

MORMON 1–6

John W. Welch Notes



Who Was Mormon?

Up until this point in the Book of Mormon, Mormon has been largely in the shadows, but now it is time for him to tell his own story. The more we can know about Mormon's life and times, his callings and motivations, the more we can appreciate why he included the things he did in this work of scripture and history.

In Mormon 2:2, we learn that he was sixteen years old in AD 326, putting his birth at AD 311. From that we can deduce that he lived to be 74 years old, since the final battle, from which he died, was in AD 385.

In 4 Nephi, the setting had deteriorated from one of faith and light into a century of slow decline that began around AD 200. Enormous cultural change occurred over the course of only a few generations. This inexorable decline continued downhill, one rung at a time. In Mormon's mind, those changes appeared linked, as things had worsened step by step over that period. Approximately 30 downward-spiraling steps can be extracted from the relatively few verses in 4 Nephi.

Mormon knew this history, and it influenced his choices as he selected which records to transcribe or to abridge onto his plates. For example, he personally knew of, and made special mention in Mormon 1:19 of the fulfillment of, "all the words of Abinadi, and also Samuel the Lamanite." This explains why Mormon included six chapters in the middle of the book of Mosiah about Abinadi's prophecies and his fate, and also four chapters at the end of the book of Helaman about Samuel's prophetic warnings and their aftermaths. It also explains why he covered in so many places throughout the Book of Mormon of the

fulfillment of inspired forecasts about the coming of Jesus Christ, the Messiah, Redeemer, and Son of God.

Mormon remained stalwart in the midst of unthinkable hardships and tragic disappointments, one after another. He introduced himself, first and foremost, as “a disciple of Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (3 Nephi 5:13), and, accordingly, throughout his composition of his abridgment, Mormon features Jesus Christ as the focus of Nephite doctrine, worship, religion, and civic and social order. Personally, Mormon wrote the ten chapters found in Mormon 1–7 and Moroni 7–9. In those chapters Mormon included the name of “Jesus” 19 times (at least once in every chapter except Mormon 4) and the title “Christ” a total of 52 times (with the highest density appearing 38 times Moroni 7 alone). Obviously, Mormon was much more than just a nominal Christian.

Having an overall chronology of Mormon’s life is helpful in guiding readers through these ten chapters that move quickly through his 75 years of life from AD 311 to AD 385. In the chronology below, **the bold dates and ages are actually stated in Mormon’s text**; the other dates and ages are derived or estimated and thus are only suggested and are not to be taken as absolutes.

Chronology of Mormon’s Life

Year	Event
311	Mormon is born
321	Ammaron commissions Mormon to retrieve sacred records when 24 years old (1:2–4)
322	Mormon, at age 11 , goes with his father to the land southward and Zarahemla (1:6)
322	War breaks out between Nephites and Lamanites (1:8)
323–326	Four years of peace (1:12)
326	Mormon, age 15 , is visited by the Lord and knows the goodness of Jesus (1:15)
327	Mormon, age 16 , is appointed to lead the army (2:2)
328	Lamanites attack (2:3)
330	Mormon defeats Aaron (2:9)

331?	Mormon marries at age 20?
331	Outbreak of hostilities
333?	Moroni is born?
335	Mormon remembers Ammaron telling him to go to Antum at age 24 (1:3)
335	Mormon goes and obtains the records
344	People curse God and wish to die; day of grace was passed (2:14–15)
345	Nephites flee to Jashon, where the records were (2:16–17)
345	Mormon finishes the large plates of Nephi by adding information up to his time (2:18)
345	Nephites fortify city of Shem (2:21)
346	Lamanites attack Shem (2:22)
348–349	Mormon describes the feelings and conditions of this time (2:19–27)
349	Mormon, age 38, has not yet made a complete record on the Plates of Mormon (2:18)
350	Nephites and Lamanites enter into ten-year peace treaty (2:28)
350–360	Ten years of peace; Mormon and Moroni work on the Plates of Mormon (2:28)
359?	Mormon preaches repentance and baptism (3:2); was Moroni 7 spoken about then?
360	The king of the Lamanites sends a letter that they will attack (3:4)
360	Nephites move to Desolation, by “the narrow pass into land southward” (3:5, 8)
361	Lamanites attack and are defeated (3:7)
362	Lamanites attack again and are defeated, dead thrown into the sea, Nephite boasting (3:8)
362	Mormon, age 51, refuses to lead the Nephite army any longer (3:11, 16)

362?	Moroni, age 29, called to the ministry (Moroni 8:1), given copy of Moroni 7?
362	Conditions are described in Mormon 3:11–15
362?	Mormon writes to Moroni (Moroni 8?); this letter's conditions match Mormon 3:3–15
363	Nephites go on the offensive (4:1)
364	Lamanites attack Teancum and are driven back (4:7–8)
366	Blood on both sides, Teancum taken, idols, women and children sacrifice (4:10–13)
367	Nephites attack back in great anger, drive Lamanites out (4:15)
367?	Mormon writes Moroni 9 to Moroni; its words and conditions match Mormon 4
368–374	Hiatus in warfare, little information given, Mormon may have worked further on the records
375	Lamanites attack, great slaughter, women and children sacrificed (4:17–22)
378?	Mormon (age 67) repents of his oath and was given again command of the army (5:1)
379	Lamanites attack the city of Jordan and other strongholds and were driven back; Nephites who would not gather in were destroyed (5:3, 5)
380	Lamanites attack again in great numbers, and the Nephites are defeated; only the swift could outrun the Lamanites (5:6, 7)
384	Mormon writes to the Lamanite king to set a final battle at Cumorah (6:2)
385	Mormon, age 74, dies (killed in last battle)

Further Reading

For two other largely compatible chronological overviews of Mormon's life, see Alan C. Miner, "A Chronological Setting for the Epistles of Mormon to Moroni," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 3, no 2. (1994): 94–113; Joseph M. Spencer, "On the Dating of Moroni 8–9," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 22 (2016): 131–148.

Mormon 1 — Mormon as a Teenager: Some Questions to Keep in Mind

- How did the events and concerns of Mormon’s formative youth and during his mid-life challenges influence his composition of the entire Book of Mormon?
- Mormon tells us that he grew up in a very difficult time. The cultural environment was already bad when he was born. Yet he grew up to be extraordinarily faithful, righteous, and dutiful. How might that have happened? Are there lessons that we as his readers can apply to strengthen the current rising generation (Mormon 1:1–14)? What happened to Mormon when he was 15 and 16 years old, and then as a very young adult?
- Is it implausible to think of a person so young being put in charge of thousands of soldiers at a very critical moment (Mormon 1:15–2:7)?

Main events covered in this chapter:

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322	War breaks out between Nephites and Lamanites (1:8)
323–326	Four years of peace (1:12)
326	Mormon, age 15, is visited by the Lord and knows the goodness of Jesus (1:15)

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[What Do We Know About Mormon’s Upbringing?](#)” *KnoWhy* 226 (November 8, 2016).

Mormon 1:2–3 — Mormon’s Character

What Did Ammaron Mean by “Sober?”

Mormon was trusted by Ammaron. There is no information on the age of Ammaron or on his immediate kinship relations to the young Mormon, though they both descended from Nephi. However, this older man knew that this 10-year-old boy was very precocious, and he trusted him. Being trusted with some major assignment can be very influential in the development of confidence in the formation of the character of a young person, and

indeed Mormon remembered that description. Being told that he was trustworthy likely made Mormon even more so. He was, even at that age, a very responsible person.

In Mormon 1:2, Ammaron said plainly to Mormon that he was a “sober” child. Likewise, Alma, when speaking to his sons Helaman and Shiblon, had ended his blessings and instructions by encouraging them to “be sober” (Alma 37:47; 38:15), and Nephi, Jacob, Benjamin, and Alma spoke words with “soberness” (1 Nephi 18:10; Jacob 2:2; 6:5) or with “truth and soberness” (Mosiah 4:15; Alma 42:31; 53:21). So, this word, in Nephite vocabulary, carried high praise and honor.

Today the word “sober” is used almost always to mean not influenced by drugs or alcohol, but according to Noah Webster’s 1828 Dictionary, the word “sober” described much more, including the following:

A person who is sober is calm, not under the influence of passion, without intemperate passion. He is cool, calm, moderate, freedom from inordinate passions, freedom from the heat of passion, calmness, coolness, habitual freedom from enthusiasm, inordinate passion or over-heated imagination. Gravity without sadness or melancholy.

The word “sober” comes from the Latin “sobrius” which also meant much more than simply “not intoxicated.” It also meant being “moderate, frugal, continent, reasonable, and sensible.” Mormon was by nature all of these things. His disposition was calm and level-headed in the worst of situations. See Mormon 3:16–22 in which he calmly steps down and becomes an “idle witness.” As readers, we can see these qualities coming through in Mormon’s statements and descriptions throughout the Book of Mormon, which are characteristically thoughtful, restrained, sensible, and wise. It reinforces my confidence in Mormon as an accurate and appropriate transmitter of the records of his people to know that his character, from a young age, disposed him toward leaving us with an accurate, perceptive, and carefully stated documentary.

Mormon Was Quick to Observe

Ammaron also referred to Mormon as being “quick to observe” (1:2), implying perhaps that he was good at accurately perceiving his surroundings, and maybe also quick to learn and obey. In Mormon 1:3, Ammaron counseled him to remember the things that “ye have observed concerning this people” in order to prepare to “take [particularly] the plates of Nephi unto yourself,” at the age of 24 (1:3–4).

The Nephites were not living their religion very well at this time, and they were making poor choices. An observant person sees his surroundings, considers them, and decides to

do something better. Mormon continued in this vein, even stepping down as the commander when the behavior of the Nephites fell below his standard.

Mormon Demonstrated Patience and Obedience

Mormon was also patient and obedient, and remembered his duty, all of which he attributed to his being a descendant of Nephi. At the age of ten years, he was asked to take stewardship of the records when he reached the age of twenty-four, in AD 334. More patient than many young people, he waited until the appropriate time to obtain the records. In recent years, research has shown that a knowledge of family history and origins have a beneficial effect on the choices that young people make.

Mormon Was Learned and Trained

Speaking about himself, Mormon commented that at the age of ten, he was “learned somewhat after the manner of the learning of my people,” using a phrase that is similar to the words Nephi used to describe himself (1 Nephi 1:1–2). One may suppose that Mormon was a diligent young student, considering the high quality of his later writing and editing. However, there had to be a time of preparation.

In Mormon 1:6, Mormon recorded that when he was eleven years old, his father took him south to Zarahemla. In AD 322, a war began by the borders of Zarahemla about the time that Mormon’s father took him to Zarahemla. They traveled southward, so they probably came from near Bountiful or the narrow neck of land where Mormon ended up at the end of his life. He found that the land was very over-populated: “The whole face of the land had become covered with buildings, and the people were as numerous almost, as it were the sand of the sea” (Mormon 1:7). As a young boy likely from a smaller, rural area, he seems to have been astounded by the big city.

Mormon’s father was probably involved in some way as a military leader, and the young Mormon went along to be exposed to military operations. This seems apparent because Mormon began at that time observing military details. He described the composition of the two sides, the numbers of soldiers, and the fact that there were several battles before the Lamanites capitulated and peace reigned for about four years.

Mormon’s calling as a prophet and religious leader occurred when he was fifteen years old, in AD 325–326. In Mormon 1:15, he described, “And I, being fifteen years of age and being somewhat of a sober mind, therefore I was visited of the Lord, and tasted and knew of the goodness of Jesus.” The similarity here to Joseph Smith’s life is obvious and worth noting. Joseph was visited by the Father and the Son around that same time in his life.

Mormon then went through a period of growth and preparation for the fulfillment of his calling. Having been visited by Jesus Christ, he immediately desired to begin teaching

what he had learned, but was forbidden for a time because of the unrighteousness of the people. And, instead, the next year, at the age of sixteen, Mormon was acclaimed the military leader of the Nephite forces.

Mormon marked that date by stating both his age and the date in Mormon 2:2, which reads, “*in my sixteenth year I did go forth at the head of an army of the Nephites, against the Lamanites; therefore three hundred and twenty and six years had passed away.*” This one link allows us to say that Mormon was 15 years old (in his 16th year), and that 326 years from the birth of Christ then ended. This means that he was born either in 310 or 311, depending on the month in which he was born. For convenience, we can say he was born in 311.

Based on Mormon’s evident precociousness, spirituality, lineage, and physical stature, Ammaron was thus certainly inspired five years earlier as he confidently selected Mormon at such a young age as the next record-keeper. Ammaron himself was no doubt quite old. He received the plates from his brother Amos, and they were both sons and grandsons of another Amos, who was a son or a grandson of leaders named Nephi in 4 Nephi. Although the chronological record is not explicit here, one can well imagine that Ammaron had searched and waited long, during the deteriorating years between AD 250–321 when Ammaron spoke to Mormon when he was “about ten years of age” (Mormon 1:2). Ammaron needed someone reliable and able to make and edit records. It is likely that his positive statements about Mormon’s strengths encouraged Mormon to develop those strengths further. An adult’s trust often proves to be invaluable to the development of young people. It is worthwhile to consider how and when we may want to provide positive reinforcement to young people.

Further Reading

Richard Neitzel Holzapfel, “Mormon, the Man and the Message,” in *The Book of Mormon: Fourth Nephi Through Moroni, From Zion to Destruction*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate, Jr. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, 1995), 117–131.

Book of Mormon Central, “What Do We Know about Mormon’s Upbringing? (Mormon 1:2),” *KnoWhy* 226 (November 8, 2016).

Mormon 2

Mormon 2:1–2 — At Age 16, Mormon Leads the Nephites in Battle

When Mormon was selected to lead the military system at the age of sixteen, he had certainly been prepared and positioned by several means to assume this position. Looking

mature and being responsible were good foundations, but he had to be groomed and trained for the role.

As he explained in Mormon 1:5, Mormon was a direct descendant of Nephi, which, according to the book of Jacob, meant that he had the right to be a king or leader. That right belonged to the direct descendants of Nephi. This may explain how he could have been selected at such a young age to fulfill that role.

Likely, his father was a military leader, and he trained Mormon. John Tvedtnes has written a very persuasive argument that Mormon may well have come from a military caste or line of Nephites, and that he learned certain things naturally from his father. In that day, people typically took over the trade of their fathers. Mormon's father may very well have been in that line of work, with great responsibility and political influence. For purposes of comparison, other great military leaders in history assumed leadership roles at young ages:

Alexander the Great (356–323 BC)

Alexander the Great, officially known as Alexander III, was the son of Philip II, King of Macedonia. He had been tutored by Aristotle, and had opportunity for the finest education. Aristotle gave Alexander, who was very interested in history, a copy of Homer's *Iliad*, the great story of the Trojan War. As any good, young Greek would, he probably knew that whole text by memory, so he knew the great military history of the Greek people. Mormon, too, had an interest in history, especially as he was destined to edit the old records of his people. He was learning of the history of the Nephite armies and their wars.

Alexander the Great fought alongside his father for several years, and successfully led the military and defended the nation while his father was away on forays. Then he defeated the Persian Empire, a huge empire, when he was only 23 years old. He had been considered very precocious at the age of ten, when he tamed his own huge, white Macedonian horse. In his day, people assumed that only someone with divine blood could possibly have done that.

Julius Caesar (100–44 BC) and Augustus Caesar (63 BC–AD 14)

Julius Caesar was born into an influential family, well educated, and entered military service at age 19. By age 26 his extraordinary career as a general and politician had begun. When Julius Caesar was assassinated, Augustus Caesar became his heir at the age of 19, inheriting two-thirds of the very large estate that Julius Caesar had amassed. Augustus led the battle at the age of 32, when he defeated Marc Anthony to become the sole ruler of the Mediterranean world and Roman Empire. He developed the state into an empire, in

which, despite appearances, he was the sole ruler, and he extended and defended the outer borders with great success.

Louis XIV (1638–1715)

The young Louis became nominal king at the age of five. However, he did not rule personally until he was sixteen, at which time, he took over complete, singlehanded rule. He reformed much of the French political and military system with a strong and highly organized hand.

Thus, it is perfectly feasible for a precocious and serious-minded young man like Mormon, particularly one who had been both trained by his father and called of God, to become an important leader at a young age. There are several examples throughout history. In contrast to these historic rulers however, young leaders such as Mormon, David the shepherd boy/king, and Joseph Smith were not only very talented and precocious, but more than that they were called by God and led through the Holy Ghost.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[What Do We Know about Mormon’s Upbringing?](#) (Mormon 1:2),” *KnowWhy* 226 (November 8, 2016).

Mormon 2:2–18 — Life Events of Mormon during the War

Main events covered in this section:

Year	Event
327	Mormon, age 16, is appointed to lead the army (2:2)
328	Lamanites attack (2:3)
330	Mormon defeats Aaron (2:9)
331?	Mormon marries at age 20?
331	Outbreak of hostilities
333?	Moroni is born?
335	Mormon remembers Ammaron telling him to go to Antum at age 24 (1:3)
335	Mormon goes and obtains the records

344	People curse God and wish to die; day of grace was passed (2:14–15)
345	Nephites flee to Jashon, where the records were (2:16–17)
345	Mormon finishes the large plates of Nephi by adding information up to his time (2:18)
345	Nephites fortify city of Shem (2:21)
346	Lamanites attack Shem (2:22)
348–349	Mormon describes the feelings and conditions of this time (2:19–27)
349	Mormon, age 38, has not yet made a complete record on the Plates of Mormon (2:18)
350	Nephites and Lamanites enter into ten-year peace treaty (2:28)
350–360	Ten years of peace; Mormon and Moroni work on the Plates of Mormon (2:28)

AD 326–331

The series of skirmishes between AD 326–331 provided a great victory for Mormon, who did not win many battles during his lifetime. Several features preceded these events: robbers, over-population, intense militarism, and a lot of fear (Mormon 2:3). The Nephites had resorted to sorceries, witchcrafts and magic (Mormon 1:19); they were no longer relying on the Holy Ghost, and they turned to superstition to find a successful strategy. Divination, augury, and things of that nature are surrogates for the lack of the influence of the Holy Ghost. These factors came together to cause the Nephite crisis.

At this point, the Nephites had to retreat. Thus, when Mormon, at age sixteen, began to lead these people, they were already on the run and setting up refugee camps. They had lost their lands, and only had the things they could carry with them. Access to healthcare and food must have been very limited, especially when they were so afraid, as described in Mormon 2:3.

As recorded in Mormon 2:9, however, he regrouped the army and prevailed for a moment of victory against Aaron. Mormon reported, “He came against us with an army of forty and four thousand. And behold, I withstood him with forty and two thousand. And it came to pass that I beat him with my army that he fled before me.” The Nephites were slightly outnumbered, but Mormon wanted us to know that he won at least that once.

When Did Mormon Marry?

By the end of that victory in about AD 331, Mormon was in his twentieth year. In Jewish tradition, if they were still following it or some similar life-expectations, the age of twenty was considered an ideal age to marry. Mormon still had another four years before he could obtain the records at the age of 24, and he would probably have wanted to first marry a woman who already understood his mission. We don't know when Mormon married, but for several reasons, sometime during the early 330s would have made sense. Interestingly, Joseph Smith married Emma at about that age as well in January 1827. Joseph began translating the plates, bringing forth the 116 pages in May and June, 1828, when he was age 22.

Hypothetically, Mormon could have married around AD 331, about twenty years of age, during the break in the wars at that time. Moroni could have been born a couple years after that. Looking ahead, if Moroni was then called to the ministry around 30 years of age, that would have occurred around AD 360, around the end of the 10-year-treaty. Considering the conditions at such times in Mormon's life helps us suggest possible dates for things such as Mormon's preaching in his synagogue as found in Moroni 7, and also his letter to Moroni as recorded in Moroni 8. Moroni noted that that letter was written by his father shortly after Moroni's call to the ministry, whenever that was (Moroni 8:1). The contexts behind those two documents as well as behind his letter found in Moroni 9 will be discussed later in the notes for Moroni 7–9.

AD 331–345

Very little of what Mormon did between AD 331–345 is recorded in Mormon 2:18, but the points that Mormon touches were the most crucial. The Nephites became worse and the day of grace was past; they were sorrowful, but not unto repentance. Rather theirs was the sorrowing of the damned. In particular, they did not come to Jesus with "broken hearts and contrite spirits," but they "did curse God and wish to die" (Mormon 2:14). The phrase "broken heart and contrite spirit" was spoken by Jesus out of the darkness in 3 Nephi 19: "I will accept none of your sacrifices and your burnt offerings. And ye shall offer for a sacrifice unto me *a broken heart and a contrite spirit*" (3 Nephi 9:19–20). The phrase was also used in the Sermon at the Temple, when Jesus commanded all to repent and come unto Him (3 Nephi 12:19). Mormon's diagnosis of the serious spiritual decline of his people thus identifies their strong rejection of the basic teachings of Jesus in 3 Nephi. In using words sparingly, Mormon is excellent at remembering and using significant key phrases that he obviously knew from his study of the records and teachings of his people.

In the year AD 344, the Nephites fled again, and Mormon led them up to the land of Jashon, where a deposit of the Nephite records were. In Mormon 2:17 he recorded,

“Behold I had gone, according to the word of Ammaron and taken the plates of Nephi and did make a record according to the words of Ammaron.” By the time he returned in AD 344, Mormon had already obtained access to the plates, at the age of 24.

It is likely that, between AD 334–344, Mormon worked somewhat on the records. He was apparently finishing the record of what he called the Large Plates when, in Mormon 2:18, he wrote: “and upon the plates of Nephi, I did make a full account.” That is, he wrote on what for centuries had been called the Large Plates, recording “all the wickedness and abomination” of his own people. But upon *these* plates (the plates of Mormon), as he also wrote, he “did forbear to make a full account.” We do not know when he actually made the plates of Mormon, but it would seem likely that he at least began working on them during this period.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Did Mormon Write So Little About His Own Time Period? \(Mormon 2:18\)](#),” *KnoWhy* 227 (November 9, 2016).

Mormon 2:19–29 — The Ten-Year Peace Treaty

Only a few words and phrases are used by Mormon to describe the feelings and spiritual conditions of the Nephites before they entered into the Ten-Year peace treaty (AD 350–360) with the Lamanites and Gadianton robbers (Mormon 2:19–29). According to Mormon 2:28, in the year AD 350, the Nephites (led by Mormon) made a ten-year peace treaty with the Lamanites and even with the Gadianton robbers. They bought those ten years of peace at a very high price, by promising to give up the entire land south of the narrow neck of land.

As numbers often do, this date and these ten years probably mean something. The year 350 was the seventh occurrence of the fifty-year cycle—the seventh Jubilee year—from the birth of Jesus. They negotiated a ten-year treaty in accordance with Hebrew custom in observance of this special sabbatical-jubilee.

In Mormon 3:1 we learn that during that decade Mormon had made sure that his people were employed in preparing for the inevitable resumption of battle. Nevertheless, that decade was the only time in Mormon’s life that he had a peaceful period long enough to work on a major project, such as the Book of Mormon. Mormon was forty years old in AD 350, and he was sixty years old when the ten-year peace expired. It would appear that it was during this Jubilee decade that he had time and the opportunity to work on the abridgment.

At the same time, if he had married in about AD 331, his son Moroni could have been born a year or two later, and he would have been about 18 or 19 years old in AD 350—old enough to have been taught and trained by Mormon in the languages of his people and

in the skills required to abridge records and to make and inscribe plates. When Mormon died in AD 385, Moroni knew exactly how to pick up where Mormon had left off. It makes sense that Moroni would have grown up as his father's research and writing assistant.

Promptly after those ten years, in Mormon 3:4, the king of the Lamanites wrote a letter warning that they would resume hostilities. Apparently, this king was willing to live exactly by this ten-year treaty. It must have been a very solemn and somewhat religiously or symbolically oriented treaty for people on both sides to be willing to take a ten-year break from the war. The Lamanites were no doubt tired and probably needed a little rest too, but that would not have required a full decade in order to regroup. The bigger problem must have been within the Nephite camp. And, indeed, it was not more than two years after this ten-year time-out that Mormon would utterly refuse to lead the Nephites any longer because of their vengefulness and hatred.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[Why Is The 10-Year Peace Treaty Important? \(Mormon 3:1\)](#)," *KnoWhy* 228 (November 10, 2016).

Mormon 3

Mormon 3 — Questions Arising within This Chapter

- Around AD 360, at the age of 49, what did Mormon preach to his people at the close of the ten-year time of treaty (see Mormon 3:2–3)?
- Why did Mormon refuse to lead his people after AD 362 (Mormon 3:10–16)?
- What might it mean to “stand as an idle witness” (Mormon 3:16)?
- How can a person become free from the natural urge to get revenge? Are we free from this problem? In what ways do we get back at people in our society today (Mormon 3:10–16)?
- What is Mormon's purpose in writing his own book and also the entire Book of Mormon (Mormon 3:17–22)? How does this statement of purpose compare with Moroni's statement of purpose in the Title Page of the Book of Mormon? Or with Nephi's statement of purpose in 1 Nephi 1:20?
- How much of the Book of Mormon had Mormon completed by this time? Had he spent much of the time during the ten-years during the treaty of peace working on that project? That may well have been the case. One might think that Mormon could have continued writing and inscribing some things during the next 23 years until his death in AD 385, but with a major population relocation to the land of Desolation and with at least eight more military offensives occurring during those

remaining years, the circumstances under which Mormon could have worked on the sacred record during that time would have been far less than ideal.

Mormon 3:1–4 — Mormon Cries Repentance

In Mormon 3:2, Mormon tells us that he was specifically asked by the Lord to “Cry unto this people—Repent ye and come unto me, and be ye baptized, and build up again my church, and ye shall be spared.” This was the last warning for his people.

Mormon recorded in Mormon 3:4 that he received this command from the Lord and began preaching in AD 360, at 50 years old. He recorded that the event occurred at the end of the ten-year peace treaty made with the Lamanites, maybe as long as ten years after his tabernacle speech recorded by his son in Moroni 7. The treaty came to an abrupt end when the King of the Lamanites wrote a letter of warning that the time for the period of peace was over.

Mormon began, as instructed, to teach about repentance. In his earlier sermon, recorded in Moroni 7, while speaking to a band of believers, he had taught the higher law from the Sermon in the Temple, but now, he focused on the first principle of the Gospel, faith, repentance, and baptism. The ten-year celebration would have been a great time for people to have regrouped and returned to Christ, but apparently, they had not done so. This was a season of repentance, and his teaching was a great deal more than just a nice topic in conference.

The Lord had said, “Repent ye!” The verb “repent” was used purposefully. They had been on the run for a while, followed by a long a season of jubilee and celebration. Now it was time to go back to work to re-establish the church. Mormon used the verb again in the expression of his inner desire, “And I would that I could persuade all ye ends of the earth to *repent* and prepare to stand before the judgment-seat of Christ” (Mormon 3:22, emphasis added).

Mormon commented in Mormon 3:3 that he had done what he had been commanded to do. “I did cry unto the people,” but his efforts were in vain. His people did not recognize that the Lord had spared them and had granted them a time for *repentance*. However, “behold, they did harden their hearts against the Lord” (Mormon 3:3).

Mormon 3:9–16 — Mormon Refuses to Lead the Wicked Nephites

At the end of the ten-year span of peace, the king of the Lamanites had sent a letter warning that the treaty was over, and that fighting would resume. Mormon led his people in two successful battles, one in the 361st year, in the Land of Desolation (Mormon 3:7), and another in the 362nd year (v. 8), in which they “did slay a great number of them.” However, it becomes clear in Mormon 3:9 that the Nephites became proud and boastful

because of their success. Not only were they interested in revenge, but they even swore before the heavens that they would avenge themselves of the blood of their brethren.

The war, to the Nephites, became an offensive action. It is quite possible that their choices were based partly on a desire to step into a position of advantage, and win, but their motivation and trust in themselves precluded the help of the Lord.

Primarily, they wrongly became avengers of blood. Avengers of blood were part of the Law of Moses. If one had a brother or first-level relative murdered, there was an obligation under the Law of Moses to act as what was called the redeemer of blood, or *go-el hadam*, and to even the score. They may have been using this old law to say that God would justify their thirst for revenge. Though this was 330 years after Christ appeared, there were lingering questions about which parts of the Law of Moses were supposed to have been discontinued and which were still applicable. Possibly, they were falling back into old customs. For example, in Moroni 8, which was an “epistle of my father Mormon, written to me, Moroni; and it was written unto me soon after my calling to the ministry,” it was noted that the law of circumcision was done away in Christ. This sort of confusion also happened in Jerusalem among a number of early Christian converts.

It was not always clear which parts of the Law of Moses were to be done away with and which were not. For example, the law of the Sabbath is still followed, but other parts of the Law of Moses are not. Prophetic instruction was required to differentiate between those parts to be retained and those parts to be discontinued. Thus, although one may understand where they might have acquired their idea, they were still incorrect.

They were warned that exacting revenge was sinful, but they ignored the prophet, Mormon. One may ask whether seeking revenge is a common part of life today. In what ways do even Latter-day Saints “get back” at people in our society? It happens at a national level; it happens in the lives of individuals. Road rage is a modern example of vengeful behavior. Holding grudges or considering getting even with someone are common failings.

Mormon retired at the age of 53 because he could no longer stand at the head of the vengeful and bitter Nephites who would neither hear his cry for repentance nor cease being avengers. In Mormon 3:11–16, he announced that he would stand down. For what it may or may not have been worth in Mormon’s day, the mandatory retirement age of priests under the Law of Moses was 50 (see Numbers 8:25). Mormon was called back into service and accepted the role of leader again at the very end of his life, 20 years later.

Mormon 3:16 — Mormon Stands as an “Idle Witness”

Mormon withdrew from the battle and stood on the sidelines. His words were resolute. “I utterly refused to go up against mine enemies; and I did even as the Lord had commanded me; and I did stand as an idle witness to manifest unto the world the things which I saw and heard” (Mormon 3:16).

What might it mean for a person stands as an idle witness? It is someone who chronicles events, but does not become involved. Mormon was not going to be a partisan. He was not going to try to persuade people. He was simply going to record the effects of their choices without being able to alter their course.

Some scholars have written about an interesting psychological phenomenon called the survivor witness. This phenomenon was most pronounced in the holocaust in Germany where people realized the hopelessness of their situation. There was no getting out of those camps, and for the most part, there was no one to whom they could talk. There was no one who would know what had happened to them. They were being eradicated without a voice.

When investigators went into the concentration camps after the war was over, they found that the victims had written notes and buried them under sidewalks where it had washed away, or in cracks of the wood. They had an urge to record what happened to them, and their notes told their story. They had no idea to whom they were speaking, but still desired to leave a record of the fact that they had been there and of what had happened to them. In most cases, they tried not to condemn what was happening, but gave a factual report. It is uncanny how many such statements seemed very dispassionate about the circumstances. They were hoping that someone, someday, would know what had occurred. That whole collection of letters has been studied by psychologists, and they have coined the phrase “survivor witnesses” for these people.

Mormon’s statements and the way in which he dispassionately told the story, matches the model that scholars developed of what these survivor-witnesses wrote. His testimony is the kind that would be expected from a person who had actually watched the horrors that he had to watch, knowing the hopelessness and his lack of power to be able to change the inevitable, inexorable consequences.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[How Can the Book of Mormon Survivors Give Us Hope?](#) (Mormon 8:3),” *KnoWhy* 393 (December 26, 2017).

Gordon C. Thomasson, "The Survivor and the Will to Bear Witness," in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon: A Decade of New Research*, ed. John W. Welch (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1992), 266–268.

Lisa Bolin Hawkins and Gordon Thomasson, "I Only Am Escaped Alone to Tell Thee: Survivor Witnesses in the Book of Mormon" *FARMS Preliminary Reports* (1984): 1–13.

Mormon 3:17–22 — Mormon Addresses His Purpose for Writing

How does Mormon now state his purpose in writing his own book and also the entire Book of Mormon? How does this statement of purpose compare with Moroni's statement of purpose in the Title Page of the Book of Mormon? Or with Nephi's statement of purpose in 1 Nephi 1:20?

Mormon's role as an idle- or survivor-witness affects his statement of purpose. He had tried to get his people to repent, but now they had uprooted and moved, had been attacked and won, but then were attacked again and lost, and became proud and unruly. In Mormon 3:17–22, after washing his hands of further responsibility and pronouncing himself an idle witness, he spoke like a survivor-witness as he stated the only remaining purposes that he hoped to accomplish as this witness. What were Mormon's purposes now in writing especially this last part of his personal book?

In Mormon 3:17, he first hoped to reach a distant, future audience:

- *"Therefore, I write unto you gentiles."* These are people long removed from his immediate audience, but he wants them to know exactly what happened.
- *"... and also unto you, House of Israel, when the work shall commence, that ye shall be about to prepare to return to the land of your inheritance."* That statement relates back to 3 Nephi 21, where this was to be the sign of the beginning of the fulfillment of those prophecies.
- *"And I write unto all the ends of the earth and you twelve tribes of Israel,"* and so on.
- *"... and I write unto the remnant of this people who shall be judged by the Twelve whom Jesus chose in this land."*

In addition, the fact that Mormon truly loved his people, as he said in Mormon 3:12, is evident in this statement of purpose. In Mormon 3:20–21, he secondarily—and perhaps less hopefully—listed three immediate purposes for his account as a witness:

- *"And for this cause I write unto you that ye may know that ye must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ, yea, every soul who belongs to the whole human family of Adam and ye must stand to be judged of your works, whether they be good or evil"*

- “And also that ye may believe the gospel of Jesus Christ which you shall have among you”
- “And also that the Jews, the covenant people of the Lord shall have other witness besides him whom they saw and heard, that Jesus whom they slew was the very Christ and the very God.”

This statement of purpose is rather different from what Moroni expresses in the Title Page, the one that people usually refer to. Why may Mormon have wanted his main purpose to be to ensure that people know that they would stand to be judged? Was he discharging his obligation to let people know that this will happen? Was it because he cared about the people and his stewardship?

In Mormon 3:22, he forewarned all to repent and prepare for the time of judgment. Repentance is what the Lord had commanded him to preach (Mormon 3:2). It is apparent that Mormon had this message of the urgency to repent in his mind the whole time he was editing, abridging, and producing the Book of Mormon.

The fact that all will stand to be judged is really the only thing Mormon had left to say to his own people at this time. Because they had been wicked and had not listened, he turned them over to the accountability of God. The status of being an idle witness left nothing more to do than to bear testimony and remind people that they are accountable. This purpose is not identical to, but is consistent with, the purpose that Moroni expressed in the Title Page. It is a reflection of Mormon’s despair after hearing, as he wrote in verse 15, that this was their last warning. He knew that they had received their last chance.

Mormon had been described as a *sober* young man. Here he did not get angry, but he calmly and coolly stepped to the sidelines and stood as an idle witness. That is a sober person. These attributes are also characteristic of the way Mormon handled the accounts of the destructions in 3 Nephi 8, and other conflicts in the record with the Gadianton robbers. He presents a very factual, purposeful, sober history. He was decidedly suited for the task of abridging the history of his people into our Book of Mormon.

Mormon 4–6 — The Last Nephite War

When the Book of Mormon was first published, readers of Mormon’s accounts of the final battles in Mormon 4–6, and Moroni 9 were very skeptical: “This is too fantastic,” they said, “This could never have really happened.” War had not been conducted in that manner in Europe. Soldiers in that era went out on to a field outside of town to fight. Even when the Civil War began, the women and children took picnic baskets and watched the battle. In

ancient warfare, however, the whole population was affected more than modern experience would indicate.

In World War II, Hugh Nibley was in Army Intelligence, and was one of the first to arrive at the beach on D-Day. His job was to go ahead of the soldiers, get inland as far as he could, and let people know where the strengths and weaknesses of the German lines were. Nibley had served a mission in Germany, had German ancestry, and had a German appearance. He spoke with a flawless accent, so he interrogated many captives. When he was in the D-Day invasion he had a large coat, and every pocket was very strictly regulated on what had to be kept and what could not be kept in each pocket, so that if he was killed, his fellow intelligence officers could get quickly to his body and get what they needed to take. He was not allowed to have anything else other than the items that were prescribed, but he violated the rules. He smuggled a copy of the Book of Mormon into one pocket, and was reading as he went across the English Channel on the morning of the invasion, 6 June 1944.

He said, "It never really dawned on me how historically real the Book of Mormon was until D-Day." In interviews included in the film *The Faith of an Observer*, Nibley recalls that he got his testimony of the Book of Mormon riding across the bumpy waves reading about the destruction of the Jaredites and Mormon's account of the destruction of the Nephites. It was there that he saw the great catastrophe, the pain, the suffering, and the chaos of war. We see both the allied soldiers' accounts and Mormon's account of people running this way and that way, fleeing and going from one city to the next, and being driven from one place to another. It is chaos. Mormon regrouped and then they were driven again. It was impossible for him to be in control of his soldiers; they did not even have walkie-talkies as they did in World War II. Once they were scattered, regrouping was very difficult. The chaos, tension, and horror of the similar military scene at the landing were overwhelming to Brother Nibley.

In the newspapers, it seemed that D-Day went according to plan, but Brother Nibley reported, "Nothing went according to plan." The ships were blown the wrong way, the weather did not cooperate, and we were not where we were supposed to be. Moreover, the Germans had intercepted all the messages, and thought the invasion was going to be where the troops expected it to be. It was a piece of good fortune that they were off course, otherwise the exercise would have come out a whole lot differently. The chaos was evident.

People used to read the Book of Mormon account and say, "This just sounds too fantastic to be true," but it is true. We know today that such things happen. Many war participants have verified similar experiences, and with embedded television participation, the public can now observe at a safe distance some of the realities of war.

Further Reading

Hugh Nibley and Alex Nibley, *Sergeant Nibley PhD: Memories of an Unlikely Screaming Eagle* (Salt Lake City, UT: Shadow Mountain, 2006).

Mormon 4

Mormon 4 — Study Questions for This Chapter

- Mormon 4:2, 5, 10, 11–18: What points here suggest that Mormon’s letter to Moroni in Moroni 9 was written as a reaction to the events described here in Mormon 4, perhaps at the end of the hiatus between AD 367–375, before the invasion in AD 375?
- Mormon 4:5: Do you find some great quotes, some pearls, in the midst of all this horrendous slaughter, suffering, and depravity? Consider, among others, the words of wisdom in Mormon 4:5; Moroni 9:5; 9:6; and 9:20.
- Mormon 4:11: What can we learn from Mormon’s great reluctance to report these awful experiences? Read and ponder Mormon 4:11, 5:8–11, and Moroni 9:19.

Mormon 4:11 — Mormon Was Reluctant to Share Details of the War

It is interesting that Mormon was reluctant to tell us everything about the horrible experiences during these last battles. They were, to him, unspeakably sad, awful events. In Mormon 4:11 we read, “It is impossible for the tongue to describe, or for man to write a perfect description of the horrible scene of the blood and carnage which was among the people, both of the Nephites and the Lamanites.”

There are a few other places in which Mormon made a similar plea for his readers to understand how bad it was, though he said it was impossible for him to describe. He did not go into detail. Is that something that modern readers could learn? If they were to produce this installment of the Nephite history in a feature-length film, the battle scene would likely go on for fifteen or twenty minutes. Mormon would not have been happy with that. His reluctance was in keeping with his lifestyle. He was surrounded by wickedness and slaughter all his life, and yet he was visited by the Savior and he was an apostle, a very sensitive person, the leader of the church, and a prophet, so his reluctance to describe the evils was in keeping with his role and life.

When one considers the great man that produced this whole book, one can appreciate what he had and had not told us about many other events. When he reported the great battles in the Book of Alma, he did not really dwell on the carnage. He said, in modern terms, “There were a lot of them and they threw them in the river.” That is about as much

as he wanted to say about that. He had sensitivity about not wanting to give more time and attention to such terrible things than he absolutely had to.

The most graphic description of the atrocities is not in Mormon's public writings in Mormon 4. It is in his letter, in Moroni 9:8–9. After Mormon had lived with the experience for some time, and it was a little in the past, he wanted people to know how bad it really had become. He wanted them to know that God was no longer justified in standing by these people; then he was willing to put this into the record so that it was available. However, when Mormon wrote these words, he did not intend them for public consumption. He was writing a letter to Moroni who was one of his Generals and his son. This record, which speaks of such atrocities as eating the flesh of others, can be compared to classified information. But it became declassified, in Moroni 9:8–9.

It happened in Mormon's time, and it happened when Jerusalem was attacked by the Romans and they would not let anybody in or out of the city of Jerusalem. Josephus recorded that they had nothing at all to eat, so they started eating their children. It has happened in South Sudan more recently. According to CNN, "Forced cannibalism, gang rapes, and death by burning are among the atrocities marking the brutal civil war taking place in South Sudan, according to an African Union (AU) report." The report describes heart-wrenching events too ugly to detail, and assures the reader that the details of Mormon's experiences are not fantasy and were thankfully under-reported.

Further Reading

Susannah Cullinane, "[Cannibalism, gang rapes -- the brutal toll of the South Sudan conflict](#)," *CNN* (October 29, 2015).

Mormon 4:11 — Did the Nephites Use a Macuahuitl?

The "horrible scene of the blood and carnage" described by Mormon in his record (Mormon 4:11, 21, and 5:8) and his letter to his son (Moroni 9) and the account of many thousands of people having been slaughtered, bring to mind the weapon known as a macuahuitl. This weapon, a particularly effective and brutal one, was used by the Aztec, Maya, and several other Central and South American native peoples. The weapon was constructed of a strong wooden baton, with sharp obsidian blades inserted along two edges. A sword that was even a foot shorter than these long "slashers" would not have been able to stand up against such a weapon. The obsidian blades were said by the Spanish who invaded the Americas to be neither breakable nor extractable. Obsidian is the sharpest, natural edge that is found. Before there were lasers, obsidian flakes were used to perform surgery.

In addition, when Spanish soldiers arrived in Mexico to conquer, they were met by a number of Aztec soldiers, who, they reported, could decapitate a horse with their swords. People assumed the conquistadors had exaggerated in order to make themselves look better when they reported what a great victory they had won. Later evidence supports that they were not exaggerating. Weapons and records found in archaeological work have supported their statements.

Although no one is certain that such weapons were used in Mormon’s battles, they would certainly have added to the appearance of a great deal of “blood and carnage” when compared with the traditional weapons that were known in Europe and the Americas in the 1800’s.

Further Reading

Matthew Roper, “[To Inflict the Wounds of Death](#),” FairMormon Presentation 2016, online at fairmormon.org.

Matthew Roper, “[Swords and ‘Cimeters’ in the Book of Mormon](#),” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 8, no. 1 (1999): 35–43.

Mormon 4 and Moroni 9 Compared

In reading Mormon 4–5 and Moroni 9, look for unique points mentioned in both texts help us see that Moroni 9 was written in response to actual atrocities, which Moroni had not yet heard of, and at a time when Moroni was not close by Mormon’s side. As Alan Miner has also concluded, I am of the opinion that Moroni 9 was likely written sometime around AD 375–376 (Mormon 4:15–16; 5:3).

Mormon	Moroni	Shared Content
4:2, 14	9:7–9	taking prisoners is particularly mentioned, only in these two places in the book of Mormon
4:10	9:3–5	anger is mentioned only in these verses in the book of Mormon; anger is in opposition to Jesus’s first mandate in 3 Nephi 12:22
4:11–21	9:8, 16	unspeakable suffering; human sacrifice unto idols; feed women the flesh of their husbands; no water; widows left to wander with no food; these things appear here and nowhere else in the whole Book of Mormon
4:13	9:2	a battle in which Nephites did not conquer; first time this happens in Mormon’s lifetime

4:12, 15	9:9–10	extraordinary Nephite excesses, revenge and wickedness
4:18	9:24	swept off as dew before the sun, on the run, many desertions
4:23	9:24	Mormon takes up all of Ammaron's records; Mormon has records to give Moroni
5:1	9:6	Mormon repented of his oath not to lead any longer; Mormon explains why he retracted his vow and is now not quitting, "if we should cease to labor, we should be brought under condemnation"
4:11; 5:8–11	9:19	reluctance to even mention some atrocities

The last few of these points in this list make it likely that Mormon first wrote about these events in Mormon 4 and then drafted the personal letter to Moroni in Moroni 9 based on that record.

Further Reading

Joseph M. Spencer, "[On the Dating of Moroni 8–9](#)," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 22 (2016): 131–148.

Alan C. Miner, "[A Chronological Setting for the Epistles of Mormon to Moroni](#)," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 3, no 2. (1994): 94–113.

Mormon 5

Events occurring in this chapter:

Year	Event
379	Lamanites attack the city of Jordan and other strongholds and were driven back; Nephites who would not gather in were destroyed (5:3, 5)
380	Lamanites attack again in great numbers, and the Nephites are defeated; only the swift could outrun the Lamanites (5:6, 7)

Mormon 5:8–24

How does Mormon now state his purpose and intent for writing the Book of Mormon? Compare these verses with his previous statement of purpose in Mormon 3:17–22.

Mormon now explains why he only writes a few things—because the sorrow would be too great (5:9). But he knows that people who care for the house of Israel will sorrow for the calamity of these distant kinsmen who would not repent and be “clasped in the arm of Jesus” (5:11). Mormon had been commanded to write to the “unbelieving of the Jews” that they might be persuaded “that Jesus is the Christ,” the anointed messiah, through whom God will keep his promises “unto the fulfilling of his covenant” (5:14).

Mormon then speaks to “the seed” of this defeated people and their fate, being led about by Satan (5:15, 18). Nevertheless, the Lord has “reserved their blessings” and the Lord will “remember the covenant” and “the prayers of the righteous,” even though the seed will be “driven and scattered by the Gentiles” (5:19–21).

Mormon concludes by admonishing the Gentiles to repent, humble themselves, turn from their evil ways, unless “a remnant” will tear them to pieces (5:22–24). Mormon’s words here echo the woes and warnings at the end of 3 Nephi 29–30, but here in Mormon 5 he relates those more general curses and commandments to the Gentiles’ specific mistreatment of the Nephite remnant and seed that will scatter and survive the institutional collapse of the Nephite nation as a people.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[What Was Mormon’s Purpose in Writing the Book of Mormon? \(Mormon 5:14\)](#),” *KnoWhy* 230 (November 14, 2016).

Mormon 6

Mormon 6 – Questions to Ponder

- Mormon 6:2–3. Mormon now writes to the king of the Lamanites to set a place and time for a final confrontation. How odd is it that the King of the Lamanites would let the Nephites gather their armies together for a final battle? Or, was honor in battle understood differently then than it is now?
- Mormon 6:4–15. Where was the hill and the land of Cumorah where this final battle was staged? How many Nephites died there? How devastating was it in the minds of ancient people for their dead to be denied burial?
- Mormon 6:10. Why do you think Mormon was killed, and not even taken captive or held as a trophy of war? Might it have been obvious that he was already

mortally wounded? Might the Lamanite king have been showing some aristocratic respect for his personal counterpart, or maybe Mormon was regarded as a holy man. Or maybe they just overlooked him in the carnage.

- Mormon 6:16–22. Do these words not rank among the most poignant and eloquent lamentations of all time? What helps human beings the most in dealing with the sorrows, pains, and uncertainties of death?

Mormon 6:10–15 — How Many Soldiers Died in the Final Battle?

The public in the early 19th century had probably not heard of whole populations being obliterated. But even when the so-called civilized Greeks took over the island of an enemy, they exterminated the male population, and either killed the women and children or reserved them as slaves. Modern reporting increases awareness of the realities of war. When one to three million Cambodians, much of the whole population, were obliterated by the Khmer Rouge from 1970 to 1975, the entire world could observe the results.

A so-called ethnic cleansing, later classified as a genocide, took place in areas controlled by the Bosnian Serbs, who were mostly Orthodox Christians in 1995. Both Muslim Bosnians and Roman Catholic Bosnian Croats were targets for extermination. According to the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY), the ethnic cleansing campaign included exterminations, unlawful confinement, murder, rape, sexual assault, torture, beating, robbery, and inhumane treatment of civilians. It also included targeting political leaders, intellectuals, and professionals; the unlawful deportation and transfer of civilians; the unlawful shelling of civilians; the unlawful appropriation and plunder of real and personal property; the destruction of homes and businesses; and the destruction of places of worship.

In the case of Mormon's final battle, the numbers were also staggering—as many as 230,000 in one battle, assuming each unit was full to begin with. Except for 24 survivors, twenty-three leaders, each together with their ten thousand, were all “hewn down.” These kinds of things do happen, probably more in the ancient world than today, but no era in history is immune from such slaughter.

Regarding uncertainties about the location of this final battle, much has been said. But in the end, one might wonder why it is that we simply do not know the place of that battle. One might also ask what significance its GPS location might have, if any.

In comparison, it might help to point out that we do not know the location of Mt. Sinai, where Moses saw God and received the Ten Commandments. Likewise, we do not know the location of the Mount of Transfiguration, where Moses and Elijah appeared to Jesus, Peter, James and John. Nor do we know the mountain on which Jesus gave the Sermon on

the Mount. In none of these cases is the specific location crucial, but rather knowing what happened there is.

Also, there is no compelling reason why Moroni should have buried the plates of Mormon at the same location where this final battle had taken place 36 years earlier. All those years, Moroni had wandered to avoid contact with his enemies, who would have killed him if they had found him.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[Where is the Location of the Hill Cumorah?](#) (Mormon 6:6)," *KnoWhy* 489 (November 29, 2018).

Book of Mormon Central, "[How Could So Many People Have Died at the Battle of Cumorah? \(Mormon 6:14\)](#)," *KnoWhy* 231 (November 15, 2016).

Mormon 6:16–22 — Mormon's Anguished Lament over the Fallen Nephites

The words of sorrow and mourning in Mormon 6:16–22, which can easily bring tears to the eyes, can be seen literarily as a powerful formal lamentation. The text could well have been sung or chanted as a dirge. It deserves and rewards a more careful analysis than it has previously been given.

As background, in ancient Syrian literature, going back to the Assyrian Empire and beyond into the Sumerian literature, we find tablets lamenting over the destruction of a city or the destruction of a temple. This became a genre, a type of writing. In early cultures, mourning and lamentation was serious and very public. Usually women, but sometimes men, would mourn for days and would cry aloud, putting expression to their deep sorrow. Under Jewish law, the men were required to mourn in a slightly different way; they tore their clothes, both the outer and inner garments. Jewish law even went so far as to say how long the tear had to be in order for it to qualify as a properly rent garment. In all these cases, mourning was a formalized experience.

In general, ancient funeral lamentations had developed patterns and styles. In the *Iliad*, for example, there are about a dozen passages in which Homer's epic poetry follows a standard pattern as the women mourn and lament over the death of Hector and other heroes. Both Homer and Mormon understood the lamentable side of intransigent warfare. Mormon's lament seems spontaneous, but he has had plenty of previous opportunities to mourn the deaths of large numbers of his people. No doubt, due to the uniqueness of this final demise of his entire nation, Mormon's lamentation is somewhat unique, but Mormon probably had cried out in bereavement on many other occasions as well. This final dirge manifests the confident cadences and heart-rending expressions of an aged and lyrically experienced prophetic leader.

Mormon's Lament

(Mormon 6:16–11)

And my soul was rent with anguish, because of the slain of my people, and I cried:

[Tripartite]

[A. Direct Address]

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.

O ye fair

sons and daughters,
ye fathers and mothers,
ye husbands and wives,

[O] ye fair ones

How is it that ye could have fallen!

But ye are gone

And my sorrows cannot bring your return.

[B. Central Parallelistic Narrative Comment]

And the day soon cometh that your mortal must put on immortality

And these bodies which are now moldering in corruption must soon become incorruptible bodies.

And then ye must stand before the judgment-seat of Christ

To be judged according to your works

And if it so be that ye are righteous,

then are ye blessed with your fathers who have gone before you.

[C. Renewed address to the dead]

O that ye had repented before this great destruction had come upon you.

But behold, ye are gone,

and the Father, yea, the Eternal Father of heaven, knoweth your state;
and he doeth with you according to his justice and mercy.

Patterns and recurring themes, are discernable in these typical formulaic military lamentations in the *Iliad*, and some of the themes that appear there are also identifiable in Mormon's speech.

Like the dirges in the *Iliad*, Mormon's speech, begins with a common verb of speaking: to cry out. Then there are words that specifically mark the speech as a personal lament. Mormon, for example, makes it clear that he personally is mourning by saying explicitly, "I mourn your loss." He also says, "My soul was rent with anguish." He is tearing his soul, perhaps when he rends or tears his coat, which would have been a customary outward manifestation of the inward spiritual tearing of his soul.

Mormon's lament has a tripartite structure, which was a common feature of the way ancient people mourned. For example, in Syrian literature—and this goes back into the Assyrian Empire and beyond that into Sumerian literature—we find clay tablets that are written lamenting over the destruction of a city or the destruction of a temple, and because of their standard styles and formats, scholars refer to them as a *genre*, a particular type of writing.

Those laments often have a tripartite structure in which they begin with a personal address, the mourner then speaks to the dead person in the direct vocative case, often characterized by the word "O." Likewise, Mormon begins, "O, ye fair ones..."

Then at the end, there is usually praise for the dead, lavishly offered and frequently enhanced by repetition. Likewise, Mormon says, "Oh, ye fair ones, ye fair ones," and four times, he refers to how good they could have been. Additionally, these ancient laments often contain an element of reproach, and Mormon likewise cries out, "How could ye have departed ...?" and "How could ye have rejected ...?" In other words, how could this have happened?

Typically, in these laments there is a comparison between the living people and the deceased, extending sometimes to a comparison of the living and the dead in general. Often, the mourner expresses an unfulfilled wish. There is a contrast between the present and the future, and concerns about the future. In particular, the women express concern about what will happen to them now that their man is gone. Will they be taken captive? What will happen next?

The Greek dirges often contain an element of bravado in which the mourners say, "We will get back at you!" "We will take vengeance; we will see that your debt is reconciled." That element does not exist in Mormon's mourning. True to his spirit, Mormon does not allow himself to feel that kind of revenge. Just as he had required his people to leave vengeance in the hands of God, Mormon ends his lament by also recognizing that God holds the ultimate power to judge what is to be done.

With a background of those elements, one can feel the power of and sense the deep emotion eloquently expressed in this terse but complete expression of lamentation. In Mormon 6:16–20, Mormon first addresses the dead:

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. O ye fair sons and daughters, ye fathers and mothers, ye husbands and wives, ye fair ones, how is it that ye could have fallen! But behold, ye are gone, and my sorrows cannot bring your return.

Then, as in the traditional tripartite structure, after addressing the dead, Mormon's lamentation turns to what is called a central narrative or comment, and then at the end, the third part will return to direct speech directed at the deceased. In Mormon's speech, we have exactly those parts too. The central narrative is in Mormon 6:21:

And the day soon cometh that your mortal must put on immortality, and these bodies which are now moldering in corruption must soon become incorruptible bodies; and then ye must stand before the judgment-seat of Christ, to be judged according to your works; and if it so be that ye are righteous, then are ye blessed with your fathers who have gone before you.

Then follows a return to a final direct address in 6:22:

O that ye had repented before this great destruction had come upon you. But behold, ye are gone, and the Father, yea, the Eternal Father of heaven, knoweth your state; and he doeth with you according to his justice and mercy.

An Outline of Mormon's Formal Elegy as Compared with Ancient Elegiac Structures

Ancient Elegiac Structures	Mormon's Formal Elegy
Formulaic speech introduction	My soul rent with anguish (cf. tearing of the garment)
Common verb of speaking	I cried
Words that specifically mark the speech as a personal lament	I mourn your loss

Poetical, chant-able, refrains, antitheticals, parallelisms	
Direct address to the dead	O ye fair ones
Praise for the dead, lavish, repeated	Fair ones, 4x (but Mormon cannot recommend them to God)
Reproach for the mourned	How could ye have rejected How could ye have fallen
Comparison to other characters living or dead	Blessed are ye with your fathers who have gone before you
Common fate of the mourner and the deceased	Mormon knows he too will die and his death is anticipated by the audience
Unfulfilled wish by the mourner	If you had not done this, ye would not have fallen My sorrows cannot bring you back, i.e., as much as I might wish
Contrast between past and present	How could ye have departed, in the past you were righteous
Contrast between present and future	Corruption to incorruption, immortal to mortal
Concern about the future	God knows your state and he will deal with you
Concern about captivity or death of women	Explicit mention of daughters, mothers, wives
Masculine alternative is retributive or compensatory action	To be judged according to your works, talionic justice, justice or mercy Mormon leaves the vengeance to God, as he has told his soldiers they should do

The repetition and structure here are striking. When one is in the deepest moments of sorrow and grief, not much can be said. However, Mormon has embraced beautifully

what can be said in this instance, as he looks back on not only the thousands who have died right before him, but on the lost potential of this great nation now ending. This is a sublime elegy.

It may be enlightening to read a few such lamentations found in the book of Lamentations in the Old Testament, which was written by Jeremiah lamenting the destruction of Jerusalem. That book is four chapters long and shares some of the same characteristics described here. However, Mormon had neither resources nor time to make his parting words as long as the book of Lamentations, so his is considerably more concise.

The other big difference is that Jeremiah ended his mournful lamentation with an optimistic prophecy, because he knew that the Jews would be brought back to Jerusalem. Jeremiah had even purchased some of the family property from his nephew in anticipation of the return. Mormon, however, knew that his people were not coming back, and he closed the record with his final and solemn farewell to his people.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[How Did Mormon React to Seeing His People Slain?](#) (Mormon 6:17)," *KnoWhy* 232 (November 16, 2016).