

THE BOOK OF MORMON

A RECORD OF A FALLEN PEOPLE

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The perpetuity of this land and nation depends upon faith. Any power or any influence that will destroy directly or indirectly this principle of faith in God is an enemy to the Constitution of the United States.¹

—David O. McKay

In the second paragraph of the Title Page to the Book of Mormon, Moroni described the key purposes of the text. Each point is connected to the other and all are connected to the promised land. Moroni wrote:

An abridgment taken from the Book of Ether also, which is a record of the people of Jared, who were scattered at the time the Lord confounded the language of the people, when they were building a tower to get to heaven—Which is to show unto the remnant of the House of Israel what great things the Lord hath done for their fathers; and that they may know the covenants of the Lord, that they are not cast off forever—And also, to the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that JESUS is the CHRIST, the ETERNAL GOD, manifesting himself unto all nations—And now, if there are faults they are the mistakes of men; wherefore, condemn not the things of God, that ye may be found spotless at the judgment seat of Christ.²

Found within this paragraph are important doctrines and concepts often overlooked in the study and purpose of the Book of Mormon. The key concepts within this paragraph are the following:

1. “Show . . . to the House of Israel what great things the Lord hath done for their fathers”
2. “That they may know the covenants of the Lord”
3. “That they are not cast off forever”
4. “Convincing of the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ”
5. That He (Christ) manifested “himself unto all nations”
6. “If there are faults, they are the mistakes of men”

These few statements or concepts explain the primary purposes of the Book of Mormon and reveal why the record was made and saved to come forth in this time to the House of Israel. The first is history—the *Past*—and is described as “what great things the Lord hath done for their

¹ Donald Q. Cannon, ed., *Latter-day Prophets and the United States Constitution* [Provo:BYU Religious Studies Center, 1991], 126.

² Title Page, The Book of Mormon.

fathers.” This purpose centers on the relationship that God had with their fathers. The Book of Mormon shows the covenants and blessings of this relationship from His hand, as well as the judgments brought upon them by their choices. Connected to this history is *the Present*—that they (the House of Israel) “may know the covenants of the Lord.” A knowledge of these gospel covenants connect the remnant of Israel to their ancestors. The salvation of both the fathers and children are connected to the covenants made between man and God in every age. The salvation of the children requires the covenant connection to their fathers. The third concept in the list above projects this purpose and relationship into *the Future* by giving hope to the remnant. This hope is accomplished by teaching them that they will not be “cast off forever,” because of the covenants made by God with the righteous patriarchs and prophets of the past. The history of the past is connected to the hope of the future by gospel covenants that are made and understood in the present.

The Title Page of the Nephite record explained that *protology* (history) and *eschatology* (prophecy) will only have meaning and value in the *fulfillment* of the prophecies and promises found within the Book of Mormon. These prophetic promises are the covenants made with the righteous in antiquity about the gospel and promised land in the textual future. That which can weld or link all dispensations together is understanding the secular or scriptural history, and then connecting the relationship of that history to the promised gospel blessings. An awareness of the destructive power of pride and spiritual Babylon—coupled with a sound understanding of the doctrines, ordinances, and influence of the laws of Zion—can bestow an endowment of power over evil upon those with this knowledge. This is the “power to become the sons of God” (John 1:12–13)—the power to become the pure in heart, even Zion (D&C 97:21).

Also connected to the first three concepts of the Title Page listed above is the convincing of *all* that Jesus is the Christ, that He is the Savior of all mankind, and that He will fulfill the promises made to the fathers. Something not often noticed in scripture is the promise from the Lord to place all people, in every nation, on equal footing in the access to knowledge of the gospel. As one final statement from the Title Page (number 5) subtly teaches, that the Savior will be “manifesting himself unto all nations.”

A Worldwide Message

The fulfillment of this manifestation of Christ to all nations is usually assumed to happen at some future time or through missionary work in this dispensation. This is true, however, within the context of the scriptures, it appears that knowledge of Jesus Christ and his teachings may have been even greater than the Jews in Jerusalem, the Gentiles of the Mediterranean by the early apostles, and the Nephites in the Book of Mormon. In 3 Nephi 16, the Savior stated that:

And verily, verily, I say unto you that I have other sheep, *which are not of this land, neither of the land of Jerusalem, neither in any parts of that land round about whither I have been to minister.*

For they of whom I speak are they who have not as yet heard my voice; neither have I at any time manifested myself unto them.

But I have received a commandment of the Father that I shall go unto them, and that they shall hear my voice, and shall be numbered among my sheep, that there may be one fold and one shepherd; therefore I go to show myself unto them. (3 Nephi 16:1–3)

3 Nephi 16:1 above implies that there were those at Jerusalem who were taught by Christ, that there were Nephites that He personally taught after His resurrection, *and* that there were others

He had already taught before He came to the Nephites, and yet there were still more that He must visit and teach. This same concept is also taught in Jacob 5, in the Allegory of the Olive Tree that came from the prophet Zenos and was found on the Brass Plates.

There was a time when all of the trees within the vineyard (i.e. the world) were nourished, before the dispensation of the fulness of times.

And it came to pass that the Lord of the vineyard and the servant of the Lord of the vineyard did nourish *all* the fruit of the vineyard. (Jacob 5:28)

The ‘tame tree’ represents Israel (Jacob 6:1) and the ‘wild’ are the Gentiles and “*all*” the fruit of the vineyard is nourished by the Lord. Following the nourishment of the fruit, there is a universal apostasy (beginning in Jacob 5:29) that will eventually take place throughout the world.

And now, behold, notwithstanding all the care which we have taken of my vineyard, the trees thereof have become corrupted, that they bring forth no good fruit; and these I had hoped to preserve, to have laid up fruit thereof against the season, unto mine own self. But, behold, they have become like unto the wild olive-tree, and they are of no worth but to be hewn down and cast into the fire; and it grieveth me that I should lose them. (Jacob 5:46; also see same chapter verses 37–45)

Following this time of a famine of hearing the word of the Lord is a restoration and re-nourishment of the trees of the vineyard that began with Joseph Smith and the restoration of the gospel and the church.

Wherefore, go to, and *call servants*, that we may labor diligently with our might in the vineyard, that we may prepare the way, that I may bring forth again the natural fruit, which natural fruit is good and the most precious above all other fruit.

Wherefore, let us go to and labor with our might this *last time*, for behold the end draweth nigh, and this is *for the last time* that I shall prune my vineyard.

Graft in the branches; begin at the last that they may be first, and that the first may be last, and dig about the trees, both old and young, the first and the last; and the last and the first, that all may be nourished once again for the *last time*.

Wherefore, dig about them, and prune them, and dung them once more, for the last time, for the end draweth nigh. And if it be so that these last grafts shall grow, and bring forth the natural fruit, then shall ye prepare the way for them, that they may grow. (Jacob 5:61–64)

This labor for the “last time” as mentioned in Jacob is also discussed in the Doctrine and Covenants, which defines the labor of missionary work in this last dispensation. The phrases used in the Doctrine and Covenants are presented below to assist in understanding the connection of the “last time” found in Jacob and the “last time” in modern scripture:

For thou art called to prune my vineyard with a mighty pruning, yea, even for the *last time*; yea, and also all those whom thou hast ordained, and they shall do even according to this pattern. Amen. (D&C 24:19)

For behold, the field is white already to harvest; and it is the eleventh hour, and the *last time* that I shall call laborers into my vineyard. (D&C 33:3)

Wherefore lay to with your might and call faithful laborers into my vineyard, that it may be pruned for the *last time*. (D&C 39:17)

Wherefore, labor ye, labor ye in my vineyard for the *last time*—for the *last time* call upon the inhabitants of the earth. (D&C 43:28)

Therefore, tarry ye, and labor diligently, that you may be perfected in your ministry to go forth among the Gentiles for the *last time*, as many as the mouth of the Lord shall name, to bind up the law and seal up the testimony, and to prepare the saints for the hour of judgment which is to come; (D&C 88:84)

Therefore, thou art blessed from henceforth that bear the keys of the kingdom given unto you; which kingdom is coming forth for the *last time*. (D&C 90:2)

For the preparation wherewith I design to prepare mine apostles to prune my vineyard for the *last time*, that I may bring to pass my strange act, that I may pour out my Spirit upon all flesh— (D&C 95:4)

The entire chapter in Jacob about the Allegory of the Olive Tree reaffirms the notion that world history is just the details of the battle between Babylon and Zion. This chapter described a history of Israel and the gospel (nourishment) that is given throughout history. Most important for this discussion is the “nourishment” of the vineyard at the time of Christ (Jacob 5:28); the “corruption” of the entire vineyard, or the universal apostasy (Jacob 5:29–49); and the labor for the “last time” in the last days (Jacob 5:61–75). The vineyard is the world, and the goal of the master and His servants is to establish Zion even in the “nethermost parts of the vineyard,” seeking that all mankind would “repent, and come with full purpose of heart, and cleave unto God as he cleaveth unto you” (Jacob 6:5).

Jacob taught that *before* the labor of the “last time” initiated by the restoration of the gospel and church in this dispensation, the Lord and master of the vineyard nourished all of the branches in the entire vineyard.

Nephi the son of Lehi seemed to teach that the nations of the earth may have received the gospel between the death and resurrection of Christ, and the restoration by Joseph Smith (2 Nephi 29:7–12, also 3 Nephi 16:1–3). No one knows how long or expansive the gospel was taught and spread before the apostasy. Nephi wrote, “the time cometh that he shall manifest himself *unto all nations, both unto the Jews and also unto the Gentiles*; and after he has manifested himself unto the Jews and also unto the Gentiles, then he shall manifest himself unto the Gentiles and also unto the Jews, and the last shall be first, and the first shall be last” (1 Nephi 13:42). This places all mankind on equal grounds in the hearing of the word of the Lord—not only the Jew at the time of Christ’s ministry but also the Gentiles after the resurrection—and then the Gentiles and then Jew after the restoration. This concept is also explained in the prophecies and promises from the Lord to Nephi as “all nations of the earth” will have the words of Christ.

Know ye not that there are more nations than one? Know ye not that I, the Lord your God, have created all men, and that I remember those who are upon the isles of the sea...and *I bring forth my word unto the children of men, yea, even upon all the nations of the earth?*

...I am God, that I remember one nation like unto another? Wherefore, I speak the same words unto one nation like unto another...

...And I do this that I may prove unto many that I am the same yesterday, today, and forever

For I command all men, both in the east and in the west, and in the north, and in the south, and in the islands of the sea, that they shall write the words which I speak unto them...

For behold, I shall speak *unto the Jews* and they shall write it; and I shall also speak *unto the Nephites* and they shall write it; and I shall also speak *unto the other tribes of the house of Israel*, which I have led away, and they shall write it; and *I shall also speak unto all nations of the earth and they shall write it.* (2 Nephi 29:7–9, 11–12)

These verses could be interpreted as a last days prophecy fulfilled by missionary work; however, the context implies, as does Jacob 5 and other scriptures, that in the Meridian of Times the gospel seems to have been worldwide. God is no respecter of persons. If this is true, it would result in finding traditions of Christ, or one like Christ, and His teachings in almost every ancient culture around the world. These traditions of Christ and the fulfillment of the prophecies above will be manifested in the art and architecture, the myths and symbols, and also the teachings found in the sacred writings of almost every culture. Even though there was a ‘worldwide apostasy’ (Jacob 5:37–45) after all “nations” are taught of Jesus Christ and His gospel like the branches were nourished throughout the vineyard (Jacob 5:27–28), a shadow of these traditions, symbols, and teachings would remain—as though Christ and His teachings would become a ‘Hero with a Thousand Faces.’³

The battle rages between the ideologies of Babylon and Zion—one against the other. To be in one is to *not* be in the other. By birth and life, everyone must have a home in a wicked world; however, the salvation of the individual depends upon which of these two philosophical forces might find a home within us: Babylon or Zion?

The Migrations

Within the Book of Mormon there are many significant messages which are discussed by the prophets who wrote and prepared the record. However, there are a few topics that seem to appear more often than others. Recognizing these particular topics may answer the question of why the Lord inspired Mormon, Moroni, and others to include these themes in the historical context that was recorded.

The first realization is that the recorded information and history in the text was inspired and directed by God to be included, and therefore it is scripture.⁴ The majority of the record—and especially the abridgments made by Mormon and Moroni—were made after any contemporary readers would be found. Therefore, the record was written for a ‘wise purpose’ that was meant specifically for a future generation.

It should be remembered that when The Book of Mormon was compiled by Mormon and Moroni, it was a *historical* record of three migrations, but a *prophetic* history of four migrations. When translated, the arrival of the fourth migration had already taken place, and the prophecies and promises are in the process of being fulfilled now. To review, the four migrations—the Jaredites, the Lehitites, the Mulekites and the Gentiles—each were led by the hand of the Lord *to the same land* and given the same gospel. The cultural content of the scripture revolves around two main groups: the Jaredites and Lehitites, which include the descendants of Lehi and those of Mulek. The majority of the text focuses upon the righteousness and wickedness of the Nephites,

³ Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, [Novato, California, New World, 2008]. Joseph Campbell titled his book based on the research of the subject of one like unto Christ in the myths found throughout the ancient world.

⁴ See the Title Page of the *Book of Mormon*, “Written by way of commandment, and also by the spirit of prophecy and of revelation.”

with its resultant conflicts between the two factions of Lehi's descendants—the Nephites and Lamanites. Since the book is written for a 'wise purpose' and written for another time, many of the messages are specifically directed to the fourth Gentile migration that would come to the land. These Gentiles will have a part to play in the translation and distribution of the gospel found in the record. The Gentiles will assist in bridging the timeline between the Nephites who were destroyed about 400 A.D. and remnant of Israel, which will include the Lamanites living in the latter days.

The Jaredites, Nephites, and Gentiles who are discussed in this book have a number of things in common. All received the teaching of Jesus Christ and His gospel; each come to the same land; each has or received a record regarded as scripture to remember what great things the Lord has done for their fathers; and each received from the Lord, the prophecies and promises—regarding their righteousness and the freedoms that are connected to the land—that apply equally to all three cultures.

The Title of Liberty

Around the middle of the Book of Mormon exists an important account that summarizes one purpose of the text by listing three important and primary messages. Recognizing that there was a divine objective in the choice of history to be included by Mormon and Moroni, these chapters should be viewed as something the Lord wants us to know.

This is the account of Captain Moroni and the Title of Liberty that was lifted up to rally the forces for the protection of specific blessings. One man named Amalickiah and his organization sought to take away the freedoms of the people. One sure thing the Book of Mormon teaches is that the man who desires and seeks to become the leader is the man who shouldn't be leader.

In the discussion of Amalickiah (as well as others like Korihor, Sherem, and Akish), there is a lesson to be learned for our day in his modus operandi. The battle fought against the 'philosophies of men' must begin with a non-denominational call to the Title of Liberty. As Captain Moroni rent his coat in a commitment to freedom, his namesake made the same call of commitment to the Gentiles of the last days who are living on the same land of promise.

The inspired Captain Moroni recognized the long term effects of Amalickiah's desires and purposes as Mormon records.

Yea, we see that Amalickiah, because he was a man of cunning device and a man of many flattering words, that he led away the hearts of many people to do wickedly; yea, and to seek to destroy the church of God, and to destroy the foundation of liberty which God had granted unto them, or which blessing God had sent upon the face of the land for the righteous' sake.

And now it came to pass that when Moroni, who was the chief commander of the armies of the Nephites, had heard of these dissensions, he was angry with Amalickiah.

And it came to pass that he rent his coat; and he took a piece thereof, and wrote upon it—*In memory of our God, our religion, and freedom, and our peace, our wives, and our children*—and he fastened it upon the end of a pole.

And he fastened on his head-plate, and his breastplate, and his shields, and girded on his armor about his loins; and he took the pole, which had on the end thereof his rent coat, *(and he called it the title of liberty) and he bowed himself to the earth, and he prayed mightily unto his God for the blessings of liberty to rest upon his brethren, so*

long as there should a band of Christians remain to possess the land— (Alma 46:10–13)

This Title of Liberty became a standard recognizing the most important things that life has to offer every age. The Book of Mormon, like the Title of Liberty, is founded on the freedoms necessary to provide and protect these sacred rights and possessions that are of primary importance. The standard was raised to remind everyone of these significant freedoms and blessings that need to be protected. They are listed as “our God, our religion, and freedom, and our peace, our wives, and our children” (Alma 46:12). The freedoms that must be protected are central to ensure the right to worship without the control of man or government. The leaders chosen should secure and insure the physical protection that would maintain an environment of freedom and peace for these inalienable rights. The spiritual protection of our wives and children is hinged on the right to worship and the freedom to raise our children in an environment conducive to the love of God and their fellow man. The Book of Mormon addresses all of these messages—from beginning to end—which messages can easily be seen if looked for. These are timeless messages to the readers of the Book of Mormon and the Gentiles of the latter-day promised land.

Like the Title of Liberty that was raised over the land of promise anciently, the Book of Mormon today is also a type and title of liberty, presenting this common message to member and non-member alike. However, those who read this book of scripture have a responsibility to make this message known to those who might not, including the non-member living upon the promised land. Freedom is a non-denominational message and there is only one way to guarantee that freedom—and that is the recognition of the God of this land.

The main message lifted up as the Title of Liberty, and the axis of the Book of Mormon, is that of ‘faith, freedom, and family.’ These obvious messages are connected clearly to the people to whom the promises and prophecies are directed. The first, *faith*, is found in the fact that the Book of Mormon contains the fulness of the gospel and that this gospel message is for Jew and Gentile, the world, and all mankind. The second, *freedom* and peace is a message directed to those who actually live upon *the land of promise* and includes, with the text, the responsibilities and restrictions that are placed upon all people— member and non-member alike—to maintain that freedom. The third message of ‘our wives and children’ is the concern for the *family*, which inherently includes the other two of ‘faith and freedom.’ This message for the spiritual and temporal protection of the family is one specifically directed to those who have accepted the gospel. The Book of Mormon contains a record of a fallen people that will give insight into those things that plagued the membership of the Church of Jesus Christ in history, clarifying a modern-day responsibility of obedience to our ‘God and religion’ to maintain freedom, peace, and security for spiritual and temporal welfare of the family. These three conceptual messages are intimately attached to the people who once lived upon the land—and those who live upon that same land today—and are discussed more in-depth in another chapter.

The elements of the Title of Liberty become the major messages of this scripture. The Book of Mormon is a prophetic message for all who live in the land of promise, and should be a non-denominational Title of Liberty for the last days and founded on the freedoms connected to the land. The Book of Mormon teaches the reader how and what to worship. It also teaches how to protect our freedom and peace, as the text explains, by scriptural history. It teaches that the spiritual and physical well-being of the family can be jeopardized and lost by neglecting the gospel and the God of the promised land.

The Old Testament

There are many similarities in the purpose of the Old Testament and that of the Book of Mormon. The first emphasis of the majority of the Old Testament focuses on a people who have been chosen by God to be the recipients of the blessings of their father Abraham. The descendants and seed of Abraham are assured that they will receive his gospel promises, to inherit a land that was promised by God to him and his posterity. These blessings are to be realized—and the people are to be protected by God from all other nations—if they remain faithful, as were the blessings promised to Lehi.

The Old Testament chronicles the escape from spiritual wickedness by leaving Egypt and traveling to the land promised to father Abraham to inherit, given to them by divine decree. The history of this testament is one of a fallen people, just like the Book of Mormon. It details their rejection of God and His teachings, given to them by prophets called of God, and their eventual destruction by other nations with only a remnant saved for a future restoration and return. The story is the same in the “sticks” of Judah and Joseph. Both records describe a people who are the descendants of Abraham, each led to a “promised land” for their family’s inheritance, each with a promise of protection, security, and prosperity. Each record contains a cultural history that not only should be likened to each other, but likened to those who live in the same promised lands today. The promised lands of scripture retain those promises made by God throughout time, as the promises and prophecies are connected to the land itself as described within scripture.

The Old Testament and the Book of Mormon are similar in their purpose in that they are both a record of a fallen people and a record about a land of promise connected to the righteousness of those who inherit that land. The requirement of obedience for the rights to the covenantal blessings for those upon the “land of promise” are the same in the Old Testament as they are in the Book of Mormon. The Book of Mormon contains, like the Old Testament included at one time, the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Book of Mormon restores the plain and precious truths and a fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ, that was lost in the processes of time, transmission, and translation of the Old Testament. Each of these books exist as a record of the promises that are connected to the acceptance of Jesus Christ as the God of the land by those who dwell on it.

The character and attitudes of the inhabitants of each promised land become the regulating factor for the realization of the promised blessings or the ‘destruction made sure’ (Helaman 13:32). This history of a fallen people comprises the major contextual structure of the Book of Mormon and is a major emphasis of the prophets of the Old Testament, and in particular the writings of Isaiah, which are found in both texts. It is this history of a chosen yet fallen people in scripture that Latter-day Saints must liken unto themselves. History will repeat itself if we do not learn from the past.

A Wise Purpose

When commanded to make plates of gold by the Lord, Nephi declared that they were made “... for a wise purpose in him, which purpose I know not.” He then added that because the Lord knoweth all things “...he prepareth a way to accomplish all his works among the children of men...” (1 Nephi 9:5–6). The Prophet Mormon, as he is abridging the large plates of Nephi, finds the small plates and, under the direction of the Lord, included them with the abridgment, stating:

And I do this for a *wise purpose*; for thus it whispereth me, according to the workings of the Spirit of the Lord which is in me. And now, I do not know all things; but *the Lord knoweth all things which are to come*. (Words of Mormon 1:7)

Alma, speaking to his son Helaman about the plates and their preservation and protection, taught him that the plates will be for the salvation of many souls.

And I also command you that ye keep a record of this people...even as I have kept them; for *it is for a wise purpose that they are kept*.

...they should be kept and handed down from one generation to another, and be kept and preserved by the hand of the Lord *until they should go forth unto every nation, kindred, tongue, and people, that they shall know of the mysteries contained thereon*.

...which do contain that which is holy writ.

...I say unto you, that *by small and simple things are great things brought to pass*; and small means in many instances doth confound the wise.

And the Lord God doth work by means to bring about his great and eternal purposes; and by very small means the Lord doth confound the wise and bringeth about the salvation of many souls.

And it may suffice if I only say *they are preserved for a wise purpose, which purpose is known unto God*... (Alma 37:2, 4–7, 12)

The Prophet Joseph Smith was instructed by the Lord that he was to be included in that “wise purpose” which would lead to the preservation of the plates that would last for over a thousand years. The Lord revealed to Joseph: “Behold, verily I say unto you, I have reserved those things which I have entrusted unto you, my servant Joseph, for a wise purpose in me, and it shall be made known unto future generations:” (D&C 5:9). The Nephite records were handed down from generation to generation and preserved for the wise purpose of, many centuries later, being delivered by Moroni, the custodian of that record, to Joseph Smith. Joseph is told that by the gift and power of God the translation will come through him (D&C 5:4) and by him “this generation shall have my word through you” (D&C 5:10). The preface to the Doctrine and Covenants declared:

I the Lord, knowing the calamity which should come upon the inhabitants of the earth, called upon my servant Joseph Smith, Jun., and spake unto him from heaven...

And after having received the record of the Nephites...my servant Joseph Smith, Jun., might have power to translate through the mercy of God, by the power of God, the Book of Mormon. (D&C 1:17, 29)

The Book of Mormon contains the messages and the mysteries that were preserved for those in the “last days” who would read and accept the record. It is for a “wise purpose” that the Book of Mormon was preserved for our very day. It is the handbook of instruction for the protection of our faith, our families, and our freedom. The message of freedom found within the text is meant specifically for the readers who live upon the promised land in the last days. Hugh Nibley used the phrase “this land” to end one of his addresses about the Book of Mormon by discussing Moroni’s counsel to Latter-day Saints in the last days. Nibley stated that Moroni’s address

(Mormon 9:30–31) “is expressly to the inhabitants of ‘this land’ into whose hands ‘this book’ shall come—specifically, it is meant for us.”⁵

The message that was prophetically composed for the Gentile inhabitants of the land, must be raised in a non-denominational way for the protection of the rights and freedoms that were set up and established by God. This message of faith in Christ is a responsibility that rests upon all those who read and understand the Book of Mormon.

⁵ Hugh W. Nibley, “Scriptural Perspectives on How To Survive the Calamities of the Last Days,” *BYU Studies*, Vol. 25 No. 1, Winter 1985.