



## The slippery slope of materialism

### helaman 13

#### Introduction

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The account of Samuel, a Lamanite, and his brief ministry, has captivated readers from the very beginning. The reader's imagination is set aflame as Samuel boldly and rebelliously takes his stand on Zarahemla's fortified walls to challenge the city's wicked citizenry. The reader can almost hear the whiz and whoosh of stones and arrows as one after another miraculously miss their intended target. The reader can almost feel the fury of a stymied and frustrated mob. Then too, the reader marvels at Samuel's prophetic imagination that intuits the birth of the Redeemer, and the signs that accompany that most miraculous of births.

Less thrilling and uplifting for modern readers, perhaps, is the prophet's unwelcome intuition concerning Nephite society's "wickedness and abominations," with their attending consequences. Nevertheless, this intuition is no less inspired. It is desperately needed in society today. Sadly, all cultural and sociopolitical signs point to the certainty that our modern society—including that portion called "religious"—will receive the application of Samuel's pertinent prophetic intuition to current societal "wickedness and abominations" with the same furious and frustrated rejection as did the ancient Nephites. However unwelcome, though, we must apply scripture to our lives as its author's intended.

In this homily, we will explore Helaman's thirteenth chapter. Here Samuel offers both an unexpected and unwelcome critique of Nephite society's "wickedness and abominations," manifest in its economic materialism, as well as a reflection upon the inevitable and

destructive consequences of that materialism.

## Law of restoration

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In order to appreciate the cohesion of Samuel’s message, it is imperative that the reader of Helaman 13 understand and apply the “law” or “plan of restoration.” In teaching his wayward son, Corianton, Alma the younger provides, perhaps, the most complete explanation of this law or plan.

“And now behold, is the meaning of the word restoration to take a thing of a natural state and place it in an unnatural state, or to place it in a state opposite to its nature? O, my son, this is not the case; but the meaning of the word restoration is to bring back again evil for evil, or carnal for carnal, or devilish for devilish—good for that which is good; righteous for that which is righteous; just for that which is just; merciful for that which is merciful. Therefore, my son, see that you are merciful unto your brethren; deal justly, judge righteously, and do good continually; and if ye do all these things then shall ye receive your reward; yea, ye shall have mercy restored unto you again; ye shall have justice restored unto you again; ye shall have a righteous judgment restored unto you again; and ye shall have good rewarded unto you again. For that which ye do send out shall return unto you again, and be restored...”<sup>1</sup>

Though less sophisticated and complete than Alma’s, the Old Testament contains several statements concerning this law of restoration.

In Psalm 35.<sup>7-8</sup>, for example, the Psalmist prays that the law of restoration be applied to his enemies.

“For without cause have they hid for me their net in a pit,  
which without cause they have digged for my soul.

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<sup>1</sup> Alma 41.<sup>12-15</sup>

Let destruction come upon him at unawares;  
and *let his net that he hath hid catch himself:*  
*into that very destruction let him fall.*<sup>2</sup>

Later in Psalms, the Psalmist describes the “restoration” which his enemies have already experienced.

“They have prepared a net for my steps;  
my soul is bowed down:  
*they have digged a pit before me,*  
*into the midst whereof they are fallen themselves.*”<sup>3</sup>

The wizened ‘Proverbialist’ draws a general conclusion from such observations.

“Whoso diggeth a pit shall fall therein:  
and he that rolleth a stone, it will return upon him.”<sup>4</sup>

The Prophet Jeremiah understands that such warnings are more than lovely pieces of poetry. They directly impact history. In directing some of his final words against the arch-enemy, Babylon, Jeremiah announces,

“Shout against her round about:  
she hath given her hand:  
her foundations are fallen,  
her walls are thrown down:  
for it is the vengeance of the LORD:  
take vengeance upon her;  
*as she hath done, do unto her.*”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Emphasis added.

<sup>3</sup> Psalm 57.<sup>6</sup>; emphasis added

<sup>4</sup> Proverbs 26.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Jeremiah 50.<sup>15</sup>; emphasis added

Jesus, too, teaches the law of restoration. He does so, for example, by offering a pointed warning, drawing one of his most profound insights and admonitions, and offering up an all-encompassing beatitude. First, the warning, then the admonition, then the beatitude.

“For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged:  
and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.”<sup>6</sup>

“Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you,  
do ye even so to them:  
for this is the law and the prophets.”<sup>7</sup>

“Blessed are the merciful:  
for they shall obtain mercy.”<sup>8</sup>

In the final Book of the New Testament, the imaginative Revelator sees a future application of this “law and the prophets,” both general and specific. “Behold,” says the Lord, “I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to *give every man according as his work shall be.*”<sup>9</sup> More ominous and specific is the warning counsel he gives to his Christian readers,

“If any man have an ear, let him hear. <sup>10</sup>He that leadeth into captivity shall go into captivity: he that killeth with the sword must be killed with the sword. Here is the patience and the faith of the saints.”<sup>10</sup>

The Saints will be sorely tested and tempted to participate in the ever-growing violence and oppression of individuals. This participation might take either actively personal and private forms, or, more likely and just as destructive, a less personal and private form through unhallowed allegiance to violent world governments.

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<sup>6</sup> Matthew 7.<sup>2</sup>; see also James 2.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Matthew 7.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Matthew 5.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Revelation 22.<sup>12</sup>; emphasis added

<sup>10</sup> Revelation 13.<sup>9-10</sup>

By this law, called “restoration,” then, if one knows only the present attitudes and actions of individuals or groups, one can with a degree of confidence predict something about the consequential outcomes that will be part of those same individuals’ or group’s future. On the other hand, if one is allowed only to see the consequential outcomes active in an individual’s or group’s present or future, one can with some confidence draw estimations concerning their past attitudes and actions.

Knowing and understanding this “law” or “plan of restoration” will assist us greatly as we seek to understand Samuel’s warnings, the nature of Nephite “wickedness and abominations,” and their application to modern society.

#### Samuel’s prophetic call

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In the first four verses of Helaman 13, we are introduced to Samuel, a Lamanite. As was sometimes the case in ancient Israel, the Lord was under the necessity of calling an outsider to deliver a message that society would likely find unwelcome. We think of the Hebrew prophet Amos, who, rejected by both the government and religious leadership, and commanded to cease his ministry in Israel, confessed his status as “outsider.” His “foreignness,” consisted of his coming from outside accepted circles of religious authority.

“I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet’s son; but I was an herdman, and a gatherer of sycamore fruit: and the LORD took me as I followed the flock, and the LORD said unto me, ‘Go, prophesy unto my people Israel.’”<sup>11</sup>

It required an outsider, Moses, to accurately assess and condemn the gross social injustices that the irresistible Egyptian empire was perpetrating against an entire class of its citizenry. We could find many other examples of God using “outsiders” to deliver unwelcome messages.

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<sup>11</sup> Amos 7.<sup>14-15</sup>

Perhaps God is sometimes under the necessity of calling an “outsider,” such as Amos or Moses or Samuel, because there are no longer any “insiders” who can or will honestly reflect upon or critique their own culture. Perhaps civic and religious leaders become blind to the sins of their own society. Then again, perhaps the taboos against speaking evil of the culture are so strong and so zealously enforced that no “insider,” who values his fellow citizens and seeks acceptance and advancement within the society, will attempt to “steady the ark,” or speak evil of the culture for fear of giving public offence and experiencing personal rejection—Amos, for example, was accused of treason.

Insightfully, Jesus acknowledges the challenges that a critical insider can expect to face.

“A prophet is not without honour, but in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house.”<sup>12</sup>

Most likely, both blindness and unwillingness on the part of Nephite “opinion leaders” played a role in God’s choice of the outsider, Samuel, to deliver the culturally offensive message. God certainly did not call an outsider to deliver his message because he thought that it might be more palpable to the society; for, Samuel, like the insider, was rejected.

“They did cast him out... They would not suffer that he should enter into the city.”<sup>13</sup>

Nevertheless, even in the midst of extreme heckling indeed—“they cast stones at him...and also many shot arrows<sup>14</sup>—“he went and got upon the wall thereof, and stretched forth his hand and cried with a loud voice, and prophesied unto the people whatsoever things the Lord put into his heart.”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Mark 6.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Helaman 13.<sup>2 & 4</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Helaman 16.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Helaman 13.<sup>4</sup>

The words of God that Samuel spoke from his perch on the city wall begin at Helaman 13.<sup>5</sup> and end at 15.<sup>17</sup>. Chapter 14 is devoted to Samuel's predictions concerning the signs that would accompany the birth and then the death of the Son of God. In Chapter 15, Samuel seems, almost, to taunt Nephite society by comparing its culture unfavorably with the hated Lamanite culture. The latter, asserts Samuel, has become superior to and more righteous than the former. Bitter, unwelcome words, indeed.

Our interest and attention in this homily will remain on Helaman's thirteenth chapter. Here, Samuel begins with a warning concerning a coming "heavy destruction" (verse 6) mediated through a divine "sword of justice" (verse 5). These threats hang over the Nephites' head because of their continued "hardness of heart" (verses 8 and 12).

Tragically, this hardness has continued even in the face of Samuel's initial "good tidings" (verses 6- 7) that the Lord is merciful and would forgive and bless the nation if it would but amend its ways. Because they could find no joy in the good news of God's merciful nature and his generous invitation to change and improve, but continued in their "wickedness and abominations," the nation and society would be visited with "sword and with famine and with pestilence" (verse 9). This would have the feeling of and be thought of as a divine<sup>16</sup> and "fierce anger" (verse 10). It would lead to "utter destruction" (verse 10). Because of wickedness and abominations," Nephite culture would cease to exist.

The "sword of justice," "sword," "famine," "pestilence," "heavy" and "utter destruction," Samuel warns, is only now restrained because there are a few "righteous," still living among

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<sup>16</sup> The topic of "divine anger" is an important one. In my view, it is highly misunderstood. It causes much violence against God. If I were writing a full-on commentary of Helaman 13, I would address it. However, I felt that going off on the topic would detract from the principle points I wished to explore in this homily—less "scholarly" and "comprehensive" than a traditional commentary.

But please note my careful language here. The Nephites would *feel* that their unquestionably demise was of divine origin. They would *think of* it as a reflection of "divine anger." The fact that they would feel and think of their very real demise in such terms does not make it so. Even the fact that Samuel might think and feel it so, doesn't make it so. We have plenty of indication in this chapter that such language of divine attribution is rhetorical, not to be taken literally. But all of this will have to await another time.

them. These, having accepted the “glad tidings” of God’s mercy and willingness to grant and accept change in the sinner, are earnestly striving to do God’s will and praying for society and its reclamation from “wickedness and abominations.” If, and when these few leave or are cast out, then the time of “ripeness” will have arrived and the nation will be destroyed (verses 12-14).

This takes us through verse 16. So far, Samuel has spoken only in the most general of ways concerning the unacceptable attitudes and behaviors of Nephite society. It is guilty of “wickedness,” “hardness of heart,” and “wickedness and abominations.” This latter is mentioned repeatedly, in verse 14, 15, 16, and 17. However, at no time has Samuel specified the exact nature of all this “hardness of heart” and “wickedness and abominations.” What specific attitudes do these include? What types of actions and behaviors constitute Nephite “hardness of heart” and “wickedness and abominations”?

So far, we are in the dark. All we know is that Nephite society has rejected the Lord’s generous offer of acceptance through change. But, again, change what, exactly?

Now, based on my observations of modern Christianity, many readers will most likely assume that Samuel is talking about sex; illicit, forbidden sex of any type: auto-erotic, hetero-erotic, homo-erotic, etc., etc. (the “righteous” must even keep a wary eye on “licit” sex within marriage). Any illicit form of human sexuality is pretty much the only true evil that modern Christians seem to acknowledge. As long as they are not engaged in any form or forbidden sex, it seems, they feel that they are doing o.k.

So, the modern-day Christian might be surprised, and just a tad put off by the direction that Samuel’s critique of society with its “wickedness and abominations” takes. Now it is nearly certain that Nephite society was engaged in all sorts of illicit sexual activity. All societies have been and are. But Samuel has not one word to say about such things. Modern Christian reformers would do well to note and follow Samuel’s example. All that illicit sex has a “root cause.” If one really wants to nip that illicit sex in the bud, one really must address the more important root causes. But more on this at a later time.



The turn in Samuel’s discourse about which we have spoken comes in the transitional verse 17. Here, Samuel turns from the unspecified “wickedness and abominations” that has dominated his warning so far to a very specific and consequential “curse” that will come to dominate the sermon at some length. In other words, we are about to see the consequences of the, so far, unspecified cause. Here, we must remember our discussion concerning the “law” or “plan of restoration.” If we have hitherto been unsure concerning the exact nature of Nephite “wickedness and abominations,” the specific description of the consequential “curse” will finally fill in the gap and inform us concerning the exact nature of Nephite society’s rebellion against God—its anti-Christ attitudes and behaviors that will bring the “sword of Justice,” “sword,” “famine,” “pestilence,” “heavy” and “utter destruction.”

#### The ‘arithmetic’ of “wickedness and abominations”

We can witness the shift in Samuel’s tirade in his vocabulary. No more “hard hearts” or “wickedness and abominations.” These vocabulary items disappear from the sermon and the text. They are replaced with the consequential “curse,” and “cursed,” and the, now, specified cause: “treasures,” and “riches.” Whereas Samuel had not spoken the word “curse” or “cursed” a single time in the first twelve verses of his discourse, together, they will appear nine times in just the next six verses, and four more times after that in the remainder of chapter 13. Whereas “treasures” and “riches” had not previously appeared in the vocabulary of Samuel’s societal critique, they will, together, appear 15 times in the next six verses, with another four after that. In addition to the repetition of “curse,” “cursed,” “treasures,” and “riches,” there is another repeated vocabulary item, “hide up,” repeated nine times in just three verses.

Such math is not academic. This arithmetic helps us understand Samuel’s perspective concerning Nephite society and the nature of its “wickedness and abominations.” It is as clear as clear can be that the nature of Nephite society’s “wickedness and abomination” is to be found in its “treasures” and “riches.” Nephite society is to be “cursed” because they self-indulgently “hide up” their “treasures” and “riches.” Nephite “wickedness and abomination” involves wicked and abominable individual and societal economic efforts and gains.

As we suggested earlier, the reader may not have been expecting this when reading of society-destroying “wickedness and abomination.” Why, “abomination,” in particular, calls to mind the most vile and damnable of sins. It has the feeling of “sin on steroids.” Surely hyper-materialism—something we in the west take for granted, living in and with every single day of our lives—is not “abominable.” “Unwise,” maybe—but only just maybe—but “abominable” and society-destroying? Surely this is hyperbole or fanaticism at its worse.

Not!

### Cause and effect

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Samuel submits quite a list of economic indictments against Nephite society. These indictments represent the “wickedness and abomination” about which he has previously spoken. They represent the cause of the effect about which he has spoken—“utter destruction”—and about which he will now speak repeatedly—“curse.”

Repeated over and over, as we have said, is the Nephite “wickedness and abomination” of “hiding up their treasures.” Samuel’s language concerning “hiding up” treasures is admittedly somewhat odd. But his meaning seems clear. This business of “hiding up treasures” is a matter of the uses to which Nephite individuals and society put their economic efforts and material resources.

On the one hand, Samuel teaches, individuals and society can “hide up treasure” for themselves. They can selfishly put their efforts and resources toward self-indulgence and self-gratification. We know all too well what this looks like, as it is the habit of our own society. On the other hand, individuals and society can “hide up treasure unto the Lord.” They can willingly grant God control over their economic efforts and their material resources. They can dedicate economic efforts and gains to the kingdom of God. They can use their economic efforts and material gains to assist God in accomplishing his divine purposes.

Now, we know beyond question the purposes of God. He lives to serve and bless others. More pointedly, he lives to serve and bless others less fortunate than he. He is all about advancing the interests and progress of those less advanced than himself—which is everyone who ever lived on earth. This is the clear meaning of his well-known mission statement found in Moses.

“This is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man.”<sup>17</sup>

Thus, individuals and societies dedicate their economic efforts and material gains to benefit and advance the interest and progress of individuals and groups less fortunate than themselves, or they selfishly and wickedly plan, act, and ultimately legislate to withhold material assistance from others who are less fortunate. This latter wickedly selfish use of economic efforts and material gains, of course, is indicative of attitudes and actions against which King Benjamin earlier warned his people.

“Ye yourselves will succor those that stand in need of your succor; ye will administer of your substance unto him that standeth in need; and ye will not suffer that the beggar putteth up his petition to you in vain, and turn him out to perish. Perhaps thou shalt say: ‘The man has brought upon himself his misery; therefore I will stay my hand, and will not give unto him of my food, nor impart unto him of my substance that he may not suffer, for his punishments are just’—But I say unto you, O man, whosoever doeth this the same hath great cause to repent; and except he repenteth of that which he hath done he perisheth forever, and hath no interest in the kingdom of God.”<sup>18</sup>

The destructive attitudes and actions described here, it should be pointed out, can be, and are, held and taken by entire societies as well as individuals.

Earlier still in the Book of Mormon, Jacob taught his people something of what it means to

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<sup>17</sup> Moses 1.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Mosiah 4.<sup>16-18</sup>

“hide up treasures unto the Lord.”

“Think of your brethren like unto yourselves, and be familiar with all and free with your substance, *that they may be rich like unto you.*<sup>19</sup> But before ye seek for riches, seek ye for the kingdom of God. And after ye have obtained a hope in Christ *ye shall obtain riches, if ye seek them; and ye will seek them for the intent to do good*—to clothe the naked, and to feed the hungry, and to liberate the captive, and administer relief to the sick and the afflicted.”<sup>20</sup>

Individuals and societies are welcome to their treasures and riches, but only if they use them for the purpose for which God bestowed them: to advance the cause of those less fortunate, and thus create a more equitable and healthy economic reality for all.

Unfortunately, Samuel is under the necessity of declaring that Nephite society is uninterested in such godly pursuits. While they “*do always remember [their] riches,*” Samuel laments, they “do not remember the Lord [their] God in the things with which he has blessed [them].” There is no thought whatsoever of “hiding up their treasures unto the Lord,” for they have “set their hearts upon their riches.”

The improper use of and attitude toward material efforts and resources, Samuel warns, is indicative of the “ripening for destruction” that is present in and spreading throughout Nephite society. In “setting their hearts upon” and “always remembering their riches” individuals have set their affections upon economic gain. They spend their time, their thoughts, and their efforts on little other than economic concerns. Other things may be forgotten or procrastinated, including God and his purposes, but not money matters. Day in and day out, economic concerns dominate the individual’s and society’s calculations and activities. This is where the day’s best and most anxious thoughts and efforts are centered.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> This is a perfect description of the “work and glory” of God. He works for the benefit of those less fortunate, less advanced than himself, that they “may be rich [advanced] like unto him.”

<sup>20</sup> Jacob 2.<sup>17-19</sup>

<sup>21</sup> I have often observed and commented that if members of the Church conducted themselves at work as they conduct themselves in Church callings and assignments, they would be quickly fired.

Now, we have spoken repeatedly of “individuals and society.” Too often, discussions concerning Samuel’s, King Benjamin’s, and Jacob’s observations concerning the proper use of economic and material resources focus exclusively on the private and personal perspective. It is certainly appropriate to consider the personal and individualistic applications of Samuel’s words—though such discussions are all too often full of acrobatic self-justification. However, individuals are social beings. They are members of local and national communities. Their private attitudes and actions can and are reflected in public policy and practice. From his description of Nephite society, it is obvious that Samuel recognizes this reality.

“They swell with great pride, unto boasting, and unto great swelling, envyings, strifes, malice, persecutions, and murders, and all manner of iniquities.”

The economic wickedness and abominations take multiply public forms.

The individual hiding up of treasures and setting the heart upon riches is contagious. It becomes a societal epidemic. Therefore, discussions concerning Samuel’s, King Benjamin’s, Jacob’s and many others’ observations concerning the proper attitudes toward and use of economic resources can and must also be applied to societies and governments. In fact, whatever good or evil citizens do individually can be and is magnified several times as members of a greater whole.

Nephite “wickedness and abominations” are not simply private affairs. They are public and institutional. They are societal. Individual attitudes have become reflected in public policy. It is this that will bring “utter” destruction. It is public policy that determines whether societal “ripeness” leads to harvest or famine, life or death.

Slip sliding away

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Samuel is fully aware that the threatened final “utter destruction” does not happen overnight. Utter destruction is the long-term effect of “the curse” that is placed upon society and its

viability, or, better, non-viability. But, a slow and slippery slope proceeds the final collapse. Samuel reminds us of this through more arithmetic. Four times, Samuel repeats his image-rich warning that treasures and riches will “become slippery”<sup>22</sup> long before the “utter destruction” descends in full force. Again, like the imagery of “hiding up” treasure, the imagery of treasure and riches “becoming slippery” is a bit odd. But Samuel makes the meaning of this imagery clear. One of the ways he does this is by imagining the future and tragic prayer of the economically “cursed.”

In praying, individuals and society lament that had they “remembered the Lord [their] God in the day that he gave [them their] riches,” their treasures would not now be “lost” (verse 33); their riches “gone” (verses 33 and 34). Here, then gone, their treasures—that which money had bought—slippery, cannot be “held on to” (verses 31 and 36) or “retained” (verse 31), but have been “taken from” them (verse 34).

Samuel warns that it will be impossible to “redeem” (verse 19) the “slippery,” “lost,” “gone,” and “taken” treasures and riches. Nephites “shall find them again no more.”<sup>23</sup> This final warning, which is actually Samuel’s first statement ‘against treasures and riches,’ stresses, again, the utter thoroughness of the curse. The absolute nature of the curse is captured, as well, in the howling lament of the damned.

“Behold, we are surrounded by demons, yea, we are encircled about by the angels of him who hath sought to destroy our souls.”<sup>24</sup>

The New Testament book of Revelation confirms the truth of this last, wretched, and too-late discovery.

“And I beheld another beast coming up out of the earth... and causeth the earth and them which dwell therein to worship the first beast... And deceiveth them that dwell on the earth... And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive

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<sup>22</sup> Verses 31, 33,35,36

<sup>23</sup> Verse 18

<sup>24</sup> Helaman 13.<sup>37</sup>

a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads: <sup>17</sup>And that *no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name.*<sup>25</sup>

The great revelation of the false “prosperity gospel” preachers is of Satanic invention and promotion. Devils do indeed abound in the materialistic orgy.

## f false prophets

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One might wonder at Nephite resistance to Samuel’s confident prophet voice. Samuel’s warning prophetic voice is not the only voice vying for society’s allegiance, however. As we find in the Old Testament, there are other seemingly confident voices opposed to Samuel’s critique of society’s economic abomination. These opposing voices advocate a very different message.

“If a man shall come among you and shall say: ‘Do this, and there is no iniquity; do that and ye shall not suffer;’ yea, he will say: ‘Walk after the pride of your own hearts; yea, walk after the pride of your eyes, and do whatsoever your heart desireth’—and if a man shall come among you and say this, ye will receive him, and say that he is a prophet. Yea, ye will lift him up, and ye will give unto him of your substance; ye will give unto him of your gold, and of your silver, and ye will clothe him with costly apparel; and because he speaketh flattering words unto you, and he saith that all is well, then ye will not find fault with him”<sup>26</sup>

We hear a very similar complaint from the great Hebrew prophet, Jeremiah.

“For from the least of them even unto the greatest of them  
every one is given to covetousness;

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<sup>25</sup> See Revelation 13.<sup>11-17</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Helaman 13.<sup>27-28</sup>. Given that Samuel’s entire focus on Nephite wickedness is economic, we must read such a passage as this one from this perspective: “Acquire and utilize your money any way you please. There’s no sin in that!”

and from the prophet even unto the priest

every one dealeth falsely.

They have healed also the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly,

saying, ‘Peace, peace;’

when there is no peace.’<sup>27</sup>

There seems, always, to be those who are ready and willing to preach a false “prosperity gospel.” They flatter and itch their listeners ears. They assure their adoring loyalist, in the name of their idolatrous god,<sup>28</sup> that there is no sin in society’s rampant self-serving and self-gratifying materialism. As these two passages make clear, these false prophets encourage their willing listeners to continue their abominations in hopes of personally benefiting from the economic bounties of their willfully gullible audience. Their non-discerning audience is all too willing to shower them with gifts and rewards in payment for their comforting lies.

But, Samuel warns, all the comforting assurances of the false prophets of the prosperity gospel are abominable lies.

“O ye wicked and ye perverse generation; ye hardened and ye stiffnecked people, how long will ye suppose that the Lord will suffer you? Yea, how long will ye suffer yourselves to be led by foolish and blind guides? Yea, how long will ye choose darkness rather than light?”<sup>29</sup>

## Conclusion

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In beginning to read Samuel the Lamanite’s warning against unspecified Nephite “wickedness and abominations,” all sorts of sordid and exotic possibilities fill our imaginations as we contemplate the exact nature of that wickedness and those abominations. Samuel never does get around to saying, directly, of what the wickedness and abominations consists. We only come to understand the specifics of Nephite wickedness and abominations

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<sup>27</sup> Jeremiah 6.<sup>13-14</sup>

<sup>28</sup> One of his most powerful names today is “Capitalism.”

<sup>29</sup> Helaman 13.<sup>29</sup>



by applying the principles that form the important “law” or “plan of restoration.” This law or plan allows us to surmise a cause from its consequence. If we know the consequence of an unspecified attitude or action, we can then confidently identify the cause.

The consequence of Nephite wickedness and abominations is a curse. The curse is directed against Nephite “treasures and riches.” The curse is both private and corporate, individual and societal. Notwithstanding the false hope of false prophets who falsely promise economic prosperity, individual and societal economic efforts will become ineffectual, and economic resources will disappear. In Samuel’s language treasures and riches will become “slippery.” Economic resources will be “lost,” “gone,” and “taken.” Irredeemable, there will be no “holding onto” or “retaining” them. Nephite society “shall find them again no more.”

The curse falls upon Nephite society’s treasures and riches because of a hardness of heart that, like a contagion, has spread throughout society. The hardness of heart is reflected in the individual’s and society’s “setting their hearts upon their riches.” In setting their heart upon treasures and riches, individuals and society spend their best and most heart-felt efforts on accumulating material resources in order to gratify personal and societal lusts. As the resources grow, so do the lusts. While hardly a minute passes without economic considerations, the heart of individuals and of society at large are far from God or his interests. God’s driving interest is the advancement of beings who are less than he; to advance them to become as he. But Nephite society gives little thought to how economic effort and resources can be, indeed, must be used to advance individuals and other societies that have been left behind and are vulnerable to hurt, pain, and even death because of their dearth of economic resources.

Samuel’s warnings are as pertinent today as they were then. Most likely, they are more pertinent today. It seems as near certain as anything that the self-indulgent materialism of today’s society goes far, far beyond anything the Nephites could have even imagined. Society’s current self-gratifying materialistic fetish is something beyond “unwise.” It is something beyond “dangerous.” It is something beyond “evil.” It is “wicked.” It is an “abomination.” Samuel puts this final label, appropriately, in the plural—“abominations.” It is the mother of all “abominations.”

The unbridled and epidemic materialism of today's society is curse-inducing. Society must repent of this self-indulgent materialistic fetish or it will not long survive. It will not be enough for an individual here and an individual there to resist materialism's idolatrous onslaught. The here and there individual must unite his or her efforts with other like-minded individuals.<sup>30</sup> They must demand that society legislate; pass and regulate laws that are consistent, not only with the divine plan of lifting the other, but with principles that tend toward societal survival through risk avoidance.

“They that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.”<sup>31</sup>

By reducing materialism, individuals and societies can avoid the “snare” of “hurtful lusts” that bring “destruction and perdition”—translation: “Individuals and societies are not made to be rich. They can't handle it. Those who think otherwise are, if not outright fools, potentially so. Wealth makes fools of the best of us.”

What is true for individuals is true in spades for Societies.

Though it is highly unfashionable to advance such positions in today's trendy, twisted, and ungodly Ayn-Rand-style survival-of-the-fittest libertarianism, men are to utilize, rely upon, and be subject to the collective will; for “governments were instituted of God for the benefit of man.”<sup>32</sup> Only through the collective rejection of materialism, encouraged by government actions, can our society avoid Samuel's slippery curse or the revelator's destructive vision.

“Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird. For all nations have

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<sup>30</sup> This is, in fact, if not THE central concern of the Doctrine and Covenants, one of the top two or three. Unfortunately, this is the concern that is least appreciated, and most creatively ignored.

<sup>31</sup> 1 Timothy 6.<sup>9-10</sup>

<sup>32</sup> DC 134.<sup>1</sup>

drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies.”<sup>33</sup>

“And the merchants of the earth shall weep and mourn over her; for no man buyeth their merchandise any more: The merchandise of gold, and silver, and precious stones, and of pearls, and fine linen, and purple, and silk, and scarlet, and all thyine wood, and all manner vessels of ivory, and all manner vessels of most precious wood, and of brass, and iron, and marble, and cinnamon, and odours, and ointments, and frankincense, and wine, and oil, and fine flour, and wheat, and beasts, and sheep, and horses, and chariots, and slaves, and souls of men. And the fruits that thy soul lusted after are departed from thee, and all things which were dainty and goodly are departed from thee, and thou shalt find them no more at all. The merchants of these things, which were made rich by her, shall stand afar off for the fear of her torment, weeping and wailing, and saying,

‘Alas, alas, that great city, that was clothed in fine linen, and purple, and scarlet, and decked with gold, and precious stones, and pearls! For in one hour so great riches is come to nought.’”<sup>34</sup>

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

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<sup>33</sup> Revelation 18.<sup>2-3</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Revelation 18.<sup>11-17</sup>