
MORMON 4-9

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INTRODUCTION

Mormon and Moroni don't want to tell us about their own day. As it is, they share minimal information, just enough to let us feel the tragedy of it all and the loneliness of their positions as disciples of Christ. Much of their words in these chapters is directed right at us—the latter-day readers of their words that they knew who hear their cry from the dust, even as they watched their own civilization disappear from history. We are their audience, and their pleas come hauntingly down to our day: “hearken unto the words of the Lord...come unto the Lord with all your heart” (Mormon 9:27).



The map above is adapted from (Sorenson 1985, 339) and gives some context to the final battles of the Nephites as well as the Jaredites (which we'll discuss in two weeks).

A simple outline of the chapters in this lesson is:

Topic	Reference	1830 Reference
Beginning of the end	Mormon 4	Mormon 2
Mormon back in action	Mormon 5	
The end of the Nephite nation	Mormon 6	Mormon 3
Mormon's final words	Mormon 7	
Moroni sees our day	Mormon 8	Mormon 4
Faith, signs, and miracles	Mormon 9	

MORMON 4 BEGINNING OF THE END

1 *Nephites did go up with their armies.* Mormon has left the leadership of his people and became “an idle witness” (Mormon 3:16) to their self-destruction. In this verse, it was the year 363, making Mormon 53 years old when the Nephites went out to try and conquer the Lamanites. They had been able to hold their defensive position for about fourteen years (Mormon 2:28) but now they turned aggressor, which proved to be the beginning of the end of their civilization (v. 4).

2 *did slay many of the Nephites.* In a bitter turn of events, the Nephite attack was fully routed by the Lamanites. Bringing up a fresh army, the Lamanites pushed on and drove the Nephites from their defensive position in the land of Desolation even further north. Now with no natural defense (like the narrow neck) to protect them, they were at the mercy of the Lamanite armies marching ever further north.

3 *the city Teancum.* Likely named after the military hero of Commander Moroni's day (Alma 50-62), this city is only mentioned in this chapter. The location is given as “by the seashore” and “near the city Desolation.”

8 *they did again boast of their own strength.* The Nephites had some success in the see-saw war of 364 and even took back the city Desolation, causing them to boast in their great achievements. It was unwarranted gloating and only temporary; in v. 13 the Lamanite retake Desolation.

11 *the horrible scene of the blood and carnage.* Mormon, the idle witness, can hardly bare to write about what is happening to his people. He sums it up: “there never had been so great wickedness among all the children of Lehi” (v. 12).

13 *Lamanites did take possession of the city Desolation.* They also captured Teancum (v. 14) but would lose them again (v. 15).

14 *offer them up as sacrifices unto their idol gods.* The Nephites were not just putting their armies at risk. As the Lamanites marched forward year after year, battle after battle, they were capturing cities and villages. A practice began, mentioned first here but again in v. 21, of taking the captured women and children and offering them as sacrifices to their gods. This practice persisted down through the years with the Mayans and Aztecs, where they not only sacrificed humans but sometimes ate them in order to get power over their enemies (Sorenson 1985, 346).

18 *from this time forth did the Nephites gain no power over the Lamanites.* The battle in v. 15 was the last time the Nephites would have a victory of any kind over the advancing Lamanite forces.

23 ***I did go to the hill Shim.*** Prior to this time, the only records Mormon has mentioned are the plates of Nephi where he is recording the history of the people, according to Ammaron's charge. But seeing the inevitable conquest of the Lamanites and not wanting all the records hidden in the Hill Shim to fall into their hands or at least be cut off from access to them, Mormon retrieved them at this time. It was the year 375, so Mormon was 65 years old. Sometime after this is when he received the commandment and began his work creating the text that we now read today. He worked on the record for no more than nine years, all the while leading his people in battle, moving from place to place just ahead of the conquering Lamanites to stay alive, and hauling around the records of his people and the sacred artifacts—the sword of Laban, the Liahona, the plates of brass, the large and small plates of Nephi, the plates of Ether, and more.

MORMON 5 MORMON BACK IN ACTION

1 ***did repent of the oath...they gave me command.*** At the age of 65, Mormon decided he could no longer be the idle witness and presented himself for military duty. The people immediately responded by giving him full command of their armies, a commission he had first received fifty years previously and held for most of his life.

2 ***I was without hope.*** Though he led them as best he could, he did so with no delusions—they were not in a repentant mood and had no belief in God.

3 ***we had fled to the city of Jordan.*** This is the only mention of this city in the Book of Mormon, so the location cannot be determined very well, except that it was probably somewhere north of Desolation and south of Cumorah.

5 ***whatsoever lands we ha passed by...were destroyed.*** Though v. 4 shows the Nephites holding their ground, it did not last. In this verse and the next two, the picture is one of flight—and only the swiftest survived (v. 7).

9 ***that ye might not have too great sorrow.*** Amazingly, Mormon abbreviates his account of the bloody battles on our behalf. He doesn't want to "harrow up the souls of men" with tales of "blood and carnage"; and he worries about bringing sorrow to us. But he is living it and has been his entire life. Yet now he was thinking of us, and not wanting to say any more than is needed to make his point.

11 ***they might have been clasped in the arms of Jesus.*** What a great but tragic image. If we but repent, that is the award that awaits us.

14-15 ***persuaded that Jesus is the Christ.*** Many of the elements in the title page of the Book of Mormon, written by Moroni, are found in these verses.

17 ***They were once a delightful people.*** Mormon is near the end of his abridgement work as he writes this. He has written about many 'golden' times in the history of the Nephites but most recently he completed 3 Nephi telling of the coming of Christ and the great period of peace and righteousness after that event. There is the sense of some longing in his voice, some wishing he had lived in the days when people "had Christ for their shepherd."

18 ***led about by Satan.*** By contrast, the people of his own day are not led by God but by Satan, and more like boat on the ocean with no way to steer.

22 ***except ye shall repent and turn from your evil ways.*** This is the point of his story, why he even bothers to relate such a sad tale. Mormon wants us—the latter-day Gentiles—to learn the lesson of the children of Lehi, and repent of our sins and turn away from Satan and toward God.

24 ***as a lion, and tear you in pieces.*** Like 3 Nephi 20:15-16, Mormon is quoting from Micah 5:8-9.

MORMON 6 THE END OF THE NEPHITE NATION

2 ***Cumorah, and there we could give them battle.*** Mormon wrote a letter to the king of the Lamanites asking for time to gather his people to Cumorah for a great battle. In our day, it seems like an odd request and perhaps even more strange that the enemy would agree to it. But in ancient Mexico (after the Book of Mormon), records show that this was a common practice (Sorenson 1985, 346-347).

4 ***waters, rivers, and fountains.*** In the Mesoamerican model, the land around Cumorah (perhaps Cerro el Vigio, Lookout Mountain) is a land of water, with lagoons, rivers, and lakes. This matches the Jaredite description of the same area (Ether 15:8-11).

we had hope to gain advantage. This was not a total strategy of desperation. Mormon uses “we” but it appears to be mostly the other leaders who felt like this was a defensible position and that perhaps they could have some victories. Time proved them wrong, of course, but this entry makes it clear that the outcome was completely unexpected—they anticipated some possibility of winning.

5 ***when three hundred and eighty and four years had passed.*** Mormon was now about 74 years old and still the leader of the surviving Nephite military. In the next verse, he finally admits that he “began to be old.”

6 ***knowing it to be the last struggle.*** Mormon knows exactly what is going on. How easy it would have been for him to leave it all and walk away. Hadn’t he served his time as their leader for these many years? Let someone else take up the charge. But even knowing the outcome before the battle, he leads on.

I made this record. The language makes it sound like he made the record during this year, but it sounds to me like he means during this period of gathering and preparation, which was 380-384. It could be that Mormon had the other records for the first five years (starting at 375; see 4:23) and spent his time studying them, but didn’t receive the commandment and start writing the record we now read, the Book of Mormon, until these final four years, while he was between the ages of 70-74.

hid up in the hill Cumorah all the records. Mormon hid all the records save the plates of Mormon and the small plates of Nephi, what we have as our text today. There is a story told where Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery went to return the plates after the translation. They went to the hill and a cave opened to them. Inside the cave were wagonloads of plates, piled all around the room. They put the Book of Mormon plates on a table. When they went back later (and the story doesn’t say why they would make such a trip again), the sword of Laban was lying on the plates, saying it would remain unsheathed until the Second Coming. The storyteller was Brigham Young, a good source to be sure, but he was telling it in 1877, just two months before his death, at what was basically a stake conference in Farmington, UT. It was recorded by a scribe in the *Journal of Discourses* (19:38-39) which President Young likely didn’t edit or approve. There is no record of Joseph or Oliver ever

telling this story, or anyone else. Brigham Young's point in telling the story was to dissuade people from going prospecting after silver and gold. In addition to the Cumorah cave story, he talked about Porter Rockwell finding buried treasure but not being able to obtain it and other related tales. Many conclusions have been based on this unique remark by Brigham Young, such as the location of the hill Cumorah (he called it that) or that this was Mormon's great library of plates that he hid in the hill. But I advise caution, for we can't be sure of Brigham's intent or the absolute truthfulness of the story—was he purposely spinning a tall tale, easily recognized by his audience but hard for us to recognize in print?

which I gave unto my son Moroni. This is the first mention of Moroni, the keeper of the plates for many years going forward and who would finally bury them in upstate New York, ready for Joseph Smith.

7 *that awful fear of death.* As the women and children and soldiers waited for the coming Lamanite army, they had no faith, but fear. Mormon described it as more than just fear, though; it was the terrible fear that comes when someone knows death is close, which he had experienced all too often in his life.

10 *I fell wounded.* The Nephite army was divided into groups of 10,000, each led by a commander. Mormon's 10,000 were in the front of the battle (v. 11) and as they fought the vast Lamanite army, they were the first destroyed—all except Mormon. He was wounded and left for dead (so his wounds must have been severe) as the army moved past the front line into the heart of the Nephite gathering.

11 *save it were twenty and four.* Twenty-four souls were left out of 230,000 troops (23 leaders of 10,000 each are mentioned). Of course, 10,000 was the largest number known among the Nephites, so it could even be more if what Mormon really meant was 'a number of soldiers too big to count.' One scholar estimates the dead that day at more than 600,000, counting women and children, and Lamanite dead (Sorenson 1985, 350).

from the top of the hill Cumorah. The twenty-four survivors, all certainly wounded and perhaps severely, somehow made it to the top of the hill, away from the sea of bodies in the plains below and away from the Lamanite army gone to rest from their day of slaughter.

15 *a few who escaped.* Mormon allows that beyond the twenty-four on the hill, there were other Nephites, some of whom went south to avoid the conflict and others who deserted and joined the Lamanites. Why didn't anyone flee north? If they were in Mesoamerica, they would have been going right into the lands of the people of Teotihuacan. History shows that at this time, these people were allied with those living in the highlands of Quatamala—the heartland of the Lamanites. In other words, they were surrounded by enemies (Sorenson 1985, 348-349).

16 *my soul was rent with anguish.* Imagine the scene—Mormon, Moroni, and twenty-two others are gathered on top of the hill. They were probably all wounded in some way with little medical care or supplies. They may have had little or no food or water. They didn't dare light a fire for fear of alerting the Lamanites of their survival. They probably had nothing to sleep on but the bare ground. Laying their tired, wounded, hungry bodies down, there was nothing but despair in their hearts; they had just watched their entire civilization be destroyed, swept off the earth by an army that was still strong and powerful.

17-22 ***O ye fair ones***. Mormon's final words to us, written on top of the hill Cumorah as he overlooked the terrible scene of death and destruction, begin with this sad and powerful lamentation. They are a good reminder that the judgment day comes for all of us. See *Student Manual*, 353.

MORMON 7 MORMON'S FINAL WORDS

1 ***the remnant of this people who are spared***. Mormon's primary audience are the survivors of his own people, plus the other people of Lehi who remain, all of whom are "of the house of Israel" (v. 2).

5 ***repent...believe in Jesus Christ***. His final words are those of all prophets in all ages—give up your sins and look to Jesus for forgiveness and atonement. He enabled the resurrection of all people (v. 6) and the redemption of all those who exercise faith in his sacrifice (v. 7).

9 ***this is written for the intent that ye may believe that***. Speaking of the Bible ("the record which shall come unto the Gentiles from the Jews," v. 8), Mormon declares that the Book of Mormon came forth to fortify belief in the messages of the Bible. This is the language of the angel teaching Nephi also (1 Nephi 13:40; see also D&C 20:11).

10 ***the people of the first covenant***. The first covenant was that made with Adam and Eve, which is therefore universal for the whole human family. The "seed of Jacob" were invited by God to be part of that first covenant down through the years, as it extended through Enoch and Melchizedek to Abraham and thus the house of Israel. But the key to the covenant is to believe in Christ, to be baptized by water and fire, and to live according to the example of the Savior. Then, "it shall be well with you in the day of judgment."

MORMON 8 MORONI SEES OUR DAY

1 ***I, Moroni***. We were introduced to the son of Mormon in chapter 6; now we hear his voice for the first time. It has been seventeen years since the great battle at Cumorah (v. 6). During that time, Moroni has somehow escaped the Lamanites even while observing their systematic destruction of all the remnants of the Nephites (vv. 2, 7), except those who had dissented and joined them. Somehow he has managed to keep the records of his father safe. Now finally after seventeen years of solitude, he takes up stylus and adds his own words.

3 ***my father also was killed by them***. We don't know the circumstances of Mormon's death, but Moroni's statement is true whether he died there on top of the hill Cumorah after his final entries in the plates, or whether he died later during the last seventeen years.

4 ***I will write and hide up the records***. There was just a small amount of room left on his father's plates, and since he had no more means to make additional plates (v. 5), Moroni determined to put some final comments on the plates and hide them. This plan will change shortly, but that is his intent as he writes these words.

5 ***I am alone***. It's hard to imagine sadder words. He has watched everyone in his family and among his entire civilization perish, and Moroni feels completely on his own.

9 **Lamanites and robbers.** For Moroni, there are only two kinds of people remaining. It strikes me that even as he says this, he offers the hint that there are more than just descendents of Lehi; he just doesn't have a name for the rest, so simply calls them "robbers."

10 **the disciples of Jesus.** The three disciples have left the view of the people at large. But Mormon and Moroni have been seen them and been the beneficiaries of their ministrations (v. 11). Did they come to the hill Cumorah that night and guide Moroni to a path of safety? It's hard to imagine how he could have escaped the vast Lamanite army completely surrounding them without some kind of divine intervention.

12 **the same shall know of greater things.** Again the promise is made to us, that if we receive the Book of Mormon and don't get caught up in any imperfections of the record, we are promised "greater things than these."

13 **I make an end of speaking concerning this people.** Moroni is done speaking of the destruction and sadness, at least for now. The rest of his writings on his father's plates focus on doctrine and exhortation.

14 **no one shall have them to get gain.** Joseph Smith had learned this early on, thinking to take the plates to help the financial circumstances of his family (JS-History 1:46).

16 **blessed be he that shall bring this thing to light.** How did Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery feel when they translated this section? Did they realize immediately it applied to them? Certainly later, then Joseph described the translation process, he used Moroni's words—it was "done by the power of God."

17 **the faults of a man.** Moroni's disclaimer refers to the work of his father. He is clear that he doesn't know of any faults, but if anyone finds any, then he wants to assure us that the power of God is still the driving force.

23 **Search the prophecies of Isaiah.** Moroni loved Isaiah as his father did. He must have studied carefully those ancient writings, about 1100 years removed from him, and found hope in them in the midst of his solitude.

26-41 **in the gall of bitterness and in the bonds of iniquity.** Moroni, who has seen our day (v. 35), recites a litany of sins and wickedness, calling upon us, who will receive his father's record at the last days, to abandon these sins. He mixes personal wickedness with prophecies of the last days. Interestingly, all of this was triggered by a challenge to search Isaiah.

MORMON 9 FAITH, SIGNS, AND MIRACLES

2 **when the Lord shall come.** Moving past the last days, Moroni goes to the Second Coming itself, wondering if those who witness all of this can possibly "not believe in Christ" (v. 1).

6 **be found spotless, pure, fair, and white.** As with many other references, Moroni is not referring to ethnicity or skin color here, but a state of perfection that is achieved by one who is "cleansed by the blood of the Lamb."

7 *I speak unto you who deny the revelations.* Moroni's audience for many of his final words are those of the last days who believe there is not a God who speaks to man, who acts in our lives as he did in other times, who does not bless his children with miracles.

8 *he has not read the scriptures.* To Moroni, anyone who believes that miracles and revelations have ceased has simply not read and understood the scriptures. God is unchanging (v. 9) and has always been a God of miracles (vv. 10-11).

12 *And because of the fall of man came Jesus Christ.* The wording here is interesting: it is *because* of the fall that Jesus Christ came to earth. The fall and the atonement are eternally linked, one being required for the other.

the redemption of man. There is a resurrection (v. 13) which is brought about by Christ's victory over death. It applies to all mankind. But Moroni is also teaching that redemption—being brought back into the presence of God—also applies to all mankind. Everyone person will be resurrected and brought back into the presence of God for judgment (v. 14). But those who have not repented “shall be filthy still” and the “righteous shall be righteous still” (v. 14). So Jesus has done his part by bringing us back to God; our part is to be prepared for that day that we might enjoy the experience.

18 *Jesus Christ...mighty miracles...by the hands of the apostles.* Even as he wanders alone, Moroni is able to teach marvelous doctrines of hope, power, and miracles. How easy for him to have been caught up in his own misery! Instead, he shows constant faith in an unchanging God, because his heart was changed by the Spirit.

22 *Go ye into all the world.* The great commission was given to the disciples of Jesus' day, both in the New Testament (Matthew 28:19-20) and the New World (3 Nephi 28:23). Likewise, many sections of the Doctrine and Covenants have the same commission (e.g., 18:28; 28:8; 35:23; 36:1).

27 *Doubt not, but be believing...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.* We cannot save ourselves any more than we can create ourselves. We are called on to believe and to labor in the kingdom. We fear and tremble before God not because he will unfairly mistreat us, but rather because we know that judgment is coming and we will have to stand before him.

30 *ye shall have my words.* Wandering alone for years, surviving on his wits, the Spirit has still taught Moroni and he has believed that the words he has written will survive and be brought out in the last days.

32 *called among us the reformed Egyptian.* We don't know what “reformed Egyptian” is but languages change over time. It had been 1000 years since Nephi wrote that he was using the language of the Egyptians (1 Nephi 1:2), and during that time the language had certainly changed dramatically.

33 *we should have written in Hebrew.* Hebrew is a pretty efficient language but reformed Egyptian must have been much better, because they chose to use it for the plates. Moroni says that the language they spoke was still called “Hebrew” by them, but like Egyptian, it is likely that the language had changed dramatically since Lehi left Jerusalem.

36 *the prayers of all the saints.* Moroni acknowledges that he is the last of the line of those who have prayed for all these messages to be preserved and come forward in the last days. Many

prayers have been given throughout the Book of Mormon's history by faithful Nephite and Lamanite Saints that this would happen. It is now his personal mission to complete the task.

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