

Helaman 5:6-12 – Helaman’s Instructions to Nephi and Lehi

Helaman 5 recounts an amazing story of how Nephi and Lehi, the sons of Helaman, undertake to reverse the unrighteousness of a nation, and their amazing successes. Their mission to the Lamanites is one of my favorite stories in the Book of Mormon. But as an added bonus, at the beginning of the story we find this excerpt from Helaman’s teachings to his sons.

Helaman’s comments about his sons’ names probably has application for many of us. I was named after my grandfathers, and in particular with one of them I have frequently felt a burden to perform to the standard which he established. Verse 7 is beautiful and simple:

Therefore, my sons, I would that ye should do that which is good, that it may be said of you, and also written, even as it has been said and written of them.

In fact, as I write that, I realize that it reflects my desires for my own children.

It is interesting, then, that in verse 8 Helaman adds a caveat – it is not sufficient to do good, they must do good for the right reasons. I frequently struggle with the fact that I may be prone to do things for the praise of men, and not for the righteousness of God. The following verse gives the doctrinal foundation for this council – salvation is through the atonement of Christ, which is not at all concerned with appearances but with intentions and desires of the heart. The reference to Zeezrom in verse 10 is also significant. Salvation only comes after the exercise of agency, it is never forced upon us. We must choose salvation. Repentance (verse 11) is the proper exercise of agency.

Verse 12 is the culmination of this mini-sermon, and the most dear to me. This verse approaches the poetic, but its truths are the very core of the message of the gospel. We must build upon the rock of our Redeemer. The forces arrayed against us are immense, and could cause fear or even despair were we to try to face them on our own. However, they will have no power over us if we are built upon the foundation of our Savior. There is a promise in the last words of verse 12 which is so powerful that it could be considered to be the promise of the gospel: If we are built upon the Savior we cannot fall. Helaman doesn’t say will not, but cannot. The nature of the plan of salvation is such that there is very little which is unconditional. The righteous can

– and will – face every kind of trial and hardship. Jobs will be lost, death and sickness will occur, and the most righteous of plans will be frustrated because of the abuse of agency by others. But if we are built upon the rock of Christ we will receive eternal increase and glory. That is the hope of the gospel, that is the promise of Christ.

In a nutshell, Helaman lays out for his sons the essential points of the plan of salvation. If each of us were to study, understand, and live the council in these few verses we would not be so prone to the detours which plague mortality, and we would have the promised joy of Christ.