

ENOS—WORDS OF MORMON

John W. Welch Notes



Enos

Enos 1:1–14 — Enos Prays That God Will Preserve a Record of His People

Enos was a grandson of Lehi, a son of Jacob, and a nephew of Nephi. He, along with the other Nephites of his time, must have wondered why the Lord had directed them to a place where they were very isolated—a place where it was difficult to converse with and understand the native people of the new land. However, Enos and his direct line of descendants knew that they were serving an important purpose because they had the oral and written history of Lehi, Nephi, and Jacob. They were told that someday their records would serve a crucial function in gathering and reestablishing Israel. Even though it might take a long time, with many generations of Nephite scribes scratching their history on plates, they knew that someday, somehow, the Lord was going to make use of their work. This would have been a very powerful and sustaining motivator for them.

Enos is best known for spending a whole day and well into the night crying unto the Lord to know personally concerning eternal life, the joy of the holy saints, that his sins were forgiven, and that he would be blessed by the Lord (Enos 1:5). When he asked how this could be done—perhaps wondering how that atonement could be made when he had not offered any sacrifices in that regard in his father’s temple in the city of Nephi—Enos was told, it is “because of thy faith in Christ” (Enos 1:8). As soon as he heard those words, he offered an intercessory prayer, first for his people, the Nephites (1:9), and then for the Lamanites (1:11). Being deeply concerned about the eternal welfare of others is a profoundly righteous feeling. Enos was personally assured by the Lord that the Nephite records would eventually be brought forth unto the Lamanites (1:16).

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[Why Is It Important to Keep Records?](#) (1 Nephi 9:5)," *KnoWhy* 345 (July 28, 2017).

Dennis L. Largey, "[Enos: His Mission and His Message](#)," in *Jacob Through Words of Mormon: To Learn With Joy*, Book of Mormon Symposium Series, Volume 4, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate, Jr. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, 1990), 141–156.

Enos 1:15–17 — Following Nephi's and Jacob's Instructions

As was mentioned previously in these notes in connection with the book of Jacob, Nephi issued a commandment to his brother Jacob that was passed along to Enos and this line of recordkeepers. It involved not only a requirement to keep a record on the Small Plates, but also stringent requirements about the content:

And he gave me, Jacob, a commandment that I should write upon these plates a few of the things which I considered to be most precious; that I should not touch, save it were lightly, concerning the history of this people which are called the people of Nephi. For he said that the history of his people should be engraven upon his other plates, and that I should preserve these plates and hand them down unto my seed, from generation to generation. And if there were preaching which was sacred, or revelation which was great, or prophesying, that I should engraven the heads of them upon these plates, and touch upon them as much as it were possible, for Christ's sake, and for the sake of our people (Jacob 1:2–4).

Jacob recorded, "I said unto my son Enos: Take these plates. And I told him the things which my brother Nephi had commanded me, and he promised obedience unto the commands" (Jacob 7:27). The verses noted below in parentheses demonstrate that Enos in particular obediently followed each of these requirements. This pattern, however, can easily go unnoticed if a reader is not actively looking for ways in which Nephi's original directive was followed:

1. A record is to be kept on the Small Plates by way of commandment (Jacob 7:27).
2. The record must be personally written (Enos 1:1, 11, 17, 19; Jarom 1:1; Omni 1:1, 4, 9, 10, 12).
3. The record must be preserved (Enos 1:13–17).
4. The record must be handed down within the lineage of Jacob from generation to generation (Jarom 1:1).
5. The record is to be added to by each person within the lineage of Jacob to whom the plates are entrusted. Note that it is not clear from Nephi's words to Jacob whether Jacob, alone, was supposed to write on the plates or whether subsequent

generations were also expected to write and add to the record. Jacob, however, clarified and solidified the tradition of extending these obligations to successive generations by specifically conveying the instructions to his son Enos. Likewise, Enos issued the command to his son Jarom (Jarom 1:1).

6. The record is to preserve only (a) precious things, (b) sacred preaching, (c) great revelation, or (d) prophesying. Even at that, only “the heads” or main points of the few precious, sacred, or great utterances should be written (Enos 1:1–17).
7. The record is not to cover the history of the people of Nephi “save it were lightly” (Enos 1:20–21, 24).
8. The words on the record are to be written “as much as it were possible for Christ’s sake, and for the sake of [the people of Nephi].” Enos, as often as possible, referred to the fact that he lived and preached for Christ’s sake “because of [his] faith in Christ” (Enos 1:8). He preached, prophesied, and declared “according to the truth which is in Christ” (1:26). The final written testimony of Enos was that he “shall rest” in his “Redeemer” (1:27).

It is remarkable how precisely and scrupulously Nephi and Jacob, as well as all the record keepers in the direct line of Jacob’s descendants (Enos, Jarom, Omni, Amaron, Chemish, Abinadom, and Amaleki) followed this template.

Interestingly, this priestly line of record keepers also gave their sons names of strong and possibly pure Hebrew origins. By clicking on the links below, readers can more fully explore the likely meaning behind each of these names, as found in the [Book of Mormon Onomasticon](#):

- “[Enos](#)” is a Hebrew word meaning “Mankind.”
- “[Jarom](#)” is a Hebrew name likely meaning “Jehovah is exalted.”
- “[Omni](#)” may relate to Hebrew expressions such as “The Lord is my faith” or “Jehovah is my trust.”
- “[Amaron](#)” may be derived from roots meaning “The Command of the Lord” or “Jehovah has spoken.”
- “[Chemish](#)” has several possible etymologies, including the “Hebrew *ḥameš* ‘five,’ possibly because he was the fifth generation from Lehi.
- “[Abinadom](#)” quite readily relates to Hebrew proper names meaning “My father was a wanderer” or “My father was grieved,” a feeling expressed by Jacob at this head of this lineage. While the meaning of the name “[Amaleki](#)” remains puzzling, it was a name that would likely have been known from the plates of brass.

These names reflect the devotion that these men felt toward their inherited family calling as scribes, as well as their calling and commitment to preserve their ancient

family traditions. Although the records left by this line of patriarchs were brief, they span more than three centuries and provide lessons of faithfulness, duty, and preservation of family history and heritage.

Life Spans of Book of Mormon Lineages

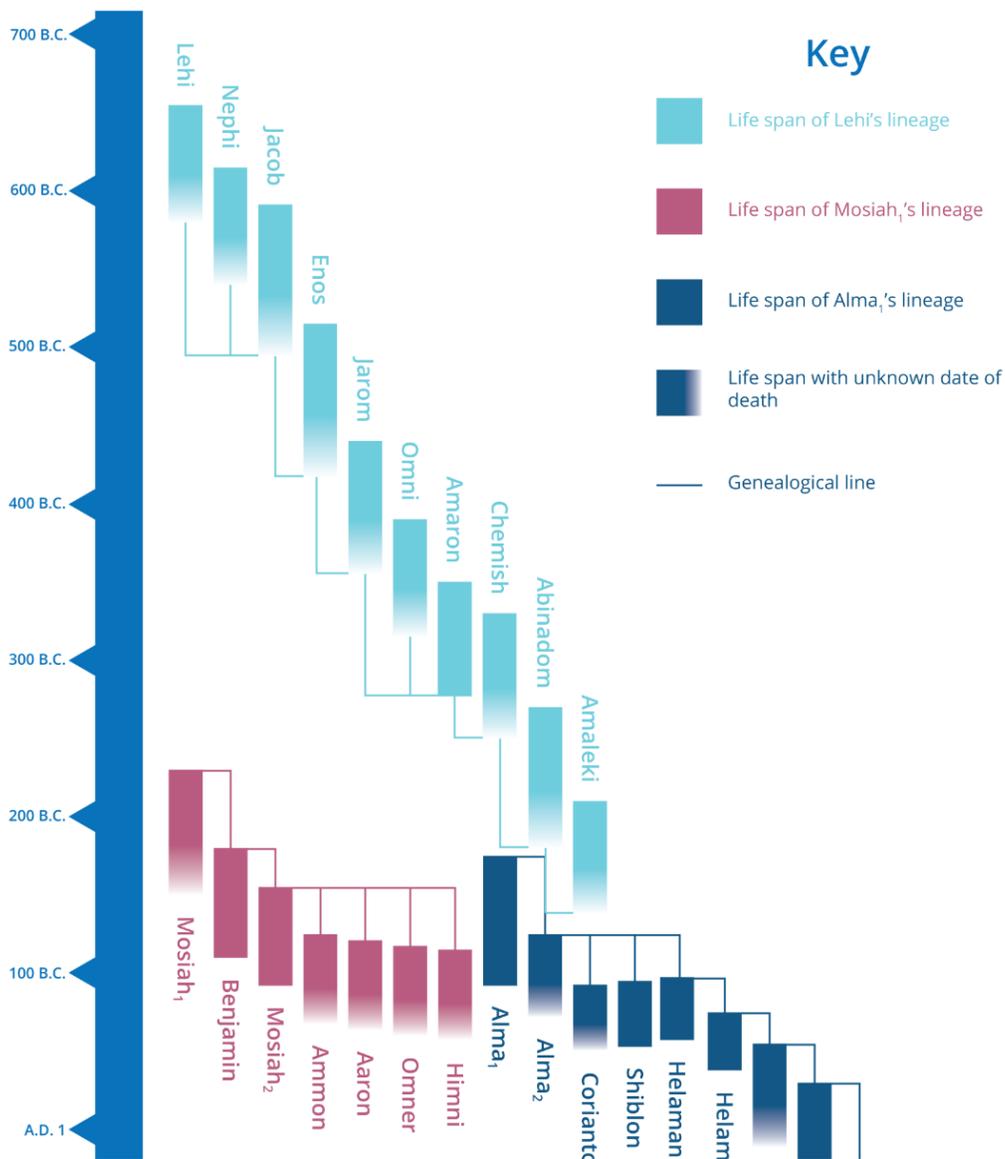


Figure 1 Welch, John W., and Greg Welch. *Life Spans of Book of Mormon Lineages*. Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1999, charts 26–28. (Continued on next page)

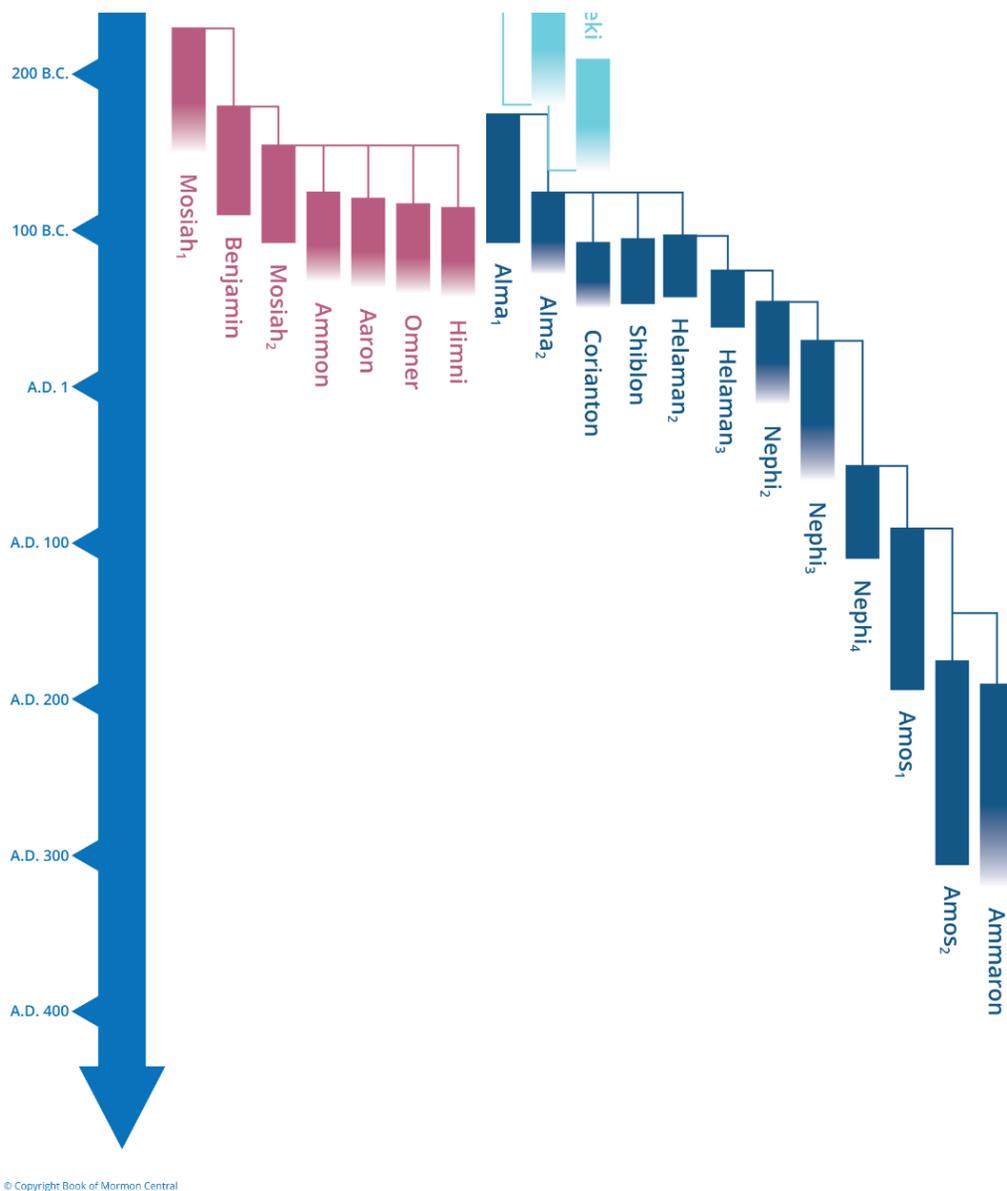


Figure 2 Welch, John W., and Greg Welch. *Life Spans of Book of Mormon Lineages*. Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1999, charts 26–28.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “Why Do the Authors on the Small Plates Follow a Pattern? (Jacob 7:27),” *KnoWhy* 74 (April 8, 2016).

John W. Welch, “The Father’s Command to Keep Records in the Small Plates of Nephi,” *FARMS Preliminary Report* (September 1984).

David Rolph Seely, "Enos and the Words Concerning Eternal Life," in *Jacob Through Words of Mormon: To Learn With Joy*, Book of Mormon Symposium Series, Volume 4, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate, Jr. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, 1990), 235–250.

Jarom

Jarom 1:1–2 — Jarom, the Son of Enos

The text in the book of Jarom manifests his careful attempt to explicitly perpetuate the tradition of keeping the record according to Nephi's command. For example, Jarom, the son of Enos, personally wrote on plates (Jarom 1:1) that were "small" (1:2, 14). He distinguished the plates he wrote on from the "other plates of Nephi" which were written by "the kings, or those which they caused to be written" and which contained the records of "[the Nephite] wars" (1:14).

Jarom wrote "a few words" (Jarom 1:1) and wrote "a little" (1:2) in order to keep "the commandment of [his] father, Enos" (1:1). Specifically, Jarom wrote his record "for the intent of the benefit of [his] brethren the Lamanites" (1:2). He chose not to record "[his] prophesying" nor "[his] revelations" because Jarom felt that there was nothing more he could write than what was already written by his fathers before him (1:2). However, Jarom did make a record of the many prophets, priests, and teachers who taught the people "to look forward unto the Messiah, and believe in him to come as though he already was" (1:11). Jarom ensured the preservation of the Small Plates by delivering "these plates into the hands of [his] son Omni, that they may be kept according to the commandments of [the] fathers" (Jarom 1:15).

The covenant which the Lord made with Enos that the record would survive any Nephite destruction for the benefit of the Lamanites (Enos 1:13, 16) overshadowed Nephi's and Jacob's previous stated purpose of the plates—benefiting "our" people. These are subtle and understandable shifts.

Further Reading

John S. Tanner, "Literary Reflections on Jacob and His Descendants," in *Jacob Through Words of Mormon: To Learn With Joy*, Book of Mormon Symposium Series, Volume 4, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate, Jr. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, 1990), 251–269.

Omni

Omni 1:1–3 — Omni Keeps the Record as Prescribed

Starting with Omni, the authors' writings on the final sheets of the Small Plates began to be very brief. Undoubtedly, the plates were almost filled. Indeed, Jarom had remarked that the plates were "small" (Jarom 1:2, 14). Nephi's command to Jacob was for him to write "upon these plates" (Jacob 1:2). The plates were unique—they had been made by the hand of Nephi, as Jacob himself emphasized (Jacob 3:14). Making more plates and adding them to the Small Plates collection was, perhaps, unthinkable.

Notwithstanding the lack of space, and in spite of the fact that Omni considered himself a wicked man, he still wrote something in an attempt to satisfy the requirements of Nephi's template for keeping the record, "[B]eing commanded by my father, Jarom, that I should write somewhat upon these plates."

Omni preserved the record, wrote according to command or instructions of his fathers, and passed the record on to his son, Amaron. Although Omni did not write for the spiritual benefit of his people, he stated that he fought "to preserve my people" and, perhaps for Christ's sake, acknowledged that he had not kept the statutes and commandments of the Lord. He touched lightly on history, mentioning vaguely some seasons of peace and others in which the Nephites were embroiled in "serious war and bloodshed." Omni ended his writings with a clear acknowledgement of his duty in keeping the record: "I had kept these plates according to the commandments of my fathers; and I conferred them upon my son Amaron. And I make an end."

Omni 1:4–8 — Amaron Takes Stewardship over the Record

Like his father, Amaron made a minimal effort in complying with the command to preserve and write on the Small Plates. He verified that he would write a "few" things and that he had "delivered" the book to another descendant of Jacob—his brother, Chemish. Amaron made no reference to revelations, preaching, or prophesying in his lifetime, but reported the destruction of wicked Nephites as fulfillment of the prophecy given by Lehi that they would not prosper in the land if they did not keep the commandments.

Omni 1:9 — Chemish, the Brother of Amaron

Chemish was Amaron's brother. Perhaps for this reason (not wanting to add two records from the same generation), Chemish did not do more than witness the fact that his brother had fulfilled the basic responsibilities and obligations of keeping the record. Nevertheless, that which Chemish wrote still contained elements common to the command of Nephi and the words of the others who had gone before him—sufficient to

show that Chemish was also intent upon fulfilling the original instructions of Nephi. Chemish stated, “Now I, Chemish, write what few things I write, in the same book with my brother; for behold I saw the last which he wrote, that he wrote it with his own hand; and he wrote it in the day that he delivered them unto me. And after this manner we keep the records, for it is according to the commandments of our fathers. And I make an end.”

Omni 1:10–11 — Abinadom, the Son of Chemish

Abinadom wrote that he witnessed “much war and contention between my people, the Nephites, and the Lamanites; and I, with my own sword, have taken the lives of many of the Lamanites in the defense of my brethren.” Apparently, Abinadom observed little of spiritual value, and though he made an effort to write, he deferred to the “plates which is had by the kings” for the more predominant history. Abinadom clearly had the instructions for writing in mind, because he added, “I know of no revelation save that which has been written, neither prophecy; wherefore, that which is sufficient is written.”

Omni 1:12–30 — Amaleki Writes, Then Passes the Plates to King Benjamin

The last person to write upon the Small Plates was Amaleki, the son of Abinadom. In relatively few verses, Amaleki covered a bit of history: “I will speak unto you somewhat concerning Mosiah.” He wrote of the departure of a group of people led by Mosiah from the Land of Nephi and of their arrival in the Land of Zarahemla. He spoke briefly about the origins of the people of Zarahemla “who had come out from Jerusalem” at around the same time that Lehi and his family had left Jerusalem. Amaleki then wrote of Mosiah uniting his people with the people of Zarahemla and of Mosiah’s appointment as their king.

Continuing with the history, Amaleki wrote that later, his brother left Zarahemla with another group of people with the intention of returning to the Land of Nephi. Amaleki had no subsequent knowledge of his brother’s whereabouts. Having no other posterity, Amaleki prepared to give the plates to King Benjamin, son of Mosiah. Quite possibly because he delivered the plates to someone outside of Jacob’s direct lineage, Amaleki wrote more than his predecessors, filling all the remaining space on the plates with his personal writings. In his final words, Amaleki exhorted “all men to come unto God, the Holy One of Israel, and believe in prophesying, and in revelations.” He spoke of the Lord from whom all good comes and expressed his concern on behalf of the people, admonishing them that they might be saved.

Once again, it is apparent that Amaleki completed his record on the Small Plates by using the command of the fathers (the instructions of Nephi and Jacob) as a controlling factor in determining the content and treatment of his text.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Which Nephite King Had the Gift of Interpretation? \(Mosiah 21:28\)](#),” *KnoWhy* 99 (May 13, 2016).

Omni 1:14 — The Mulekites Rejoice Over the Plates

Mosiah took the brass plates with him when he traveled down from the Land of Nephi into Zarahemla. The king, who was named Zarahemla, was “exceedingly” glad to finally see these plates which had the record of the Jews. Since Zarahemla was king, he probably was a descendant of Mulek, with a royal lineage that had attendant royal privileges. He probably did not know much about the details of where he came from, but Zarahemla probably did have knowledge that he was of royal blood and perhaps had knowledge that he was from some faraway place. The people of Zarahemla had lost their language, but that does not mean that they had completely lost all knowledge of their ancestral history.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Should Readers Pay Close Attention to the Mulekites? \(Omni 1:19\)](#),” *KnoWhy* 434 (May 17, 2018).

Omni 1:15-16 — How Did Mulek Travel to the New World?

There are interesting legends and a bit of lore about Mulek—his name and how he arrived on the American continent. The name “Melek” is the word for “king” in Hebrew. It is the opinion of some scholars that several passages in the Book of Mormon which reference the “king” should really be translated as “Mulek” and not “king.” If that is so, we can learn a little bit more about who Mulek might have been. Apparently, Mulek was a son of King Zedekiah. After Lehi left Jerusalem, King Zedekiah, along with his other sons, were taken into captivity by the Babylonians and were killed. However, Mulek was able to slip away somehow. We do not know how he got to the New World. I like to think that Mulek and his guardians found passage on a Phoenician ship. The Phoenicians, at this time, were notorious for their ship-building and sailing skills.

Sidon and Tyre were two major shipping centers in Phoenicia, not far from Jerusalem. These two cities were intense competitors—even enemies. Individuals and nations would not normally have traded or engaged in business with both of these centers of commerce. One of the cities was a trading partner with Egypt and the other a partner with Babylon. Egypt and Babylonia were rival nations and generally were not on good terms, which created the tension between Sidon and Tyre. Lehi probably traded with one or the other of these large shipping centers.

Hugh Nibley pointed out that there may have been a connection between the name of the large river running through the land of Zarahemla and the old world of Jerusalem and Phoenicia. That river was named “Sidon”—the same name as one of two large shipping centers in Phoenicia.

If Mulek was transported to the New World on a ship run by the Phoenicians from Sidon, they may have chosen to name the prominent river in their new land after their place of origin. When the Nephite people of Mosiah met the Mulekites, the land was already called “Zarahemla,” which is a Mulekite name. You would think that the primary river in the region would also be a Mulekite name—but it was not. This fact may be evidence of a Phoenician connection.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Has An Artifact That Relates to the Book of Mormon Been Found?](#) (Mosiah 25:2),” *KnoWhy* 103 (May 19, 2016).

Jeffrey R. Chadwick, “[Has the Seal of Mulek Been Found?](#)” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 12, no. 2 (2003): 72–83, 117–18.

Words of Mormon

Chronology of Mormon’s Writings

Mormon was the chief abridger and editor of the full Book of Mormon. Periodically, he added editorial commentaries of his own that were skillfully woven into the texts of the primary authors in that record. Mormon also wrote two books within the Book of Mormon that bear his name (The Words of Mormon and the book of Mormon).

One may ask, “When did Mormon write these particular “words?” Words of Mormon 1:1–11 appear to have been part of Mormon’s farewell address and were among the very last of his writings. How do we know? Right there, in the first verse of Words of Mormon, he stated, “And now I, Mormon being about to deliver up the record into the hands of my son Moroni . . .” Then, in the same verse, Mormon explained that he delivered his abridgement of the plates to Moroni after he, Mormon, had “witnessed almost all the destruction of [his] people, the Nephites.” Verse 2 continued: “[I pray that God may] grant that he [Moroni] may survive,” but “it supposeth me that he will witness the entire destruction of my people.” So, Mormon wrote these passages when it was very close to the end of the Nephite nation, about A.D. 385.

The chart below (Figure 3) gives a chronology of the writings of Mormon. After reviewing the chart, it becomes apparent that Mormon’s sermon on good works and his

epistle on baptism were written at an earlier date and then subsequently inserted into the final record, as Moroni 7 and 8 respectively, by his son, Moroni.

Writings in the Book of Mormon

Writings of Mormon



Reference	Description of Text	Date Written*
W of M 1:1–2	On delivering plates to Moroni	A.D. 385
W of M 1:3–11	On abridging the plates of Nephi	A.D. 340
W of M 1:12–18	Account of Benjamin	A.D. 340
Helaman 3:13–17	On record keeping	A.D. 340
Helaman 12	On human nature	A.D. 341
3 Nephi 5:8–26	On record keeping	A.D. 341
3 Nephi 10:11–19	On searching the scriptures	A.D. 341
3 Nephi 26:8–21	On Christ's visit to the Americas	A.D. 341
3 Nephi 28:24–30:2	On Three Nephites and the gathering of Israel	A.D. 341
4 Nephi	Four generations of history	A.D. 342
Mormon 1:1–6:15	Autobiography	A.D. 384
Mormon 6:16–7:10	Lament over people and testimony to latter-day remnant	A.D. 384
Moroni 7	Sermon on good works	A.D. 334
Moroni 8	Epistle on baptism	A.D. 337
Moroni 9	Farewell epistle to Moroni	A.D. 385

*dates are approximate

Figure 3 Welch, John W., and Greg Welch. *Writings of Mormon*. Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1999, chart 20.

The same chart shows that two chapters in Mormon (6–7) contain part of Mormon’s farewell wherein Mormon laments in Mormon 6:17–18, “O ye fair ones, how could ye have departed from the ways of the Lord! O ye fair ones, how could ye have rejected that Jesus, who stood with open arms to receive you! Behold, if ye had not done this, ye would not have fallen. But, behold, ye are fallen, and I mourn your loss.”

Then, after Mormon wrote about the destruction of his people and lamented their loss in Mormon 6–7, he wrote Words of Mormon just prior to giving the plates to his son, Moroni. Mormon expected that Moroni would then begin his own writings and abridgements. The text in Words of Mormon 1:1–11 contain the final words that Mormon wrote. Very likely, these eleven verses were also the last words translated by Joseph Smith. For greater clarity about the various plates and records that comprised the Book of Mormon, refer to the chart below (Figure 4).

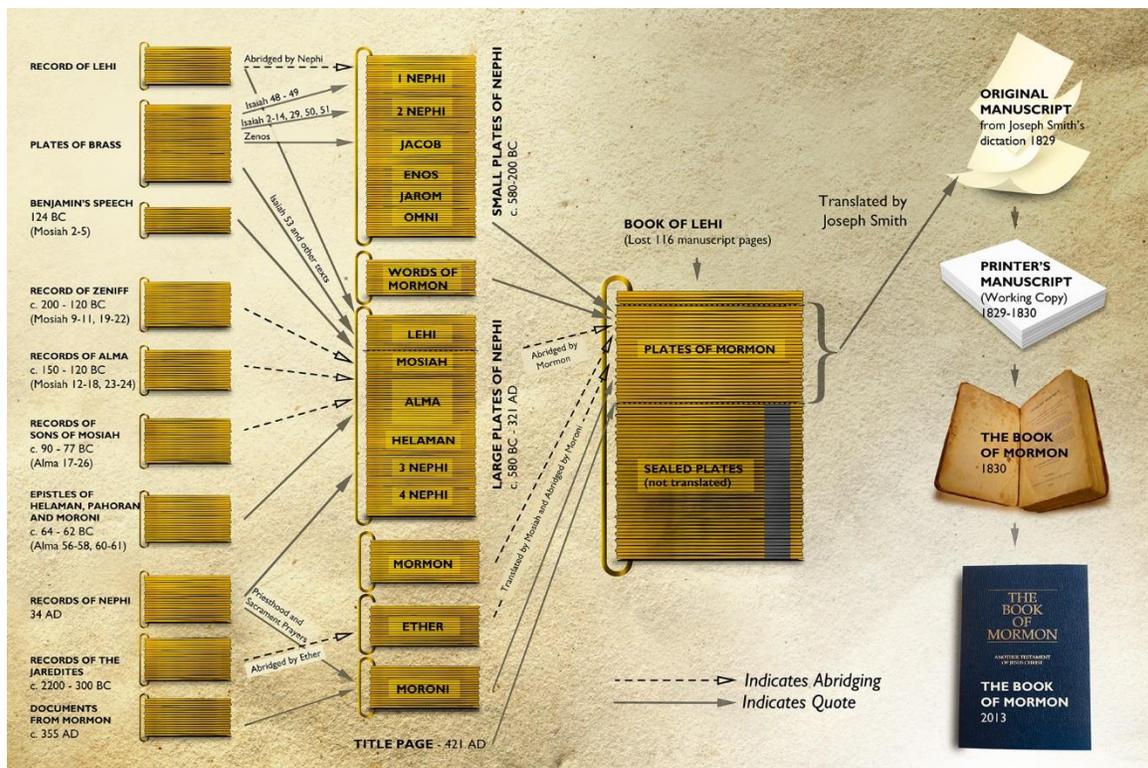


Figure 4 Welch, John W., and Greg Welch. *Book of Mormon Plates and Records*. Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1999, chart 13.

Words of Mormon 1:1–11 — Mormon’s Final Words (Prayers for the Grace of God)

In his farewell address, Mormon chose not to speak to us, but to speak to God. Mormon recorded three of his prayers or pleadings with God. It was as though someone approached Mormon and said, “You have three wishes. What do you wish?”

Mormon’s first prayer is recorded in verse 2: “[M]ay God grant that [my son Moroni] may survive them [his people, the Nephites], that he may write somewhat concerning them, and somewhat concerning Christ, that perhaps someday it may profit them.” One of Mormon’s last prayers was to express concern for his son, Moroni. Primarily, Mormon pled with God to give Moroni time to complete the record and to write more about Christ. He did not ask God to give Moroni more time to prove that he and Moroni were actually right and that their stiff-necked brethren were wrong. Mormon’s first wish was that his people may profit by believing in Christ.

Mormon’s second wish is recorded in verse 8: “And my prayer to God is concerning my brethren.” Who were Mormon’s brethren? They were the enemies—the Lamanites and Nephites who had defected and were fighting against him. Mormon was expressing forgiveness for those who had turned against him. Is there a lesson in that for us? Mormon’s prayer continued: “[T]hat they may once again come to the knowledge of God, yea, the redemption of Christ; that they may once again be a delightsome people.”

The third prayer of Mormon is found in verse 11: “And I, Mormon, pray to God that [these records that have been kept so faithfully by so many people, including myself,] may be preserved from this time henceforth. And I know that they will be preserved.”

Why will the records be preserved? Because “there are great things written upon them, out of which [Mormon’s] people and their brethren shall be judged at the great and last day, according to the word of God, which is written.” Mormon was very familiar with the writings of ancient Nephite and Lamanite prophets. He knew that many prophets revealed that we all shall be judged out of those things which are written in the books. There is gravity in knowing that this is the last thing that Mormon says. For more on being judged out of the books which have been written, see 2 Ne. 25:18; 29:11; 33:11, 14–15; 3 Ne. 27:23–27; Ether 5:4.

Words of Mormon 1:1–11 — An Overlap of Two Abridged Historical Records

Words of Mormon is often referred to as “a bridge” between the Small Plates of Nephi and the Large Plates. Even though Words of Mormon is, indeed, a bridge between records, there is complexity involved in the text and differing opinions regarding the structure and make-up of this book.

After a simple reading of the eighteen verses that comprise the text of Words of Mormon, one notices that the first eleven verses (1:1–11) are written using only first-person pronouns. There are twenty-two uses of the pronoun “I,” another twenty-two uses of the pronoun “we,” and one use of the pronoun “us” in these verses. They contain no third-person pronouns. Then, in the remaining verses (1:12–18) only third-person pronouns are used; no first-person pronouns are found in the latter half of the book. There is a significant shift in the narrative half-way through Words of Mormon. It appears that something worthy of attention is happening at the narrative mid-point of Words of Mormon.

Royal Skousen, who has done by far the most extensive work on the manuscripts and texts of the Book of Mormon, thinks that the prophet Mormon personally wrote (not abridged) Words of Mormon 1:1–11 as his final farewell address. Skousen emphasizes that the first-person pronouns in the first half of Words of Mormon and the absence of them in the second half is a clue that something happened. It is important to note that the book prior to Words of Mormon is Omni—the last book included by Mormon from the Small Plates of Nephi. The book immediately following Words of Mormon is Mosiah—Mormon’s abridgement of Mosiah’s reign from the Large Plates.

Remember that the first book on the Large Plates was the book of Lehi. However, Lehi’s record was lost when Martin Harris lost the first 116 pages that were translated from that record, and it appears that a very small portion of what was originally the beginning translation of Mosiah was not lost with those 116 pages.

When Martin Harris took the 116 printed pages from Joseph, he would not have taken a stack of collated printed pages for the Book of Mormon; he would instead have taken a “gather” (Figure 5). A “gather” is made by “gathering” several large sheets of printer’s paper that may appear to be printed out of order, folding the pages in half lengthwise and then tying the pages together with a string. When binding the volume, the gather would be folded or cut in half, resulting in a final stack of pages that are collated in proper order for the volume being printed. A printed volume may be completed in one gather or any number of gathers, depending on the length of the volume. There would have been several gathers that were put together in making the completed volume of the Book of Mormon.

It would have been highly unlikely that what was written on the gather that Harris took ended exactly at the end of the book of Omni or exactly at the end of Words of Mormon. Therefore, there would have been text from the original translation from the Large Plates that Martin Harris didn’t lose. That means that there would have been something

that Martin Harris did not take with him that had already been translated and that remained with Joseph. Maybe it was just a small part—perhaps a few verses.

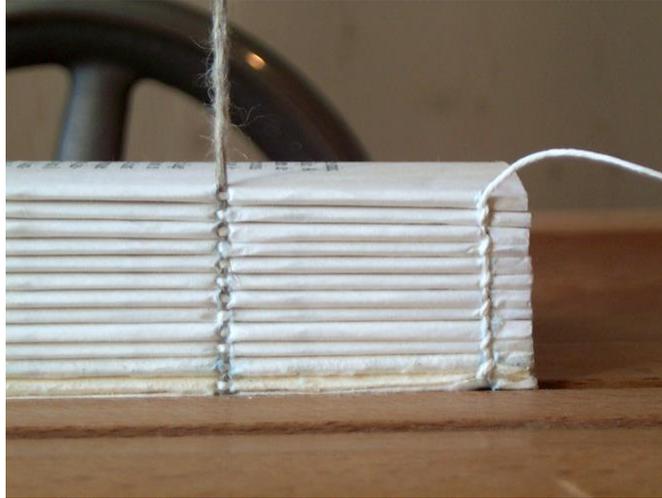


Figure 5 Twelve gatherings being bound in a book. Photo by Colporteur via Wikimedia Commons.

By close examination of the Printer’s Manuscript of the Book of Mormon, Royal Skousen discovered a possible explanation for the shift in narrative from first-person to the third-party account in Words of Mormon. There were two Book of Mormon manuscripts: 1) the Original Manuscript which was written by scribes as Joseph Smith dictated his translation from the golden plates, and 2) the Printer’s Manuscript, which was a copy of the original manuscript made by Oliver Cowdery for use by the printer. We do not have the Original Manuscript of the words of Omni, the Words of Mormon, or the first part of the Book of Mosiah. It would be useful if we did. All we have to work with is Oliver Cowdery’s Printer’s Manuscript. However, what is left of the printer’s manuscript is still very helpful.

Below is a copy of the page from the Printer’s Manuscript made by Oliver Cowdery showing the section from Words of Mormon where there is a narrative change (Figure 6). What is on the Printer’s Manuscript has fascinated textual scholars in the last couple of years. Look at where the text reads, “Benjamin, by laboring with all the might of his body and the faculty of his whole soul, and also the prophets, did once more establish peace in the land.” This is the last verse of Words of Mormon in printed volumes of the Book of Mormon. After the word “land,” Oliver Cowdery wrote the word “Chapter” and followed that by the Roman numeral III. Then, Cowdery put a little squiggle and wrote, “And now there was no more contention in all the land of Zarahemla . . .” This is what we now have as verse 1 from the book of Mosiah. Then, sometime after transcribing the Original Manuscript to create the Printer’s Manuscript, Cowdery

crossed out the Roman numeral III, changed it to a Roman numeral I (Chapter I), and inserted a notation “Book of Mosiah.” This likely indicates that at one point, what was initially called Chapter 3 began with the text that is now Mosiah 1:1. And, what was originally the last part of the original Mosiah chapter 2 (perhaps on page 117 of what was left when Harris took the 116-page gather) was appended to Words of Mormon by Oliver Cowdery and Joseph Smith after the 116 pages were lost. Thus became the text we have today. In the Preface to the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon, Joseph Smith spoke of these “one hundred and sixteen pages” that were “stolen and kept from me, notwithstanding my utmost exertions to recover it again.”

Mormon’s actual words may thus end at verse 11. Verses 12–18 were then what remained of the Large Plates translation after Martin Harris took and lost the 116 pages. These seven verses should be read as part of the introductory material initially found in the book of Mosiah.

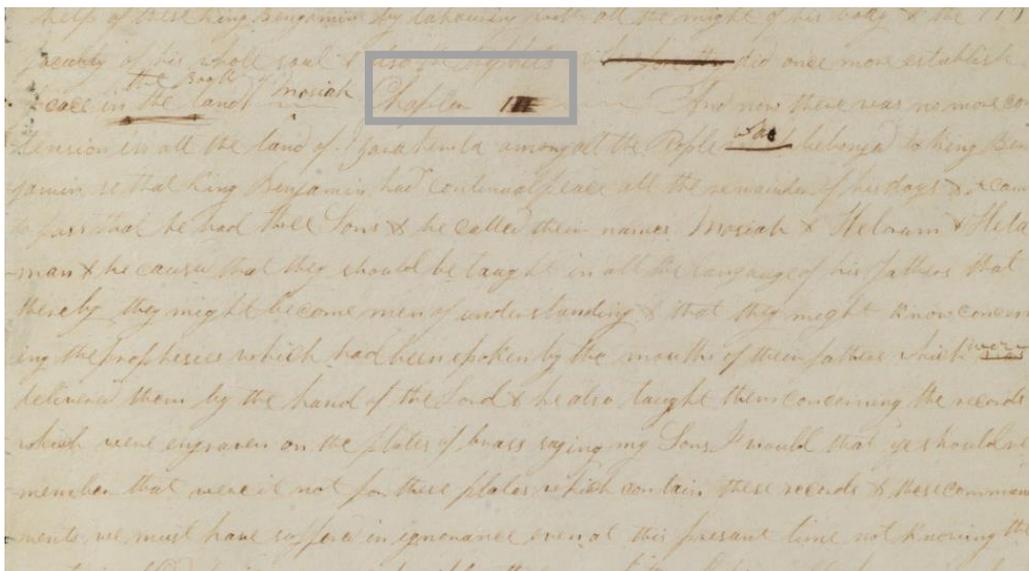


Figure 6 Printer’s Manuscript of the Book of Mormon, showing where Oliver Cowdery “Chapter III” to “Chapter I”. Image via the Joseph Smith Papers website. <http://josephsmithpapers.org/>.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[How Does the ‘Mosiah-First’ Translation Sequence Strengthen Faith?](#) (Words of Mormon 1:5),” *KnoWhy* 503 (February 22, 2019).

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why is ‘Words of Mormon’ at the End of the Small Plates?](#) (Words of Mormon 1:3),” *KnoWhy* 78 (April 14, 2016).

Printer’s Manuscript of the Book of Mormon, 1923 photostatic copies, p. 117, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed 9 Mar. 2020, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper->

[summary/printers-manuscript-of-the-book-of-mormon-circa-august-1829-circa-january-1830/121](#).

Words of Mormon 1:12–18 — That Which Had Been Translated and Retained

When Joseph Smith received possession of the plates again, after they had been taken back by the Angel Moroni in 1828 because of issues arising from the lost 116 pages that summer, Smith received a revelation concerning how to go forward with the translation process. In D&C 10:41 (emphasis added), the Lord instructed Joseph: “Therefore, you shall translate the engravings which are on the plates of Nephi, down even till you come to the reign of king Benjamin, or *until you come to that which you have translated, which you have retained.*”

The few verses that comprise the text of Words of Mormon give us a bigger picture of the composition of the Book of Mormon. It is really quite remarkable that this, like so many other things, ends up being a very strong confirmation of the accuracy of the Book of Mormon, of its miraculous coming forth, and of the way in which the dictation occurred under difficult circumstances. It is hard enough for us to read the record and figure out what happened. Imagine Joseph Smith simply dictating these segments and putting them all together in the way that they all came through and making good sense. Although the details of how this precisely happened continues to be explored, discussed, and debated, it is textually clear that there actually were two records—the Words of Mormon and the book of Mosiah—that collided at this particular juncture and at the point where Harris lost the 1828 translation of the large plates down to and into the first part of the book of Mosiah.

Further Reading

Jack M. Lyon and Kent R. Minson, “[When Pages Collide: Dissecting the Words of Mormon](#),” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 51, no. 4 (2012): 120–136.

Brant A. Gardner, “[When Hypotheses Collide: Responding to Lyon and Minson’s ‘When Pages Collide’](#),” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 5 (2013): 105–119. As this topic continues to be discussed, see the [comments](#) between Gardner and Lyon as recently as November 26, 2019.

Royal Skousen, “[Some Textual Changes for a Scholarly Study of the Book of Mormon](#),” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 51, no. 4 (2012): 99–117.

Words of Mormon 1:15 — False Christs among the Nephites

The final section of what is now called the Words of Mormon picks up during the early years of King Benjamin’s reign, when he had to deal with “much contention” and “many dissensions” among his people. Verse 15 states that “there had been false Christs.” The

word “Christ” is equivalent to the word “Messiah” in Hebrew, which means “anointed one.” In other words, “there had been many false [Messiahs]” in the land. It is of interest to note that the two names “Mosiah” and “Messiah” would have been very similar in Hebrew. “Mosiah” is also the way in which the word for “Redeemer” is vocalized in Hebrew. It may have been that King Benjamin had to deal with people claiming that it was their job not just to be a religious leader (a priest or anointed one), but to be a political leader of some kind.

The record goes on to state that “there had been false prophets, and false preachers and teachers” and they were all “punished according to their crimes.” Was it a “crime” to preach falsehoods among the people and to hold oneself out as a “Messiah” to the people? The people of Zarahemla had chosen to live under Nephite law, which was the Law of Moses. Under the Law of Moses, a person could be severely punished for causing dissention by spreading falsehoods and holding oneself out as a prophet when one didn’t have that calling from God. Freedom of religion did not exist in this world—especially when religion was being used for political purposes. During the early part of his rule, King Benjamin had to deal with the formation of sub-groups of people with different religious beliefs and political motives. Benjamin was able to unify his people by creating a unified pluralist society where two groups of people of different political and historical backgrounds were accommodated and could thrive through the making and keeping of a centralizing covenant with God, their Heavenly King. The inspiring peace that King Benjamin was able to accomplish under this unique situation stands as a model for governing in a religiously pluralistic society.

Like King Benjamin, Mormon himself had wrestled with the problem of false prophets, false preachers, and false teachers among his people. He was familiar with dissensions and the stiffneckedness of people. However, Mormon had a much larger population to deal with and probably did not have the benefit that King Benjamin had with “many holy men” and “holy prophets who were among his people” to establish peace in the land. Mormon and his son, Moroni, were among the few lone outliers of remaining righteous leaders among their people.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[How Did King Benjamin’s Speech Lead to Nephite Democracy?](#) (Mosiah 29:32),” *KnoWhy* 301 (April 17, 2017).

Book of Mormon Central, “[How Was Mosiah a Type of Christ?](#) (Mosiah 26:12),” *KnoWhy* 104 (May 20, 2016).