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# “They Did Multiply and Prosper Exceedingly in the Land of Helam”: Naming and Narrative Irony in Mosiah 23

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Matthew L. Bowen

**Abstract:** *The name Helam, attested as a place name in the Bible is also attested as a personal and place name in the Book of Mormon. Evidence suggests that this name is derived from the Hebrew noun ḥayil/ḥēl, which has a wide range of meaning, including “wealth,” “abundance,” “power,” and even “army” (including Pharaoh’s “army” or “host”). The form of Helam suggests the meaning, “[God is] their wealth,” “[God is] their abundance,” “[God is] their power,” and even “[God is] their army.” Although the promise latent in the name Helam is celebrated in their exceeding prosperity and abundance, Alma<sub>2</sub>’s people also meet with a dramatic and ironic (apparent) reversal of this abundance and prosperity, when an army of the Lamanites occupies Helam and brings them into bondage. Mormon draws multiple lessons from this event, and he draws substantively from the language of Alma<sub>2</sub>’s conversion accounts to narrate this event and its meaning.*

The Book of Mormon attests the name *Helam* as a place name (land and city), eponymous with one of Alma<sub>2</sub>’s “first” converts (see Mosiah 18:12–14) to the religious movement he started that became a church of Christ. Mormon’s narrative gives the name *Helam* special emphasis through concentrated repetitions in Mosiah 23, where it occurs no less than eleven times<sup>1</sup> in this single chapter and only twice afterward in the remainder Book of Mormon.<sup>2</sup> The sheer repetition

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1. Mosiah 23:19–20 (three times), 25–26 (three times), 29, 35, 37–39 (three times).  
2. Mosiah 27:16; Alma 24:1.

alone in this chapter suggests the name's narrative importance and invites us to consider how its integration into the narrative and its meaning impact or shape the narrative as Mormon has presented it.

In the Hebrew Bible, the name Helam is also attested as a place name in the Transjordan. 2 Samuel 10:16–17 mentions Helam as the site of David's defeat of Shobach, the military captain of the Syrian king Hadadezer (Hadarezer) and his invading army. This dramatic victory broke Syrian power in the region and marked the height of David's military power. Its twofold mention in the biblical text at this point thus seems significant.

In this study, I will follow up on previous suggestions that the aural components of Helam suggest a connection with the Hebrew noun *hayil*, construct form *hēl*, which can mean both “wealth” and “army” among other things, and the plural possessive suffix *-ām*, “their”—suggesting the basic meaning “their wealth,” “their abundance,” or something similar. Understood as a possible theophoric hypocoristicon,<sup>3</sup> the name suggests the meaning “[God is] their wealth,” “[God is] their abundance,” “[God is] their power,” or even “[God is] their army.” I will further propose that Mormon (or his source text) created a sophisticated and ironic wordplay on the name Helam. This wordplay begins as a play on the meaning of Helam in terms of the tremendous prosperity (compare “their wealth” or “their abundance”) that Alma’s people experienced in fulfillment of the Lord’s covenant with Lehi and his righteous descendants, when Alma’s people first settled in the land of Helam. However, this wordplay becomes polysemous (playing on multiple meanings of the same word) as “their army” with the appearance of a Lamanite “army”—a more ominous meaning for *hayil/hēl* in the context of the narrative—thus marking a sudden and dramatic reversal of Alma’s people’s temporal prosperity. An “army” of the Lamanites arrives in the land of Helam amid Alma’s people’s prosperity and abundance, and they are brought into bondage in fulfillment of the prophetic curse of Abinadi. For Alma<sub>1</sub> and his people, only the “the Lord their God, yea, even the God of Abraham and Isaac and of

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3. A *hypocoristicon* is a shortened form of a name. A *theophoric hypocoristicon* is a shortened name in which the theophoric, or the element referring to divinity, is largely or entirely missing, but implied. For example, the name *Nathan*, Hebrew *nātān*, means “he [the Lord] has given” or “he [God] has given,” but the divine element has been left out. It may be short for *Nathaniel* or *Nethaniah* (cf. *Netanyahu*) or something similar.

Jacob"—as "their army" or "their power"—"could deliver them" from the Lamanite "army" that brought them into bondage.

The polysemic wordplay involving Hebrew *ḥayil/hēl* and Helam (*ḥēlām*), "their abundance" and the coming of the Lamanite "army," as part of the broader narrative of Mosiah 23, highlights how divine blessings and divine judgments are sometimes interwoven. Covenant obedience can contribute to "wealth," "abundance," or "prosperity," but it cannot nullify divine judgment or exempt one from the trials of mortality. Ultimately, only Jehovah has the "power" or means (*hayil/hēl*) to "deliver" or "redeem." The Lord Jesus Christ, the dispenser of both divine blessings and divine judgments, fulfills the Abrahamic Covenant and all related covenants (such as the covenant he made with Lehi) while also allowing the fulfillment of the words of Abinadi that he had pronounced against king Noah's people, of whom Alma's people had constituted part.

### The Meaning of Helam

As noted above, Helam is attested as a toponym (place name) in the Hebrew Bible. Henry O. Thompson identifies Helam as a "town in Transjordan ca. 40 miles E of the Sea of Galilee."<sup>4</sup> Regarding the attestation of Helam in 2 Samuel 10:16–17, P. Kyle McCarter Jr. writes:

[Otto] Thenius understood MT [Masoretic Text] *ḥylm* as 'their army' (cf. Vulg.); but LXX [the Septuagint], Syr[iac Peshitta], and Targ[ums] take it as a proper noun identical to *ḥl'mh* in v. 17, and this is evidently correct.<sup>5</sup>

Although there is no current scholarly consensus, the form of Helam (*ḥēlām*) suggests several possible etymologies. One of the more plausible of these, as Paul Y. Hoskisson notes in the entry for "Helam" in the Book of Mormon onomasticon, is Helam derives from the Semitic/Hebrew root *ḥlm*, "[to be] healthy, to become strong, to be strong."<sup>6</sup> Derivations from roots like *ḥll*, *ḥlm*, and *ḥll* are less likely.

The phonemic elements of Helam, however, suggest another plausible Hebrew etymology and meaning, one that has indirect support

4. Henry O. Thompson, "Helam," *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman et al. (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 3:116–17.

5. P. Kyle McCarter Jr., *2 Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes, and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1984), 269.

6. Paul Y. Hoskisson, "Helam," *Book of Mormon Onomasticon*, onoma.lib.byu.edu /index.php/HELAMAN.

of the biblical text and, as I hope to show later, the direct support of the Book of Mormon text. The first phoneme in the name Helam suggests a possible derivation from the noun *hayil*, which takes the form *hēl* in its construct (genitive) and suffixed (possessive) forms. The noun *hayil*/*hēl* has a broad range of meaning that includes “faculty, power” and “wealth, property,”<sup>7</sup> but also “army.”<sup>8</sup> The second phoneme would then be the possessive plural suffix *-ām*, “their.” As a personal name, Helam or *hēlām* would then denote “their wealth” or “their abundance”—the suffix pronoun “their,” in this instance, referring to the parents or family of the one so named.

Helam as meaning “their wealth” or “their abundance” becomes more plausible on analogy with Solomon, Hebrew *šēlōmō*, meaning “his replacement”—the suffix pronoun *-ō* [ōh] “his,” in the latter instance, referring to the deceased first child from David and Bathsheba’s illicit union or to her late husband Uriah.<sup>9</sup> Nathan had given this subsequent son the name Jedidiah,<sup>10</sup> which meant “Beloved of Yahweh,” or “Yahweh is beloved,” a name akin in origin and meaning to *David*: *dāwid*, “Beloved.” For Bathsheba, the bereaved mother, Solomon was a “replacement” or “recompence” for the son she had lost. The name Malachi, attested as a personal name in the seventh century BCE in the form *ml’ky* on a jar handle among the Arad ostraca<sup>11</sup> and as the name of the fifth century BCE prophet, means “my messenger” or “my angel.” It is possibly a theophoric hypocoristic on

7. Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden, NL: Brill, 2001), 311.

8. Koehler and Baumgartner, *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*, 311.

9. For example, see McCarter, *II Samuel*, 303.

10. 2 Samuel 12:24–25: “And David comforted Bath-sheba his wife, and went in unto her, and lay with her: and she bare a son, and he called his name Solomon: and **the Lord loved him** [wayhwā ‘āhēbō]. And he sent by the hand of Nathan the prophet; and he called his name **Jedidiah** [yēdīdyāh], **because of the Lord.**”

11. Yohanan Aharoni, *Arad Inscriptions* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1981), 109, [archive.org/details/arad-inscriptions/page/n59/mode/2up](http://archive.org/details/arad-inscriptions/page/n59/mode/2up). Aharoni describes the engraving of *ml’ky* thus:

The engraving is crude and the form of most of the letters is distorted. Thus it would seem that this inscription was incised by a man not used to writing, as in several inscriptions from Beer-Sheba, and perhaps . . . two horizontal strokes are written in the wrong direction. We would therefore have the name Malachi or perhaps Malachi[yahu]. This name appears in the Bible only as the name of one of the prophets. Even though the reading of this inscription is not entirely certain, it supports the theory that Malachi is the name of the prophet, and not his title.

denoting "Yahweh is my messenger" or "Yahweh is my angel."<sup>12</sup> On analogy, the name Helam as a theophoric hypocoristicon would mean "[God is] their wealth," "[God is] their abundance," "[God is] their power," or even "[God is] their army." The name as having a double reference to a child with grateful parents—" [he/she is] their wealth" or "[he/she is] their abundance"—is also not a strained etymology. Understood as a derivation from *hayil/hēl* with a possessive suffix and as a theophoric hypocoristicon, Helam works well as a personal or place name.

The biblical text itself hints at a derivation—real or midrashic—from the combination of *hēl* and *-ām*:

And when the Syrians saw that they were smitten before Israel, they gathered themselves together. And Hadarezer sent, and brought out the Syrians that were beyond the river: and they came to **Helam** [*hēlām*]; and Shobach the captain of the host of Hadarezer [Hadadezer] went before them. And when it was told David, he gathered all Israel together, and passed over Jordan, and came **to Helam** [*hēlā'mâ*]. And the Syrians set themselves in array against David, and fought with him. (2 Samuel 10:15–17)

Regarding the appearance of the name Helam in this passage, consistent with McCarter's reading of Helam as "their army,"<sup>13</sup> Moshe Garsiel writes:

The name appears twice, the second version probably reflecting the original spelling *h̄l'm*. . . . It is changed in the antecedent verse to "Helam" . . . to indicate its derivation from *hyl* (חַל), "an army"; *hylm* . . . means "their troops." This MND

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See also G. I. Davies, *Ancient Hebrew Inscriptions: Corpus and Concordance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 36, 423. Davies understands *ml'ky* in the Arad ostracaon inscription as a proper name. See further Joel S. Burnett, "Divine Silence or Divine Absence? Converging Metaphors in Family Religion in Ancient Israel and the Levant" in *Reflections on the Silence of God: A Discussion with Mario Korpel and Joannes de Moor*, ed. Bob Becking (Leiden, NL: Brill, 2013), 52, [archive.org/details/reflections0000unse/page/52/mode/2up](http://archive.org/details/reflections0000unse/page/52/mode/2up).

12. See Matthew L. Bowen, "Messengers of the Covenant: Mormon's Doctrinal Use of Malachi 3:1 in Moroni 7:29–32," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 31 (2019): 111–38, [interpreterfoundation.org/journal/messengers-of-the-covenant-mormons-doctrinal-use-of-malachi-31-in-moroni-729-32](http://interpreterfoundation.org/journal/messengers-of-the-covenant-mormons-doctrinal-use-of-malachi-31-in-moroni-729-32).

13. McCarter, *II Samuel*, 269.

[midrashic name derivation] establishes a link between the place and its history, since it is there that both David and Hadarezer gather their troops to fight each other.<sup>14</sup>

In consideration of the relationship of this toponym to the Book of Mormon personal and place name Helam, Hoskisson further notes the relevance of Stephen K. Ehat's observation (like McCarter's) that the Latin Vulgate's rendering of Hebrew *ḥēlām* in the first instance is as *exercitum eorum*, meaning "their army," rather than as the toponym (place name) Helam.<sup>15</sup> The Vulgate's rendering of *ḥēl(')ām* as the toponym Helam, in the second instance, suggests that translator (Jerome or otherwise) saw the first instance as a wordplay on the second.<sup>16</sup> It should be further noted here that "their army" as a plausible

14. Moshe Garsiel, *Biblical Names: A Literary Study of Midrashic Derivations and Puns*, trans. Phyllis Hackett (Ramat Gal, IL: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1991), 126.

15. Hoskisson, "Helam," *Book of Mormon Onomasticon*. The Latin Vulgate text of 2 Samuel 10:15–17 reads,

videntes igitur Syri quoniam corruissent coram Israel congregati sunt pariter | misitque Adadezer et eduxit Syros qui erant trans Fluvium et adduxit **exercitum eorum** | Sobach autem magister militiae Adadezer erat princeps eorum quod cum nuniatum esset David contraxit omnem Israelem et transivit Iordanem venitque in **Helema** et direxerunt aciem Syri ex adverso David et pugnaverunt contra eum

[biblegateway.com/passage/?search=II%20Samuelis%2010%3A15-17%2C2%20Samuel%2010%3A15-17&version=VULGATE](http://biblegateway.com/passage/?search=II%20Samuelis%2010%3A15-17%2C2%20Samuel%2010%3A15-17&version=VULGATE). The KJV rendering of the Hebrew Masoretic Text of the same passage reads,

And when the Syrians saw that they were smitten before Israel, they gathered themselves together. And Hadarezer sent, and brought out the Syrians that were beyond the river: and they came to **Helam**; and Shobach the captain of the host of Hadarezer went before them. And when it was told David, he gathered all Israel together, and passed over Jordan, and came to **Helam**. And the Syrians set themselves in array against David, and fought with him.

The first Hebrew phrase is translated here "and they came to Helam." In the Masoretic Text the verb is plural *wyb'w* ("and they came"). Some manuscripts, however, have a singular form of the verb here: *wyb'*, which creates confusion about the verb's subject. This verb is treated as a singular causative form of the verb *bw'* by the Vulgate (or its *Vorlage* [predecessor text]), which also treats *ḥēlām* as the noun phrase "their army" (in the first instance) rather than a proper name: "et adduxit exercitum eorum" (= "and he [Hadadezer] brought up their army" or "and he lead up their army").

16. This notion perhaps finds further support with additional wordplay (paronomasia) involving the verb *lh̄m* ("fight") in 2 Samuel 10:13 and 10:18.

etymology and meaning for Helam is less important than the fact that this is one attested way in which the name was understood by ancient readers and interpreters and that the phonemes of this name (*hēlām*) are exactly *heard* in "their army" (*hēlām*), as the Vulgate rendering conclusively shows.

Support for Helam as "their wealth" or "their abundance," as well as the ironic, polysemic inversion "their army," emerges in Mosiah 23:19–30, with Alma's people multiplying and prospering exceedingly (vv. 19–20), but then coming into bondage to the Lamanites and King Noah's former priests with the appearance of an "army" that occupies the land of Helam. Mormon's account of this prosperity and its sudden dramatic reversal invites readers to consider the various aspects of "prospering" and to reconsider the notion that "prosperity" is always synonymous with wealth, protection, and immunity from life's challenges.

### A Text Critical Note

When writing out the Printer's Manuscript, Oliver Cowdery originally wrote *Helaman* for *Helam* but then corrected it to *Helam* in all instances. Royal Skousen maintains that

the original manuscript read Helam in Mosiah 23 but . . .  
Oliver [Cowdery] initially decided that Helam was a mistake for Helaman. He later decided to accept the name as written in [the] O[riginal manuscript] and thus corrected all 11 instances of Helaman to Helam.<sup>17</sup>

The writing of *Helem* for *Helam* in Mosiah 27:16 strongly suggests that Skousen's hypothesis is correct. In other words, we can be confident that the name is *Helam*, and that it is very near or identical to the biblical name Helam.

### **"They Began to Prosper in the Land and They Called the Land Helam": The Naming of the Land Helam and the Fulfillment of the Lehitic Covenant**

The first mentions of the name Helam occur in a threefold repetition in Mormon's description of Alma's baptizing in the waters of Mormon:

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17. Royal Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon, Part Three: Mosiah 17–Alma 20* (Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies [FARMS], 2006), 1447.

And now it came to pass that Alma took **Helam**, he being one of the first, and went and stood forth in the water, and cried, saying: O Lord, pour out thy Spirit upon thy servant, that he may do this work with holiness of heart. And when he had said these words, the Spirit of the Lord was upon him, and he said: **Helam**, I baptize thee, having authority from the Almighty God, as a testimony that ye have entered into a covenant to serve him until you are dead as to the mortal body; and may the Spirit of the Lord be poured out upon you; and may he grant unto you eternal life, through the redemption of Christ, whom he has prepared from the foundation of the world. And after Alma had said these words, both Alma and **Helam** were buried in the water; and they arose and came forth out of the water rejoicing, being filled with the Spirit. (Mosiah 18:12–14)

Mormon's mention of Helam as "one of the first" of Alma's converts, and evidently the first of those he baptized, probably indicates that he was one of the leaders of this new church and community. Brant Gardner writes,

That the land should be named Helam suggests his importance among Alma's people, probably a status that he had in Lehi-Nephi. Even though Alma's society reduced economic differentiations, it could not have eliminated manifestations of social respect.<sup>18</sup>

Gardner further notes, "Probably the same reasons that led Alma to baptize Helam first led to naming the land for him."<sup>19</sup> Helam's name ("their wealth," "their abundance") became even more meaningful in a context of receiving covenant blessings, which became covenant "prospering" (see below). For Mormon, the naming of the land as Helam and the people's experiences there constituted a moment of narrative opportunism, which helped him place emphasis on this story within his larger account as the parallel to the story of the exodus<sup>20</sup>

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18. Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon, Volume 3: Enos–Mosiah* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2007), 395.

19. Gardner, *Second Witness*, 3:395.

20. Sara Riley, "Even as Moses Did: The Use of the Exodus Narrative in Mosiah 11–18," (lecture, FairMormon Conference, Provo, UT, 2 August 2018), fairlatterdaysaints.org/conference/august-2018\_fair\_conference/even-as-moses-did.

and the continuing story of Israel's salvation history. It is not unlikely that Helam himself was exemplary in helping the new church and community "look forward with one eye, having one faith and one baptism, having their hearts knit together in unity and in love one towards another" (Mosiah 18:21; compare Mosiah 18:8–10), and was thus one beloved among his people.

In the same pericope in which he first mentions Helam, Mormon gives the reader a sense of just how much this community loved the waters of Mormon and their environs (the prophet-editor's namesake)<sup>21</sup> in the hymnic sixfold clustered repetition of this name:

And now it came to pass that all this was done in **Mormon**, yea, by the waters of **Mormon**, in the forest that was near the waters of **Mormon**; yea, the place of **Mormon**, the waters of **Mormon**, the forest of **Mormon**, how beautiful are they to the eyes of them who there came to the knowledge of their Redeemer; yea, and how blessed are they, for they shall sing to his praise forever. (Mosiah 18:30)

The naming of the land and city in which they settled after their relocation from Mormon would thus reflect the community's love for Helam as a leader. Notably too, the land of Helam is characterized as "a very beautiful and pleasant land, a land of pure water" (Mosiah 23:4), recalling the "fountain of pure water" in the land of Mormon where the community was first baptized and formed into a church.

Did the naming of this "very beautiful and pleasant land" as "Helam" (*hēlām*) have the meaning of "their wealth" or "their abundance" in view? Mormon's repetition of Helam in a clustered repetition that emphasizes the people's prosperity points in this direction:

And it came to pass that **they began to prosper exceedingly in the land**; and they called the land **Helam**. And it came to pass that **they did multiply and prosper** exceedingly in the land of **Helam**; and they built a city, which they called the city of **Helam**. (Mosiah 23:19–20)

Mormon also gives double emphasis to Alma's people "prosper[ing] exceedingly in the land" of "Helam"; that is, "prosper[ing] exceedingly in the land of their wealth/abundance."

Mormon's statement that "they began to prosper exceedingly in the land" specifically alludes to the fulfillment of what Joseph Spencer

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21. See especially 3 Nephi 5:12; cf. Mormon 1:5.

has called “the Lehitic Covenant.”<sup>22</sup> Nephi first mentions this covenant in 1 Nephi 2:20–21:

And inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments, ye shall prosper, and shall be led to a land of promise; yea, even a land which I have prepared for you; yea, a land which is choice above all other lands. And inasmuch as thy brethren shall rebel against thee, they shall be cut off from the presence of the Lord.

Lehi reiterates this covenant to his children in 2 Nephi 1:20: “And he hath said that: Inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments ye shall prosper in the land; but inasmuch as ye will not keep my commandments ye shall be cut off from my presence.” In his description of Helam, Mormon invokes the Lehitic covenant he later quotes in full, probably from the record of Lehi,<sup>23</sup> in Alma 50:20. There he records that the Lord declared to Lehi,

Blessed art thou and thy children; and they shall be blessed, inasmuch as they shall keep my commandments they shall prosper in the land. But remember, inasmuch as they will not keep my commandments they shall be cut off from the presence of the Lord.<sup>24</sup>

Mormon’s addition of the verbal construction “they did multiply” (“they did multiply and prosper exceedingly in the land of Helam”) helps the reader see the fulfillment of the Lehitic covenant among Alma’s people as, more broadly, a fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant.

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22. On the designation “Lehitic Covenant,” see Joseph M. Spencer, *An Other Testament: On Typology*, 2nd ed. (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2016), 84–90, [scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1007&context=mi](http://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1007&context=mi); Kimberly M. Berkey, “Retain All Their Oaths: Lehitic Covenant and Secret Combinations in Alma 37,” in *Give Ear to My Words: Text and Context of Alma 36–42*, ed. Kerry M. Hull, Nicholas J. Frederick, and Hank R. Smith (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University [BYU]; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2019), 411–32, [rsc.byu.edu/sites/default/files/pub\\_content/pdf/19%20Berkey%20%285-2-19%29-19.pdf](http://rsc.byu.edu/sites/default/files/pub_content/pdf/19%20Berkey%20%285-2-19%29-19.pdf).

23. Joseph Smith’s translation of the book of Lehi, from the plates of Mormon, is famously lost or no longer extant.

24. The Book of Mormon attests many other references to the “Lehitic” covenant. See, for example, 2 Nephi 4:4; 5:11, 13; Jarom 1:9; Omni 1:6; Mosiah 1:7; 2:22, 31; 9:9; 10:5; 12:15; 21:16; 23:20; 27:7; Alma 1:31; 9:13; 36:1, 30; 37:13; 38:1; 48:15, 25; 50:18, 20; 62:48, 51; Helaman 3:20; 4:13, 15; 12:1–2; 3 Nephi 6:4; and 4 Nephi 1:18. Compare 1 Nephi 13:15, 20; Ether 6:28; 7:26; 9:16; 10:16.

Thus, Alma's community reappropriating the personal name *hēlām*—“[God is] their wealth,” [God is] “their abundance”—as the name for their new land could hardly be more appropriate given their circumstances as they came into the land to possess it.

Deuteronomy 8 illustrates how the noun *hayil/hēl* functions within the context of inheriting or possessing new land in the land of promise and experiencing prosperity in the land of promise in fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant. This legislation included several “commandments” that Israel was to “observe to do, that ye **may live, and multiply, and go in and possess the land** which the Lord sware unto your fathers” (Deuteronomy 8:1). This legislation specifically warned against the pride that prosperity in the land would bring: “And when thy herds and thy flocks **multiply**, and thy silver and thy gold is **multiplied**, and all that thou hast is **multiplied**; then thine heart be lifted up, and thou forget the Lord thy God, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage” (Deuteronomy 8:13–14). The temptation then, as now, is to believe that prosperity in “lands of promise”<sup>25</sup> and Abrahamic multiplication proceed from one's own industry and work ethic rather than God:

My power and the might of *mine* hand hath gotten me this **wealth** [*ha:hayil*]. But **thou shalt remember the Lord thy God**: for *it is* he that giveth thee power **to get wealth** [*la:šōt hayil*] that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as *it is* this day. (Deuteronomy 8:17–18)

Psalm 49, one of the “hymns of the [Jerusalem] temple”<sup>26</sup> familiar to ancient Judahites and Israelites, offers similar cautions:

They that trust in **their wealth** [*hēlām*], and boast themselves in the multitude of their riches; none of *them* can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him . . . For he seeth that wise men die, likewise the fool and

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25. Jacob and his brother Nephi use the plural form of this expression in 2 Nephi 9:2; 24:2. The latter occurs as part of Nephi's small plates rendition of Isaiah 14 and in the context of the gathering of Israel.

26. Margaret Barker, *The Gate of Heaven: The History and Symbolism of the Temple in Jerusalem* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1991), 45. See further Gary A. Rendsburg, “The Psalms as Hymns in the Jerusalem Temple,” in *Jesus and Temple: Textual and Archaeological Explorations*, ed. James A. Charlesworth (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014), 95–122, [jewishstudies.rutgers.edu/images/documents/faculty/Rendsburg/psalms-hymns-temple.pdf](http://jewishstudies.rutgers.edu/images/documents/faculty/Rendsburg/psalms-hymns-temple.pdf).

the brutish person perish, and leave **their wealth** [*hēlām*] to others. (Psalm 49:6–7, 10)

The Hebrew expression *hēlām* (“their wealth”) exactly matches the form of Helam in 2 Samuel 10:16.

By all indications, Alma’s people had not failed to “remember the Lord [their] God” with respect to their abundance or wealth (*hēlām*). Indeed, they had been blessed and prospered by him because of their covenant obedience. “Nevertheless,” Mormon interjects, “the Lord seeth fit to chasten his people; yea, he trieth their patience and their faith” (Mosiah 23:21). Mormon adds one of his major theses of this account: “For behold, I will show unto you that they were brought into bondage, and none could deliver them but the Lord their God, yea, even the God of Abraham and Isaac and of Jacob” (Mosiah 23:23). Thus, at least one of the purposes of Mormon’s inclusion of this account is to show that even covenant obedience that results in prosperity and wealth does not exempt people from divine chastening and trials, and that obedience, prosperity, and wealth do not nullify divine prophecy, especially when the prophet has “sealed the truth of his words by his death” (Mosiah 17:20). Only Jehovah himself can deliver or redeem the righteous or the wicked and he will not redeem any in their sins (see Helaman 5:9–10; compare Alma 11:34–37, 40).<sup>27</sup> The lessons of Alma’s people in Helam are thus consonant with the truism of Psalm 49:6–7: “They that trust in their wealth [*hēlām*] . . . none of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him.”

### “While They Were in the Land of Helam . . . Behold, an Army of the Lamanites”: The Polysemy of *hayil/hēl* as Marking a Reversal of Fortunes

It is not clear just how long Alma<sub>1</sub> and his people “did multiply and prosper exceedingly in the land of Helam.” As Gardner observes, “There is no way to know how much time elapsed, but it strongly suggests a minimum of two years, although it could easily have been more.”<sup>28</sup> The word “multiply” probably suggests a much longer time. At some point toward the end of this period of prosperity and

27. Compare further Matthew 1:21. See also 2 Nephi 9:38; Mosiah 15:26; Moroni 10:26; Doctrine and Covenants 138:21; Moses 7:1.

28. Gardner, *Second Witness*, 3:395.

Abrahamic multiplication, a Lamanite "army"<sup>29</sup> was sent to recapture Limhi's people who had escaped captivity in the lands of Lehi-Nephi and Shilom. This army ended up lost in the wilderness (Mosiah 22:16). This army then happened upon Alma, and his faithful community in the land of Helam. They must have hoped that the army would simply pass on through, but the army did not.

Mormon reports the coming of these Lamanites with a second clustered repetition of the name Helam, interposed with the mention of the Lamanite "army" (Hebrew *hayil/hēl*):

For behold, it came to pass that while they were in the land of **Helam** [*hēlām*], yea, in the city of **Helam** [*hēlām*], while tilling the land round about, behold **an army** [*hēl*] of the Lamanites was in the borders of the land. Now it came to pass that the brethren of Alma fled from their fields, and gathered themselves together in the city of **Helam** [*hēlām*]; and they were much frightened because of the appearance of the Lamanites. (Mosiah 23:25–26)

The term *army*—Hebrew *hēl* echoes the sound and meaning latent in the name *Helam*—no longer as "their wealth," now in terms of "army." We recall the meaning "their army" that Garsiel believes is midrashically assumed in 2 Samuel 10:16, and which is also rendered with this meaning in the Latin Vulgate (*exercitum eorum/their army*) instead of translating as a place name. Alma's people had been "multiplying" and "prospering in the land" precisely because they had been keeping the commandments as the Lord had stipulated in the Lehitic covenant.

It should be noted here the noun *hayil/hēl* is the term used to describe the "host" or "army" of the Pharaoh in the Exodus account of Jehovah delivering Israel out of Egyptian bondage: "And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, that he shall follow after them; and I will be honoured upon Pharaoh, and upon all **his host** [*hēlō*]; that the Egyptians may know that I am the Lord" (Exodus 14:4); "But the Egyptians pursued after them, all the horses and chariots of Pharaoh, and his horsemen, **and his army** [*wēhēlō*], and overtook them encamping by the sea, beside Pi-hahiroth, before Baal-zephon" (Exodus 14:9); "And I, behold, I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians, and they shall follow them: and I will get me honour upon Pharaoh, and upon all **his host** [*hēlō*], upon his chariots, and upon his horsemen" (Exodus 14:17); "And the

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29. This army is first mentioned in Mosiah 22:15: "[the Lamanites] sent an army into the wilderness to pursue them."

waters returned, and covered the chariots, and the horsemen, *and all the host* [*hēl*] of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them; there remained not so much as one of them" (Exodus 14:28); "Pharaoh's chariots **and his host** [*wēhēlō*] hath he cast into the sea: his chosen captains also are drowned in the Red sea" (Exodus 15:4).

Mormon evidently draws a narrative parallel between the army of Pharaoh and the army of the Lamanites. In Mosiah 24, Mormon will explicitly frame the bondage of Alma's people in Helam in terms of Israel's bondage in Egypt with Amulon's "taskmasters" who caused Alma's people to "cry mightily to God" (Mosiah 24:9–10, 19; see Exodus 1:11; 3:7; 5:6–14) and from whom God, "knowing" their hearts and affliction, delivered them (Mosiah 24:12–13, 21; see Exodus 3:7). God intervenes against the Lamanites in the valley of Alma as he did against the Egyptians at the Red Sea (see Mosiah 24:23; Exodus 14–15).

The name *Helam*, understood as "[God is] their army" or "[God] is their power," sets up a striking juxtaposition between the Lamanite army and the Lord, whom Mormon shows to be the decisive means of deliverance or redemption from an Egyptian-like bondage to Amulon and the Lamanites.

### The "Armies" of the Lamanites Take Possession of the Land of "Helam": The Irony of Captivity

The Lamanite army, of course, did not pass on. They occupied the land and city of Helam but did not destroy Alma's people:

And it came to pass that the Lord did soften the hearts of the Lamanites. And Alma and his brethren went forth and delivered themselves up into their hands; and the Lamanites took possession of the land of **Helam**. Now **the armies** of the Lamanites, which had followed after the people of king Limhi, had been lost in the wilderness for many days. (Mosiah 23:29–30)

The text here juxtaposes Helam with "armies," switching from the singular to the plural (compare *ḥāyālīm*/*ḥāyālē*), which more clearly illuminates the pun. This is the second apparent wordplay on *Helam* in terms of *ḥayil*/*ḥēl* or its meaning, "army."

Moreover, this wordplay amplifies the irony of Alma's and his people's circumstances. They had been living faithful to the covenant and had accordingly "prospered exceedingly in the land of Helam," the land of their wealth or abundance, but now had the Lamanite army (cf.

*hayil/hēl*) or armies (compare *hāyālīm/hāyalē*) taking control of their community and settling with them.

The Lord allowing these circumstances fulfilled Abinadi's prophetic promise that Noah's people, of which Alma's people were at that time a part, would be "brought into bondage" (Mosiah 11:21, 23; 12:2). Mormon specifically mentions the fulfillment of this very prophecy in Mosiah 23:23: "For behold, I will show unto you that they were brought into bondage, and none could deliver them but the Lord their God, yea, even the God of Abraham and Isaac and of Jacob." This interpretation of events is shared by Mosiah<sub>2</sub>, who saw the bondage of both Limhi's and Alma's peoples as fulfilling the prophetic word of Abinadi (see Mosiah 29:18–20).

### **"And Thus the Lamanites Began to Increase in Riches": Helam and the Irony of the Lamanites' Wealth**

The coming of the Lamanite army and subsequently Amulon and the other former priests of Noah to the land of Helam resulted in the end of temporal prosperity for Alma<sub>1</sub> and his people. Mormon writes that the presence of Amulon and the other priests of Noah in the land of Helam results in an increase in the Lamanites wealth:

And now the name of the king of the Lamanites was Laman, being called after the name of his father; and therefore he was called king Laman. And he was king over a numerous people. And he appointed teachers of the brethren of Amulon in every land which was possessed by his people; and thus the language of Nephi began to be taught among all the people of the Lamanites. And they were a people friendly one with another; nevertheless **they knew not God**; neither did the brethren of Amulon teach them anything concerning the Lord their God, neither the law of Moses; nor did they teach them the words of Abinadi; but they taught them that they should keep their record, and that they might write one to another. And thus **the Lamanites began to increase in riches**, and began to trade one with another and wax great, and began to be a cunning and a wise people, as to the wisdom of the world, yea, a very cunning people, delighting in all manner of wickedness and plunder, except it were among their own brethren. (Mosiah 24:3–7)

Mormon saw Amulon and the priests of Noah as major catalysts

in the Lamanite transition from a primarily oral culture to a culture of writing and record-keeping during this period. While this resulted in an immense “increase in riches,” Mormon avoids ever saying that these Lamanites “prospered” or “prosper[ed] exceedingly in the land.”

Mormon also appears to have recognized that this antagonistic group was unwittingly laying the groundwork for the future evangelizing of the Lamanites by Ammon and his brothers. As Mormon understood it, “the brethren of Amulon” helped establish a level of familiarity with Nephite language and writing among the Lamanites (see Mosiah 24:6). A generation later, Ammon and his brothers then introduced the Nephite scriptures among the Lamanites. It seems likely that they did not just hear them taught (for example, Ammon “rehearsed and **laid before him** the records and the holy scriptures of the people,” Alma 18:36), but could read and teach them to their children. Several generations later, Samuel the Lamanite demonstrates a superior knowledge of Hebrew prophetic speech forms.<sup>30</sup> He almost certainly gained this knowledge through a copious reading of scripture, and this probably constitutes some evidence of a robust culture of scripture literacy among the families of converted Lamanites.<sup>31</sup>

### **“Remember the Captivity of Thy Fathers in the Land of Helam”: The Importance of Remembering Divine Deliverance for Spiritual Prosperity**

Gardner notes that the heading to the story of Alma<sub>1</sub>’s people (“An account of Alma and the people of the Lord, who were driven into the wilderness by the people of King Noah”) is intended to cover what was originally Mosiah chapter 11 in the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon: “That single chapter is now represented by Mosiah 23–27, inclusive. The text in the 1981 edition indicating that this introduction covers only our chapters 23 and 24 is a misreading of Mormon’s intent.”<sup>32</sup> A similar note has been perpetuated in the 2013 edition. Thus, the content of Mosiah 27 and the conversion of Alma<sub>2</sub> and the sons of Mosiah actually completes the narrative circuit of the pericope begun in Mosiah 23, as suggested by the larger text structure evident in the Printer’s Manuscript and the 1830 edition. This datum is helpful

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30. Donald W. Parry, “Thus Saith the Lord: Prophetic Language in Samuel,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 1, no. 1 (1992): 181–183, scholarsarchive .byu.edu/jbms/vol1/iss1/10/.

31. This topic cannot be further explored here.

32. Gardner, *Second Witness*, 3:387.

in explaining, as I will show, why Mormon drew on Alma<sub>2</sub>'s personal accounts in crafting his Helam narrative.

The angel who appeared to Alma<sub>2</sub> as "he did go about secretly with the sons of Mosiah seeking to destroy the church" (Mosiah 27:10–11; see also Alma 36:6)<sup>33</sup> gave Alma some pointed counsel that included a charge to remember his family's bondage in the land of Helam:

Now I say unto thee: Go, and **remember the captivity of thy fathers in the land of Helam**, and in the land of Nephi; and **remember how great things he has done for them**; for they were in bondage, and he has delivered them. And now I say unto thee, Alma, go thy way, and seek to destroy the church no more, that their prayers may be answered, and this even if thou wilt of thyself be cast off. (Mosiah 27:16)

Alma's reminiscence of this event given shortly after his conversion, as Mormon has included from his source here in Mosiah 27, and Alma's more reflective account given to his son Helaman (in Alma 36), appear to have influenced the way Mormon presents his account of Alma<sub>1</sub> and his people's experience in Helam in Mosiah 23.

If we recognize this as one literary unit, we see that Alma<sub>2</sub>'s immediate mandate to remember Helam, though Mormon places it later, would focus Mormon's editorial instincts on the significance of the place, the name, and the symbolism of Helam in his own retelling of the initial story in Mosiah 23. (Mormon's own name was given in remembrance of their previous location, as he states in 3 Nephi 5:12.) John W.

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33. On the significance of Alma<sub>2</sub> "go[ing] about secretly" to destroy the church established by his father, Alma<sub>1</sub>, who "went about privately among the people" teaching the words of Abinadi (Mosiah 18:1) and establishing a church, see Matthew L. Bowen, "'He Did Go About Secretly': Additional Thoughts on the Literary Use of Alma's Name" *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 27 (2017): 197–212, [interpreterfoundation.org/journal/he-did-go-about-secretly-additional-thoughts-on-the-literary-use-of-almas-name](http://interpreterfoundation.org/journal/he-did-go-about-secretly-additional-thoughts-on-the-literary-use-of-almas-name).

Welch,<sup>34</sup> John A. Tvedtnes<sup>35</sup> and S. Kent Brown<sup>36</sup> have drawn attention to the language of the personal accounts of Alma<sub>2</sub>'s conversion and the intricate ways in which that language finds expression in other texts (e.g., Alma 29). Mormon's incorporation of language and themes from these accounts is similarly intricate and even extends into his narration of events a generation before Alma<sub>2</sub>'s conversion.

In making and publicizing what is arguably the most significant textual discovery within the Book of Mormon, namely the chiastic structure comprising Alma 36, Welch<sup>37</sup> has powerfully illustrated the structural importance of the material at both the beginning and the end relating to the Lehitic covenant and the redemption of Alma's people. At the center of this chiastic structure, and upon which the entire structure hinges, is Alma's remembrance of Jesus Christ and his cry for salvation.<sup>38</sup> That structure has been reproduced below, in part, to highlight the prominence of the covenant material, the importance of divine deliverance, and centrality of Jesus Christ to Alma's conversion and redemption:

The commandments of Alma to his son Helaman.

- A My son, give ear to my words;
- B for I swear unto you, that inasmuch as ye shall keep the commandments of God **ye shall prosper in the land.**

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34. John W. Welch, "Three Accounts of Alma's Conversion," chart at Scripture Central, [scripturecentral.org/archive/media/chart/three-accounts-almas-conversion](http://scripturecentral.org/archive/media/chart/three-accounts-almas-conversion). Also in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon: A Decade of New Research*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, UT: FARMS, 1992), 150–53, [scholarsarchive.byu.edu/mi/66/](http://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/mi/66/).

35. John A. Tvedtnes, "The Voice of an Angel," in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited: The Evidence for Ancient Origins*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1997), 311–21, [archive.bookofmormoncentral.org/sites/default/files/archive-files/pdf/tvedtnes/2019-12-30/12\\_john\\_a.\\_tvedtnes\\_the\\_voice\\_of\\_an\\_angel\\_311-321.pdf](http://archive.bookofmormoncentral.org/sites/default/files/archive-files/pdf/tvedtnes/2019-12-30/12_john_a._tvedtnes_the_voice_of_an_angel_311-321.pdf).

36. S. Kent Brown, "Alma's Conversion: Reminiscences in His Sermons," in *From Jerusalem to Zarahemla: Literary and Historical Studies of the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, BYU, 1998), 113–27, [scripturecentral.org/archive/books/book/jerusalem-zarahemla-literary-and-historical-studies-book-mormon](http://scripturecentral.org/archive/books/book/jerusalem-zarahemla-literary-and-historical-studies-book-mormon).

37. John W. Welch, "Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon," *BYU Studies* 10, no. 1 (1969): 69–84. See also Welch, "A Masterpiece: Alma 36," in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, ed. John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, UT: FARMS, 1991), 114–31, [scripturecentral.org/archive/books/book-chapter/masterpiece-alma-36](http://scripturecentral.org/archive/books/book-chapter/masterpiece-alma-36).

38. Matthew L. Bowen, "Alma's Cry for Salvation," *Religious Educator* 24, no. 2 (2023): 40–49.

C I would that ye should do as I have done,  
D **in remembering the captivity of our fathers;** for they  
were in bondage,  
E **and none could deliver them except it was the  
God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the  
God of Jacob; and he surely did deliver them in  
their afflictions.** (Alma 36:1–2)

...

Q behold, I remembered also to have heard my  
father prophesy unto the people concerning  
the coming of one **Jesus Christ**, a Son of  
God, to atone for the sins of the world.

Q' Now, as my mind caught hold upon this  
thought, **I cried** within my heart: **O Jesus,  
thou Son of God**, have mercy on me, who  
am in the gall of bitterness, and am encircled  
about by the everlasting chains of death. (Alma  
36:17–18)

...

E' **God has delivered me from prison, and from  
bonds, and from death; yea, and I do put my trust  
in him, and he will still deliver me....**

D' yea, and I will praise him forever, for he has brought  
our fathers out of Egypt, and he has swallowed up the  
Egyptians in the Red Sea; and he led them by his power  
into the promised land; yea, and he has delivered them  
out of bondage and captivity from time to time. Yea,  
**and he has also brought our fathers out of the land  
of Jerusalem; and he has also, by his everlasting  
power, delivered them out of bondage and captivity,**  
from time to time even down to the present day; **and I  
have always retained in remembrance their captiv-  
ity; yea, and ye also ought to retain in remembrance,  
as I have done, their captivity.**

C' But behold, my son, this is not all; for ye ought to know as I  
do know,

B' that **inasmuch as ye shall keep the commandments of God  
ye shall prosper in the land**; and ye ought to know also, that  
inasmuch as ye will not keep the commandments of God ye  
shall be cut off from his presence.

A' Now this is according to his word. (Alma 36:27–30)

Mormon's abridged account of Alma<sub>1</sub>'s people in the land of Helam  
also links prosperity, bondage, and the ultimate promise of not being

cut off, but of being welcomed into God's presence. It draws almost verbatim in some instances from Alma<sub>2</sub>'s words in his initial account of his conversion and his account to his son Helaman:

Alma <sub>2</sub> 's personal accounts — the sources for the language of Mormon's narration	Mormon's narration
<p>"Now I say unto thee: Go, and remember the <b>captivity of thy fathers in the land of Helam</b>, and in the land of Nephi; and remember how great things he has done for them; <b>for they were in bondage, and he has delivered them</b>" (Mosiah 27:16)</p>	<p>"Yea, and in the valley of Alma they poured out their thanks to God because he had been merciful unto them, and eased their burdens, <b>and had delivered them out of bondage; for they were in bondage, and none could deliver them except it were the Lord their God</b>" (Mosiah 24:21)</p>
<p>"I swear unto you, that inasmuch as ye shall keep the commandments of God <b>ye shall prosper in the land</b>" (Alma 36:1)</p>	<p>"And it came to pass that <b>they began to prosper exceedingly in the land</b>; and they called the land <b>Helam</b>. And it came to pass that <b>they did multiply and prosper exceedingly in the land of Helam</b>; and they built a city, which they called the city of <b>Helam</b>. Nevertheless the Lord seeth fit to chasten his people; yea, he trieth their patience and their faith" (Mosiah 23:19–21)</p>
<p>"I would that ye should do as I have done, in remembering the captivity of our fathers; <b>for they were in bondage, and none could deliver them except it was the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, and he surely did deliver them in their afflictions</b>" (Alma 36:2)</p>	<p>"Nevertheless — <b>whosoever putteth his trust in him the same shall be lifted up at the last day</b>" (Mosiah 23:22a)</p>
<p>"And now, O my son Helaman, behold, thou art in thy youth, and therefore, I beseech of thee that thou wilt hear my words and learn of me; for I do know that <b>whosoever shall put their trust in God shall be supported in their trials, and their troubles, and their afflictions, and shall be lifted up at the last day</b>" (Alma 36:3).</p>	<p>"Yea, and thus it was with this people. For behold, I will show unto you that <b>they were brought into bondage, and none could deliver them but the Lord their God, yea, even the God of Abraham and Isaac and of Jacob</b>" (Mosiah 23:22b–23)</p>

Note how Mormon's narration in Mosiah 23:19–23 inverts the order of Alma<sub>2</sub>'s statements in Alma 36:1–3. Donald W. Parry has identified several examples of inverted quotations in the Bible and the Book

of Mormon.<sup>39</sup> Mormon's explicit citation of Alma's words to Helaman (Alma 36:2–3) in Mosiah 23:22–23 constitutes another example of this practice. Mormon inverts the order of Alma's statements: "for they were in bondage, and none could deliver them except it was the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob"; "whosoever shall put their trust in God shall be supported in their trials, and their troubles, and their afflictions, and shall be lifted up at the last day" in laying out one of his major reasons for including the story of prosperity and bondage in Helam and divine deliverance: "whosoever putteth his trust in him the same shall be lifted up at the last day"; "they were brought into bondage, and none could deliver them but the Lord their God, yea, even the God of Abraham and Isaac and of Jacob."

Mormon's double emphasis on the fulfillment of the Lehitic covenant in Helam ("they began to prosper exceedingly in the land; and they called the land Helam"; "that they did multiply and prosper exceedingly in the land of Helam") in the text of Mosiah 23:19–20 appears to have been prompted or reinforced by at least two things. First, the angel's charge for Alma<sub>2</sub> to "remember the captivity of thy fathers in the land of **Helam**" called to mind both the prosperity and abundance of Alma<sub>1</sub>'s people in Helam as well as the Egypt-evoking "army" that enslaved them. Second, Alma's twofold invocation of the Lehitic covenant in the chiasmus of Alma 36:1, 30 directed to Helaman ("inasmuch as ye shall keep the commandments of God ye shall prosper in the land" [two times]). Recognizing Alma<sub>2</sub>'s conversion story and the charge given in Mosiah 27:16 as the culmination of the entire Helam episode (Mosiah 24–27) helps us see the logic in Mormon's use of the language of Alma<sub>2</sub>'s conversion accounts in his own account of the Alma<sub>1</sub>'s people's prosperity, abundance, captivity in—and finally deliverance from—Helam.

## Conclusion

Textual evidence suggests that the name Helam—attested as place name in the Hebrew Bible (2 Samuel 10:16–17) as well as a personal name (Mosiah 18:12–14) and a place name (Mosiah 23:19–20, 25–26, 29, 35, 37–39, 27:16; Alma 24:1) in the Book of Mormon—means something like "[God is] their wealth," "[God is] their abundance,"

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39. Donald W. Perry, "Inverted Quotations," in *Preserved in Translation: Hebrew and Other Ancient Literary Forms in the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, BYU; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book), 89–92.

“[God is] their power” or even “[God is] their army.” The Latin Vulgate, which renders Helam as *exercitum eorum*, confirms that at least some ancient tradents saw and heard the name as *hēlām*, not as a proper noun but simply as directly meaning “their army.”

While this meaning of Helam fits the context of armies gathering for battle in the account of David’s and the Israelite army’s victory over the Syrian army in 2 Samuel 10:15–17, as the Vulgate rendering affirms, it *better* fits within the narrative of Mosiah 23, especially as the rich polysemy (range of multiple meanings) of the Hebrew noun *hayil/hēl* is considered. Hebrew *hayil, hēl* in its construct (genitive) form, denotes “wealth, abundance,” as well as “army.” The repeated emphasis on Alma’s people’s abundance in Helam<sup>40</sup> demonstrates that covenant faithfulness leads to the fulfillment of the Lehitic covenant and the Abrahamic covenant in this aptly named place. It links this story to the covenant salvation offered to ancient Israel and to Lehi’s descendants. However, the name Helam becomes ironic with the coming of the Lamanite “army” (*hayil/hēl*) that brings Alma’s people into bondage, in fulfillment of the prophecy of Abinadi. Mormon draws parallels to the Lamanite army and the Lamanite presence in Helam in Mosiah 23–24 with the “taskmasters” of Egypt and the “army” or “host” of the Pharaoh in Exodus 14–15, which is always characterized with the Hebrew noun form *hēl*.

Mormon’s narrative in Mosiah 23 draws heavily (sometimes verbatim) on Alma<sub>2</sub>’s accounts of his own conversion as preserved in Mosiah 27:16 and Alma 36:1–3, 27–30 and the angel’s charge to “remember the captivity of [his] fathers in the land of Helam.” In doing so, his editorial work exhibits sophistication and skill. Through an artful use of polysemy, irony, and intertextuality involving the name *Helam*, Mormon demonstrates that even covenant righteousness does not exempt one from all of life’s trials, troubles, or afflictions. Nor does it nullify the words of a prophet whose prophetic testimony has been sealed with his own blood. Mormon demonstrates on the one hand that covenant obedience eventuates in prosperity and multiplication in fulfillment of divine covenants, but on the other hand that the Lord enables decreed consequences to come to fruition, even as he mitigates their effects. Mormon clearly illustrates that only Jesus Christ—the God

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40. And it came to pass that they began to prosper exceedingly in the land; and they called the land Helam . . . they did multiply and prosper exceedingly in the land of Helam; and they built a city, which they called the city of Helam. (Mosiah 23:19–20)

of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—can ultimately deliver from bondage. Mormon also causes us to rethink the very nature of prosperity, wealth, or abundance, which can certainly be material, but in the end is much, much more than that.

The Lord separately charged Oliver Cowdery and Hyrum Smith in our own dispensation,

Seek not for riches but for wisdom, and behold, the mysteries of God shall be unfolded unto you, and then shall you be made rich. Behold, he that hath eternal life is rich. (Doctrine and Covenants 6:7; 11:7)

The Lord further promised the early Saints of this dispensation:

And if ye seek the riches which it is the will of the Father to give unto you, ye shall be the richest of all people, for ye shall have the riches of eternity; and it must needs be that the riches of the earth are mine to give; but beware of pride, lest ye become as the Nephites of old. (Doctrine and Covenants 38:39)

From time to time, we need the Lord's reminder, as did they: "Behold and lo, mine eyes are upon you, and the heavens and the earth are in mine hands, and the riches of eternity are mine to give" (Doctrine and Covenants 67:2). Sometimes, even more than those forebearers, we forget that prosperity, wealth, or abundance also includes our family relationships:

Now, I, the Lord, am not well pleased with the inhabitants of Zion, for there are idlers among them; and their children are also growing up in wickedness; they also seek not earnestly the riches of eternity, but their eyes are full of greediness. (Doctrine and Covenants 68:31)

As he was patient with and understanding of their weakness, the Lord is patient with and understanding of ours. The Lord desires that his children truly prosper in all regards.

And ye cannot bear all things now; nevertheless, be of good cheer, for I will lead you along. The kingdom is yours and the blessings thereof are yours, and the riches of eternity are yours. (Doctrine and Covenants 78:18)



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