

Introduction to Helaman 12**MORMON'S COMMENTARY**

1

After writing what must have been eleven frustrating chapters of the book of Helaman, Mormon boldly inserts his own feelings into the twelve chapter....

In a great, painful lamentation Mormon mourns in earlier generations the sins that brought destruction to his own... And Mormon pleads with a future generation to change that pattern.

In perhaps no other chapter does Mormon more forcefully use what comes to be his most reliable editorial technique—the use of a phrase such as “and thus we can behold,” or “and thus we are.”

Jeffrey R. Holland, in *Book of Mormon: It begins with a family* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1983], 225-226.

2

In 1787 Edward Gibbon completed his noble work *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. Here is the way he accounted for the fall.

1. The undermining of the dignity and sanctity of the home, which is the basis of human society.
2. Higher and higher taxes and the spending of public monies for free bread and circuses for the populace.
3. The mad craze for pleasure, sports becoming every year more and more exciting and brutal.
4. The building of gigantic armaments when the real enemy was within the decadence of the people.
5. The decay of religion—faith fading into mere form, losing touch with life, and becoming impotent to warn and guide the people.

Is there a parallel for us in America today? Could the same reasons that destroyed Rome

destroy America?... The lessons of history, many of them very sobering, ought to be turned to during this hour of our great achievements, because during the hour of our success is our greatest danger. Even during the hour of our great prosperity, a nation may sow the seeds of its own destruction. History reveals that rarely is a great civilization conquered from without unless it has weakened or destroyed itself within.

Ezra Taft Benson, *God, Family, Country* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1974], 363-364.

3

Great nations rise and fall—the people go from bondage to spiritual faith, from spiritual faith to great courage, from courage to liberty, from liberty to abundance, from abundance to selfishness, from selfishness to complacency, from complacency to apathy, from apathy to dependency, from dependency back to bondage.

Robert Muntzel, *Manage Magazine*, Jan. 1961.

Helaman 12:1-3*The Unsteadiness of Man*

4 Is it simply unintended forgetfulness? Or is it a failure of intellectual integrity by our refusing to review and to acknowledge past blessings Or is it a lack of meekness which requires the repetition of such stern lessons, because we neglect the milder and gentler signs beckoning us to ‘remember Him?...

.... We need the Spirit daily to help us remember daily. Otherwise memory lapses will occur when we are most vulnerable. It is not natural to the natural man to remember yesterday’s blessings gratefully, especially when today’s needs of the flesh press steadily upon him.
Neal A. Maxwell, *Lord Increase Our Faith* [1994] 101-2.

5 Dependence upon God can fade quickly when prayers are answered. And when the troubles lessens, so do the prayers. The Book of Mormon repeats that sad story over and over again.
Henry B. Eyring, *Ensign*, Nov. 2001, 15

6 Isn’t that a terrible indictment, and yet that is happening before us today. We are seeing that affluence. Never was there such prosperity in this country. We have been forgetting God, and we have turned aside from His teachings, and we are paying a terrible price. It is the test that, if we survive, will perhaps take some of the punishments that this prophet said would be necessary to bring us back to our knees and seek for the Lord to guide and direct us.
The Teachings of Harold B. Lee, 329.

7 President Ezra Taft Benson (1899-1994) described the difficulty that can come with prosperity: “Ours then seems to be the toughest test of all for the evils are more subtle, more clever. It all seems less menacing and it is harder to detect. While every test of righteousness represents a struggle, this particular test seems like no test at all, no struggle and so could be the most deceiving of all tests. Do you know what peace and prosperity can do to a people—it can put them to sleep.”
Larry E. Dahl, “Fit for the Kingdom” in *Studies in Scriptures, Volume Five: The Gospels*, edited by Kent P. Jackson and Robert L. Millet [1986], 5:369.

8 President Harold B. Lee (1899-1973) compared the test of “luxury” with other tests of life: “We’re tested and we’re tried. Perhaps we don’t realize the severity of the tests we’re going through. In the early days of the Church, there were murders committed, there were mobbings. The Saints were driven out into the desert. They were starving, they were unclad, and they were cold. We’re the inheritors of what they gave to us. But what are we doing with it? Today we’re basking in the lap of luxury, the like of which we’ve never seen before in the history of the world. It would seem that probably this is the most severe test of any we’ve ever had in the history of this Church.”
Dahl, “Fit for the Kingdom,” in *Studies in Scriptures*, 5:369.

Helaman 12:39 *Terror*

Have you noticed that word *terror* in that prophetic Book of Mormon warning?

The moral values upon which civilization itself must depend spiral downward at an ever-increasing pace. Nevertheless, I do not fear the future....

Our young people in many ways are much stronger and better than we were. They and we should not be afraid of what is ahead.

Encourage our young people. They need not live in fear (see D&C 6:35). Fear is the opposite of faith....

As a grandfather who has lived a long time, I counsel you to have faith. Things have a way of working out. Stay close to the Church,...

Life will not be free from challenges, some of them bitter and hard to bear. We may wish to be spared all the trials of life, but that would be contrary to the great plan of happiness, "for it must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things" (2 Nephi 2:11). This testing is the source of our strength....

The Church is a safe harbor. We will be protected by justice and comforted by mercy (see Alma 34:15-16). No unhallowed hand can stay the progress of this work (see D&C 76:3).

Boyd K. Packer, *Ensign*, May 2004 [Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2004], 78-80

Helaman 12:4-610 "*foolishness of men*"

Fallen men and women are:

1. Foolish
2. Vain
3. Evil and devilish
4. Quick to do iniquity
5. Slow to do good
6. Quick to hearken to the words of the evil one
7. Quick to set their hearts on the vain things of the world
8. Quick to be lifted up in pride
9. Quick to boast
10. Slow to remember the Lord their God
11. Slow to give ear to God's counsels
12. Slow to walk in wisdom's path
13. Not desirous that the Lord their God, who created them should rule and reign over them
14. Eager to set aside God's counsel
15. Not desirous that God should be their guide

Rex C. Reeve, *God's Way or Man's Ultimate Choice Studies in Scriptures*, p. 110.

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11 The proud cannot accept the authority of God giving direction to their lives (see Helaman 12:6). They pit their perceptions of truth against God's great knowledge, their abilities versus God's priesthood power, their accomplishments against His mighty works.

Our enmity toward God takes on many labels, such as rebellion, hard-heartedness, stiff-neckedness, unrepentant, puffed up, easily offended, and sign seekers. The proud wish God would agree with them. They aren't interested in changing their opinions to agree with God's. Ezra Taft Benson, CR, Apr. 1989, 4

12 Pride causes us to become overly concerned, as we compare ourselves with others, about how intelligent we think we are, the brand of our jeans or other clothing—the 'costly apparel' we wear, to what organizations we belong, on which side of town we live, how much money we have, what our race or nationality is, what kind of car we drive, even to what church we belong, how much education we have been privileged to acquire, and so on and on and on.

In the scriptures there are many indications that pride has risen to destroy individuals, nations, and in some cases even the Church itself.... It has been calculated that no fewer than thirty times throughout the Book of Mormon the cycles of prosperity and peace were destroyed, principally by the effects of human pride.

Joe J. Christensen, *One Step at a Time: Building a Better Marriage, Family and You* [1996], 138-39.

13 The 'vain things of [the]world' include every combination of that worldly quartet of property, pride, prominence, and power. As to all of these, the scriptures remind us that 'you cannot carry them with you' (Alma 39:14). We should be seeking the kind of treasures the scriptures promise the faithful: 'great treasures of knowledge, even hidden treasures' (D&C 89:19).

Dallin H. Oaks, *Ensign*, May 2001, 84.

Helaman 12:1-6

14 *Chasten with many afflictions*

Prosperity, abundance, honor, and praise lead some men to the false security of haughty self-assurance and the abandonment of the inclination to pray. Conversely, turmoil, tribulation, sickness, and death crumble the castles of men's pride and bring them to their knees to plead for power from on High.

Thomas S. Monson, *Ensign*, Aug. 1995 [Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1995], 4-5.

15 It is frightening to observe that in places where there is the greater prosperity, there is the unmistakable evidence that, like the peoples of other dispensations, when the people prosper they forget God. They are seemingly rich in things that money can buy, but they are devoid of most of the precious things money cannot buy.

Harold B. Lee, *Stand Ye in Holy Places* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976], 82.

16 The world seems to be in commotion. There are wars and rumors of wars. The economics of whole continents are faltering. Crops are failing from lack of rain in places all over the earth. And the people in peril have flooded heaven with prayers. In public and in private, they are petitioning God for help, for comfort, and for direction.

You have probably noticed, as I have in recent days, that prayers have not only become more numerous but more heartfelt....

Such a turning to fervent prayer when the world seems out of joint is as old as mankind. In times of tragedy and danger, people turn to God in prayer....

Our own personal experience and God's record of His dealing with His children teaches us that. Dependence on God can fade quickly when prayers are answered. And when the trouble lessens, so do the prayers....

[Helaman 12:3-6.] From those three short verses.... We see three causes for the sad drift away from humble prayer. First, while God implores us to pray, the enemy of our souls belittles and then derides it,,,

Second, God is forgotten out of vanity. A little prosperity and peace, or even a turn slightly for the better, can bring us feelings of self-sufficiency. We can feel quickly that we are in control of our lives, that the change for the better is our own doing, not that of a God who communicates to us through the still, small voice of the Spirit. Pride creates a noise within us which makes the quiet voice of the Spirit hard to hear. And soon, in our vanity, we no longer even listen for it. We can come quickly to think we don't need it.

Henry B. Eyring, *Ensign*, Nov. 2001 [Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day-Saints, 2005], 16-17.

Elder Neal A. Maxwell stated:

17 "The Lord has made no secret of the fact that He intends to try the faith and the patience of His Saints. (See Mosiah 23:21.) We mortals are so quick to forget the Lord: 'And thus we see that except the Lord doth chasten his people with many afflictions... they will not remember him' (Helaman 12:3).

"However, the Lord knows our bearing capacity, both as to coping and to comprehending, and He will not give us more to bear than we can manage at the moment, though to us it may seem otherwise. (See D&C 50:40; 78:18.) Just as no temptations will come to us from which we cannot escape or which we cannot bear, we will not be given more trials than we can sustain. (See 1 Corinthians 10:13.)....

"President Brigham Young said of a geographical destination, 'This is the place.' Of God's plan of salvation, with its developmental destination, it can be said, 'This is the process'!

"President Young, who knew something about trial and tribulation but also of man's high destiny, said that the Lord lets us pass through these experiences that we might become true friends of God. By developing our individual capacities, wisely exercising our agency, and trusting God—including when we feel forsaken and alone—then we can, said President Young, learn to be 'righteous in the dark.' (Secretary's Journal, 20 Jan. 1857.) The gospel glow we see radiating from some—amid dark difficulties—comes from illuminated individuals who are 'of good cheer'!

“To be cheerful when others are in despair, to keep the faith when others falter, to be true even when we feel forsaken—all of these are deeply desired outcomes during the deliberate, divine tutorials which God gives to us—because He loves us. (See Mosiah 3:19.) These learning experiences must not be misread as divine indifference. Instead, such tutorials are a part of the divine unfolding.”

Ensign, Nov. 1982, p. 67.

18 As people heed the words of the prophets, the Lord blesses them. When they disregard His word, however, distress and suffering often follow. Over and over, the Book of Mormon teaches this great lesson....

There is something about prosperity that brings out the worst in some people....

The natural consequence that comes to those who depart from the way of the Lord is that they are left to their own strength (see Helaman 4:13). While in the heat of our success we might assume that our own strength is sufficient, those who rely upon the arm of the flesh soon discover how weak and unreliable it truly is (see John 15:5).

When the people are righteous, the Lord prospers them. Prosperity often leads to pride, which leads to sin. Sin leads to wickedness and to hearts that become hardened to things of the Spirit. Eventually the end of this road leads to heartbreak and sorrow.

Joseph B. Wirthlin, *Ensign*, Nov. 2005 [Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2005], 16-17.

19 If all the sick for whom we pray were healed, if all the righteous were protected and the wicked destroyed, the whole program of the Father would be annulled and the basic principle of the gospel, free agency, would be ended. No man would have to live by faith.... Should all prayers be immediately answered according to our selfish desires and our limited understanding, then there would be little or no suffering, sorrow, disappointment, or even death, and if these were not, there would also be no joy, success, resurrection, nor eternal life and Godhood.

Spencer W. Kimball, *Faith Precedes the Miracle*, p. 97.

20 When I held my little son in my arms, knowing that he may be sentenced to life in a defective body, I suffered anguish of soul. We had not prepared ourselves to deal with this... Our pain was founded in a deep concern for the welfare of our son. I felt confident with the Lord's help my son would be healed. I fasted and prayed for the Lord's direction in giving Boyd a blessing. As I laid my hands on his head, everything I desired made me anxious for his body to be made whole. But, even in my overzealous state, I had to admit I could feel no spiritual promptings in blessing him to recover from Cystic Fibrosis.... This caused me more pain than when I had first discovered his illness! I felt personally responsible for Boyd's disease. As I searched for an explanation I read these words of Brigham Young, "In many instances our anxiety is so great that we do no pause to know the spirit of revelation.... We have anxiety instead of faith. He lays his hands upon the sick, but they are not healed. It is in consequence of not being completely molded to the will of God" (*Journal of Discourses* 12:125). I had prayed for a miracle and... in God's own time the miracles came, but not in the way that I had expected. There is a God in Heaven who understands the destiny of each of his children . He also understands the pathway

of challenges each will be confronted with in order to reach their destiny. (See Acts 17:26; Ether 12:27). Without this insight I could not hope to see the reason for this particular challenge in Boyd's life. As his life unfolded, I grew to understand it better.

K. Douglas Bassett, *Kisses at the Window*, pp. 15-16.

21 “*Sometimes we need chastening.* It’s an interesting thing that sometimes it takes calamity to drive us together. It’s a terrifying thing to think that that’s necessary, but the Lord said through one of His prophets that sometimes we have to have the chastening hand of the Almighty before we will wake up and humble ourselves to do the thing that He has asked us to do (see Helaman 12:3-6). In talking about the conditions that would come, He warned the people that death and destruction and all sorts of difficulties would have to come before people would listen, before they would obey, and He removes His hand and lets these things occur, or our people would not repent and come unto the Lord.

The Teachings of Harold B. Lee, 191.

22 Only greater consecration will cure ambivalence and casualness in any of us! As already noted, the tutoring challenges arising from increased consecration may be severe but may reflect the divine mercy necessary to induce further consecration (see Helaman 12:3). If we have grown soft, hard times may be necessary. Deprivation may prepare us for further consecration, though we shudder at the thought. If we are too easily contented, God may administer a dose of divine discontent. His long-suffering thus becomes very necessary to maximize our agency and development. But He is not an indulgent Father.

Neal A. Maxwell, “Consecration,” CT Oct. 1992, 90-91.

Helaman 12:7

23 “*Nothingness of men*”

President Joseph Fielding Smith helped us understand that the phrase “the nothingness of the children of men” (Helaman 12:7) is not a reflection of man’s worth: “Now this prophet did not mean to say that the Lord has greater concern for and loves the dust of the earth more than he does his children... The point he is making is that the dust of the earth is obedient. It moveth hither and thither at the command of the Lord. All things are in harmony with his laws. Everything in the universe obeys the law given unto it, so far as I know, except man. Everywhere you look you find law and order, the elements obeying the law given them, true to their calling. But man rebels, and in this thing man is less than the dust of the earth because he rejects the counsels of the Lord.”

(in Conference Report, Apr. 1929, 55)

Helaman 12:14-15

24 Reference is here made to the biblical account that shows Joshua commanding the sun and the moon to stand still so that his army might complete their rout of the Amorites (Joshua 10:12-14). Here a corrective note is added to that account, which supposed the sun to rotate around a stationery earth. (See also Isaiah 38:7-8; 2 Kings 20:8-11.) These verses provide a subtle but

certain assurance that the prophet-editor Mormon, like many of the ancient spiritual leaders, was anything but primitive in his understanding concerning God, man, and the universe.

Joseph Fielding McConkie and Robert L. Millet, *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 4 vols. [1987-91], 3:397.

Helaman 12:18-19

25 *Slippery Treasure*

When we consider the condition of the Latter-day Saints, and see how many there are who seem to have their eyes fixed upon things of this world, things that are not lasting, but that perish in the handling, and how anxious they are to obtain them, how do you think I feel about it? We see many of the Elders of Israel desirous of becoming wealthy, and they adopt any course that they think will bring them riches, which to me is as unwise as anything can be—to see men of wisdom, men that seem to have an understanding of the world and of the things of God, searching after minerals throughout these mountains... These treasures that are in the earth are carefully watched, they can be removed from place to place according to the good pleasure of Him who made them and owns them. He has his messengers at his service, and it is just as easy for an angel to remove the minerals from any part of one of these mountains to another, as it is for you and me to walk up and down this hall.... People do not know it, but I know there is a seal set upon the treasures of earth; men are allowed to go so far and no farther. I have known places where there were treasures in abundance; but could men get them? No. You can read in the Book of Mormon of the ancient Nephites holding their treasures, and of their becoming slippery; so that after they had privately hid their money, on going to the place again, lo and behold it was not there, but was somewhere else, but they knew not where. The people do not understand this; I wish they did, for they would then do as I do, pay attention to the legitimate business that God has given them to perform.

Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses*, 19:36-39.

Helaman 12:23-24

26 *Christ's Grace*

With divine assistance people are in a position to receive additional attributes and powers of the Spirit through repentance and subsequent faithfulness: they may receive what the scriptures speak of as “grace for grace.”... To receive “grace for grace” is to receive of the Father as we give to others. In this, as in all other enterprises in this life, Jesus Christ is our exemplar and our pattern.

Robert L. Millet, *By Grace Are We Saved*, p. 39.

27 The grace of the Lord through the Atonement can both cleanse us of sin and assist us in perfecting ourselves through our trials, sicknesses, and even character defects... Christ can repair our flaws and failings that otherwise are not repairable⁴ (see Genesis 18:14; Mark 9:23-24).

That great truth ought to fill us all with hope, as long as we are quick to remember that the effect of grace in our lives is conditioned upon repenting of our sins... “A repentant heart and good works are the very conditions required to have grace restored to us. When someone pleads

fervently in prayer for an answer, the answer may be more conditioned on repentance of personal sins that on any other factor (see D&C 101:7-8; Mosiah 11:23-24).

To obtain grace, one does not have to be perfect, but he does have to be trying to keep the commandments the best that he can. Then the Lord will allow him to receive that power.

Gene R. Cook, *Ensign*, May 1993, 80-81.

28 In the Bible Dictionary we learn that the word *grace* frequently is used in the scriptures to connote a strengthening or enabling power: “The main idea of the word is divine means of help or strength, given through the bounteous mercy and love of Jesus Christ.

... It is likewise through the grace of the Lord that individuals, through faith in the atonement of Jesus Christ and repentance of their sins, receive strength and assistance to do good works that they otherwise would not be able to maintain if left to their own means. This grace is an enabling power that allows men and women to lay hold on eternal life and exaltation after they have expended their own best effort. (p. 697).

Thus, the enabling and strengthening aspect of the Atonement helps us to see and to do and to become good in ways that we could never recognize or accomplish with our limited mortal capacity. I testify and witness that the enabling power of the Savior’s Atonement is real.

(in Conference Report, Oct. 2004, 79; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2004, 76-77; see also D&C 93:20, 27-28).

Helaman 12:26

29 Mormon, in his stirring recapitulation of the vagrancy and unsteadiness of humankind (Hel. 12:4-6), echoes a theme that King Benjamin taught his people: “Ye cannot say that ye are even as much as the dust of the earth” (Mosiah 2:25). Similarly, Mormon concludes that man in his nothingness is even *less* than the dust of the earth: “For behold, the dust of the earth moveth hither and thither, to the dividing asunder, at the command of our great and everlasting God” (Helaman 12:8; see Mosiah 4:2). By contrast, man who is made in the image of God, is moved by no such propensity to obedience. Without the warming winds of benign redemption, activated by the softening of hearts and the effects of godly sorrow (2 Cor. 7:20), mankind will be left alone in despair and isolation. Therefore, Mormon prays earnestly: “And may God grant, in his great fulness, that men might be brought unto repentance and good works, that they may be restored unto grace for grace, according to their works. And I would that all men might be saved.” (Hel 12:24-25).

Richard J. Allen, *Teachings and Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, Richard J. Allen and Ed Jolley Pinegar, p. 401.

30 The phrase “everlasting life” describes more than a life that does not end; it is descriptive of the kind and quality of life enjoyed by the obedient and faithful, the life of exalted and glorified beings. Conversely, “everlasting damnation” is not properly understood to mean an endless stint in hell, but rather is descriptive of the kind of punishment—God’s punishment—which will be meted out to the defiant (see D&C 19:4-12).

Joseph Fielding McConkie and Robert L. Millet, *Doctrinal commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 4 vols. [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1987-1992], 3:398.