted by the drinkers, all they have to do is drink.
13. Darkness: Darkness is a term always associated with the plans of secret combinations; it describes both their means and purposes.
14. As strong as its adherents: Satan's plan is only as strong as its adherents—"according as he can get hold upon the hearts of the children of men." We possess the power to crush him, while he can only bruise us if we let him.

Victor L. Ludlow, "Secret Covenant Teachings of Men and the Devil in Helaman Through 3 Nephi 8" taken from *The Book of Mormon: Helaman Through 3 Nephi 8, According to thy Word*, Book of Mormon Symposium 1992, pp. 279-281.