

# MORONI 7–9

John W. Welch Notes



## Moroni 7

### **Moroni 7 — Overview Questions**

- When in his life did Mormon deliver the words found in this chapter? During a time of war or a time of peace? Was it a time of discouragement or of hope?
- Can you identify all of the connections in Mormon's writing here with statements found in the Savior's Sermon at the Temple in 3 Nephi 11–18? Why might Mormon have turned especially to the words that Jesus spoke on that first day at the temple in Bountiful?
- What do you learn in Mormon's sermon in Moroni 7 about the connectivity between faith, hope, and charity? How does each of these three depend upon the other two? How does each build upon the others? How does each lead to the others?
- Although this chapter is especially remembered for what it says about faith, hope, and charity, what else does Mormon have to say about the following other topics?
  - making an offering to God
  - praying to God
  - knowing good and evil
  - laying hold on every good thing
  - miracles
  - messengers
  - repentance
  - covenants
  - meekness

- confessing Christ
- becoming the purified sons and daughters of God

### **Moroni 7 — Mormon's Sermon in the Context of the Ten-Year Peace Treaty**

In approximately AD 350, the Lamanites, the Gadianton Robbers, and the Nephites made a serious, inviolate peace treaty that lasted ten years (Mormon 3:1). One should note the monumental timing of the peace treaty. If, as scholars believe, it coincided with a great sabbatical celebration of peace and jubilee, what better time for a prophet like Mormon to have given his magnum opus—the most important words that he could give to his people.

The occasion must have been very solemn, as everyone on both sides of the war was willing to take a sabbatical from the killing and violence. At the end of the period, the king of the Lamanites wrote and announced that the treaty had ended (Mormon 3:4). This peaceful decade may have been the only time in Mormon's life when he could sit still long enough to work on his abridgement of the records. In addition, Mormon had recently been commanded to call people to repentance and to build up the Church again (Mormon 3:2).

It seems likely that Mormon's speech was written at the beginning of this ten-year time of peace, a period when he was again given permission to preach (see Mormon 1:16; 3:2). The occasion was in a synagogue that the people had built. Perhaps it was at some kind of "dedication" of that synagogue. The Nephites had been driven north (Mormon 2:20) and had been granted the right to settle in a land northward (Mormon 2:29), where they lived during the ten-year peace. It would make sense for them to have built a new synagogue there, and that Mormon would have been the most appropriate candidate to have spoken on that occasion, as people tried to reclaim their faith, rebuild their hope, and try especially to love everyone, even their enemies.

Moroni, who would have been a young man then, was probably present when his father gave the sermon, which was likely also written and distributed among the "brethren" who were leaders in that synagogue. Although we do not know when Moroni got his copy of this speech, he clearly treasured it, along with two other letters from his father. Even when Moroni was wandering alone and fleeing from his enemies, he carried these three writings with him as his great personal legacy from his father. He must have regarded them as worthy of recording for our time.

As one recognizes the nature of the problems that had surrounded Mormon and the few faithful Nephites during that era, one may better appreciate the power of this very plain talk from a different angle than ever before. One can see why he said what he said, and how he enhanced their understanding of the Savior's teachings. During this time of peace, Mormon was not only using his time to provide physical fortifications to prepare for

attack from the Lamanites, but was also making an outstanding effort to fortify the people spiritually to choose wise behavior to lead them to Christ after the end of the peace.

This is not embellished rhetoric. Mormon’s vocabulary was very straightforward. When he spoke about the Savior, he used very plain and clear language. He was a leader who did not produce flowery, elaborate expressions. He was a forthright speaker of truth. This same man conveyed the candid history of the whole Nephite people. He was direct and to the point, and he bore his testimony openly. He was a man of great wisdom and truth, a sober man, and we are blessed to have this little window into his wonderful sermon.

### Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why is the 10-Year Peace Treaty Important?](#) (Mormon 3:1),” *KnoWhy* 228 (November 10, 2016).

### Moroni 7 — Mormon’s Sermon Often Echoes the Sermon at the Temple

The Sermon at the Temple, like the Sermon on the Mount, contains some of the most sacred words that Jesus had given. At the time of Mormon’s sermon, his people were living north of the narrow neck of land. They were in the land of Jashon, near Bountiful where Jesus had visited the Nephites and given his sermon. Those words of Jesus would likely have been vivid and poignant to the people who were present during Mormon’s address. This context is reminiscent of Samuel the Lamanite using King Benjamin’s words when he stood on the walls of Zarahemla—the place where Benjamin had given those words. These people would not have heard the Savior’s words from the Savior himself. At the time of Mormon’s speech, it was 320 years after that event, but Mormon knew what had happened there, and he drew on the Savior’s sacred sermon as a main source for his teaching.

Although Mormon frequently used or alluded to the Savior’s words, he explained further and even added new concepts to meet the local needs. For example, the following are some of the crucial words and phrases that unmistakably echo the resurrected Lord’s Sermon:

“By their works ye shall know them” (Moroni 7:5) has changed only one word from 3 Nephi 14:20, “fruits” to “works.”

“A man being evil cannot do that which is good” (Moroni 7:6) declaratively and deliberately answers the rhetorical question of 3 Nephi 14:6, “Do men gather grapes of thorns?”

“Neither will he give a good gift” (7:10) makes the clearest sense when understood against the background of 3 Nephi 14:11: “If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children.”

“For with *that same* judgment *which* ye judge ye shall *also* be judged” (7:18) simply adds emphasis to the original words of the sermon: “For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged” (3 Nephi 14:2).

Mormon’s promise, “Whatsoever thing ye shall ask the Father in my name, which is good, in faith believing that ye shall receive, behold it shall be done unto you” (7:26), repeats, with two qualifications, the words of the sermon: “Ask, and it shall be given unto you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you” (14:7; see also 27:29).

Mormon’s emphasis on “meekness” (7:39, 43, 44)—a virtue that was sorely lacking among his people, who were losing their lands—is likely an elliptical reference to the statement “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth” (3 Nephi 12:5).

Of course, some of Mormon’s words and teachings can be found scattered elsewhere among the writings of earlier Nephites before the coming of Christ. But the density and proximity of these apparent allusions to the Savior’s preeminent teachings at the temple in Bountiful make it the most likely source, rhetorically as well as authoritatively, for Mormon’s urgent preaching on this occasion. It should also be remembered that Mormon saw himself first and foremost as “a disciple of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, ... called to declare *his* word” (3 Nephi 5:13; emphasis added). The basic text behind our version of the words of Jesus in 3 Nephi must have been frequently used in Nephite religion and culture, and so Mormon would have known it well and would have had several reasons to use and develop those authoritative words as he implored his people to repent, to regroup, and to revive their faith and commitment to their Savior Jesus Christ.

### Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why is the Sermon at the Temple Echoed throughout the Rest of 3 Nephi?](#)” (3 Nephi 16:6),” *KnoWhy* 208 (October 13, 2016).

John W. Welch, “[Echoes from the Sermon on the Mount](#),” in *The Sermon on the Mount in Latter-day Scripture*, ed. Gaye Strathearn, Thomas A. Wayment, and Daniel L. Belnap (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2010), 314–315; reprinted as “[Reusages of the Words of Christ](#),” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies and Other Restoration Scripture*, 22 no. 1 (2013): 63–71.

### Moroni 7:1 — The Nephites Build Places of Worship

Moroni 7:1 describes this record as a speech that Mormon gave in a synagogue “which they had built for the place of worship.” One may glide over that little statement, not noticing that these people had been on the run, and were now able to settle down for a period of peace. They may have been quite proud of building this synagogue. It looks like they are expecting to be there for a while, although that would not happen.

In that synagogue, to the faithful (or relatively faithful) Mormon addressed several themes that related especially to his time and situation. He tailored his teaching to address the background and circumstance, and even the level of faith of his audience. If one can recognize the impetus for his talk and the problems with which he was dealing at the time, the teachings in Moroni 7 become all the more forceful, relevant, and meaningful.

### Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Did Alma and Amulek Preach in Synagogues?](#) (Alma 16:13),” *KnoWhy* 124 (June 17, 2016).

A. Keith Thompson, “[Nephite Insights into Israelite Worship Practices Before the Babylonian Captivity](#),” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 3 (2013): 155–195.

William J. Adams Jr., “[Synagogues in the Book of Mormon](#),” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 9, no. 1 (2000): 4–13, 76.

John W. Welch, “[Synagogues in the Book of Mormon](#),” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon: A Decade of New Research*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992), 193–195.

### Moroni 7:3–4 — Mormon’s Audience

In Moroni 7:3, Mormon began by saying, “I would speak unto you that are of the church.” It appears that the text in Moroni 7 is Mormon’s opening speech after being commanded to teach and build up the church. In Mormon 3:2, he had received the call to preach again. The Lord had said, “Cry unto this people. Repent ye and come unto me and be baptized and build up again my church and ye shall be spared” — a principle with a promise. In verse 2, Mormon explicitly said, “I am permitted to speak unto you at this time.” The Lord had permitted it, after a period of being asked not to preach, and he began by speaking to the more faithful.

Mormon’s wording aimed right at the hearts of his audience. He said, “I would speak unto you that are of the church, that are the peaceable followers of Christ, that have obtained a sufficient hope by which ye can enter into the rest of the Lord from this time henceforth until ye shall rest with him in heaven.” Any Nephite listening to Mormon would have been weary from being on the run. They were a war-torn generation. All they had known was strife and instability. Yearning for the peace that comes from entering into the rest of the Lord would have been a very powerful way for him to begin his talk, especially as a ten-year period of peace had been negotiated.

“And now my brethren, I judge these things of you because of your peaceable walk with the children of men.” He is speaking to his synagogue, his beloved brethren, his church, and

his people. He was blessed with an inner-group of faithful believers. He was leading Nephites, Jacobites, Josephites, Zoramites, and many different people; but here, he is likely addressing the leaders, the ones who really held the Nephite tradition together. They were people who had hope in the “Rest of the Lord.” They had a start, and he wanted to stir them to greater works. Fourteen times, Mormon interrupts his train of thought by calling out to his “brethren,” and nine of those times he refers to them as “my beloved brethren.”

### **Moroni 7:5–13 — “By Their Works Ye Shall Know Them”**

Mormon’s statement in verse 5, “For I remember the word of God which saith by their works ye shall know them; for if their works be good, then they are good also,” echoes the words of the Savior at the Temple, in 3 Nephi 14:16–20. There Jesus said, “Ye shall know them by their fruits .... A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit .... Wherefore, by their fruits ye shall know them.”

Mormon, however, says, “By their works ye shall know them.” Whereas the Savior commonly used metaphors to illustrate principles, Mormon tended to use a more straightforward style of sentence structure, unembellished and very plain. His adaptations of the text come predominately through developing the concepts and principles to benefit his audience. He often added a new level of understanding to the words and phrases. In this case, the word “works” is more active, progressive, and ongoing, whereas “fruits” might be thought of as more final, specific, and result oriented.

Following this reference to the Savior’s sermon, Mormon went on to develop the thought even further. He explained that if their works were good, then they were good. He said, in verse 10, “Behold, God has said, a man being evil cannot do that which is good.” This refers back to Jesus’s metaphor of the tree in 3 Nephi 14:17–19, in which a tree, being a good tree, cannot bring forth evil fruit. Mormon continued, “For if he offereth a gift or prayeth unto God, except he shall do it with real intent, it profiteth him nothing.”

Giving a gift, making an offering, or praying without real intent (i.e. doing so casually or grudgingly) is not counted as righteousness and one might as well not have performed the “righteous” action at all. Such gifts or offerings can be meaningfully compared to the giving of tithing today. In Mormon 2:14, Mormon had recorded that the people had refused to offer the ultimate and most desirable sacrifice—that of a broken heart and contrite spirit. Notice further that Moroni reused the words “with real intent” in his encouragement to pray to know the truth of the Book of Mormon in Moroni 10:4–5. Moroni had learned this from his father.

### **Moroni 7:11 — “Ye Cannot Serve God and Mammon”**

Mormon also added a metaphor of his own in verse 11 to clarify his point and move forward into the next topic. He pointed out that “a bitter fountain cannot bring forth good water, neither can a good fountain bring forth bitter water, wherefore a man being a servant of the Devil cannot follow Christ and if he follow Christ he cannot be a servant of the devil.” That statement is related to a passage in the Sermon at the Temple in 3 Nephi 13:24: “Ye cannot serve God and Mammon.” Mormon’s people could not sit on the fence in this world. They needed to be soldiers, following Mormon, living righteously, and trying to fight the war. They didn’t have the luxury of choosing their lifestyle. However, they could choose how they responded to their circumstances. They could either face their challenges with the Savior or without him.

#### **Further Reading**

Matthew L. Bowen, *“‘That Which They Most Desired’: The Waters of Mormon, Baptism, the Love of God, and the Bitter Fountain,”* *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 39 (2020): 261–298.

### **Moroni 7:12–15 — All Good Things Come from God**

In verse 12, developing the thought of choosing between God and Mammon, Mormon concluded his message about good works versus evil works with a concept that pointed to his next topic: “Wherefore all things which are good cometh from God, and that which is evil cometh from the devil, an enemy unto God who fighteth against him continually.” He was preparing to teach them how to choose, or judge, between good and evil using this principle.

The image of the devil fighting God continually would have resonated with this audience. The war-torn but faithful Nephites would have understood what was being said. His imagery is consistent with his congregation’s experience.

Choosing the good from the bad at a time of oppression or in the heat of battle is especially hard. Mormon’s method of judging what is good—checking to see if a certain choice persuades them to believe in Christ through the Spirit or Light of Christ—is available to everyone even under trying circumstances. Mormon warns people not to judge good things to be of the devil, or evil things to be of God, and he assures them that there is a way for them to know the difference “with a perfect knowledge, as the daylight is from the dark night” (7:15). Mormon may have been thinking here about Alma’s meditation about how the growth of faith can lead to a “perfect knowledge,” a concept that Alma includes seven times in Alma 32:21, 26, 29, 34 and 35.

### **Moroni 7:16–18 — The Light of Christ**

In verse 16, Mormon taught a very significant new concept. He explained that the spirit of Christ—or what today is more often called the “Light of Christ”—is given to everyone. And this source of divine light can help us make righteous judgements: “The Spirit of Christ is given to every man, that he may know good from evil; wherefore, I show unto you the way to judge.” The idea that things “invite” people to do good (7:13, 16) is a very open part of the generously repeated message of the Book of Mormon to all the world.

There was a lot of emphasis on “light” in Christ’s Sermon on at the Temple. For instance, Christ wanted his followers themselves to become “the light of this people,” much like a candlestick (oil lamp) gives light unto a room, or like a city on a hill can give light to surrounding areas (3 Nephi 12:14–16). Jesus also taught, “The light of the body is the eye; if, therefore, thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light” (3 Nephi 13:22). The eye is the organ by which we discern between physical light and darkness. Now, here in Mormon’s discourse, he also is discussing light and discernment. His ultimate purpose is to help his listeners discern how to “lay hold upon every good thing” (Moroni 7:18). It can be achieved through faith, hope, and charity. Thus, he introduces the theme of the rest of his talk, having built a solid foundation upon the words of Christ, explained, as needed to his audience’s circumstances.

#### **Further Reading**

David A. Bednar, “[Quick to Observe](#),” BYU Devotional Address, 2005, online at [speeches.byu.edu](http://speeches.byu.edu): “I repeat again for emphasis the truth that discernment is a light of protection and direction in a world that grows increasingly dark. In these latter days you and I can press forward safely and successfully through the mist of darkness and have a clear sense of spiritual direction. Discernment is so much more than recognizing right from wrong. It helps us to distinguish the relevant from the irrelevant, the important from the unimportant, and the necessary from that which is merely nice. The gift of discernment opens to us vistas that stretch far beyond what can be seen with natural eyes or heard with natural ears. Discerning is seeing with spiritual eyes *and* feeling with the heart—seeing and feeling the falsehood of an idea or the goodness in another person. Discerning is hearing with spiritual ears and feeling with the heart—hearing and feeling the unspoken concern in a statement or the truthfulness of a testimony or doctrine.”

### **Moroni 7:18 — “Judge Not, That Ye Be Not Judged”**

Mormon taught, “See that ye do not judge wrongfully, for with that same judgment which ye judge, ye shall also be judged” (Moroni 7:18). This language is clearly adapted from Christ’s Sermon at the Temple in 3 Nephi 14:1–2: “Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged.” As Mormon has, by this point, made

abundantly clear, his message isn't concerned with making final judgments about other individuals—as we might think of “judging” others today in a negative way. Instead, the judgment to which he refers has more to do with generally discerning between good and evil in a variety of settings or applications. Our judgments must be informed and guided by the divine light or Spirit of Christ. When seen in the broader context of judging between good and evil, it is actually imperative that we *do* and must make judgments. As Mormon declared in verse 15: “it is given unto you to judge.” Judge we must, but we do so at our peril, if we do not learn to judge righteously using the light of Christ.

### Further Reading

Dallin H. Oaks, “‘Judge Not’ and Judging,” *Ensign*, August 1999, online at [archive.bookofmormoncentral.org](http://archive.bookofmormoncentral.org).

### Moroni 7:21–22 — Mormon on Goodness Being Only in and through Christ

In the opening twenty verses of his speech, Mormon built a foundation on the teachings of the Savior to prepare for the main body of his sermon. He had taught them to be righteous by doing righteous acts, by evaluating decisions by virtue of the light of Christ, and making choices based on the potential for leading them to Christ. Now, he continued by teaching them, as he generalizes this in verse 21, that they should “lay hold on *every* good thing,” and in verse 22 that “in Christ there should come *every* good thing.”

That axiom stands at the logical and theological foundation of Mormon's message, being as fundamental to Mormon's thinking as Euclid's first axiom was to his mathematics. The same point was not lost on Moroni. As his father's protégé, Moroni begins his own final exhortations in his final chapter with a related contrapositive postulate: “And whatsoever thing is good is just and true; wherefore, *nothing that is good* denieth the Christ, but acknowledgeth that he is” (10:6).

By establishing the foundational proposition that Christ is absolutely essential in all that pertains to “the good,” the stage is then set for Mormon's first expository lesson, which is about faith in Jesus Christ; and faith will in turn lead, secondly, to and also depend on hope; and the results of hope will, finally, be found in charity, good works, and the pure love of Christ.

While readers usually think of Moroni chapter 7 as Mormon's great speech about charity, this oration is actually about four topics: “the good,” “faith,” “hope,” and then finally “charity.” Rhetorically, verses 5–28 are saturated with the word “good,” which appears in those verse 26 times! But in verses 29–48, the word “good” never appears.

Starting in verse 21, the word “faith” is blended in and appears a total of 24 times, scattered fairly evenly over verses 21–44.

The word “hope” is then used 10 times, with all (except for the one in verse 3) coming between verses 40–48, while the word “charity” is used only 8 times, all in the final verses 44–47.

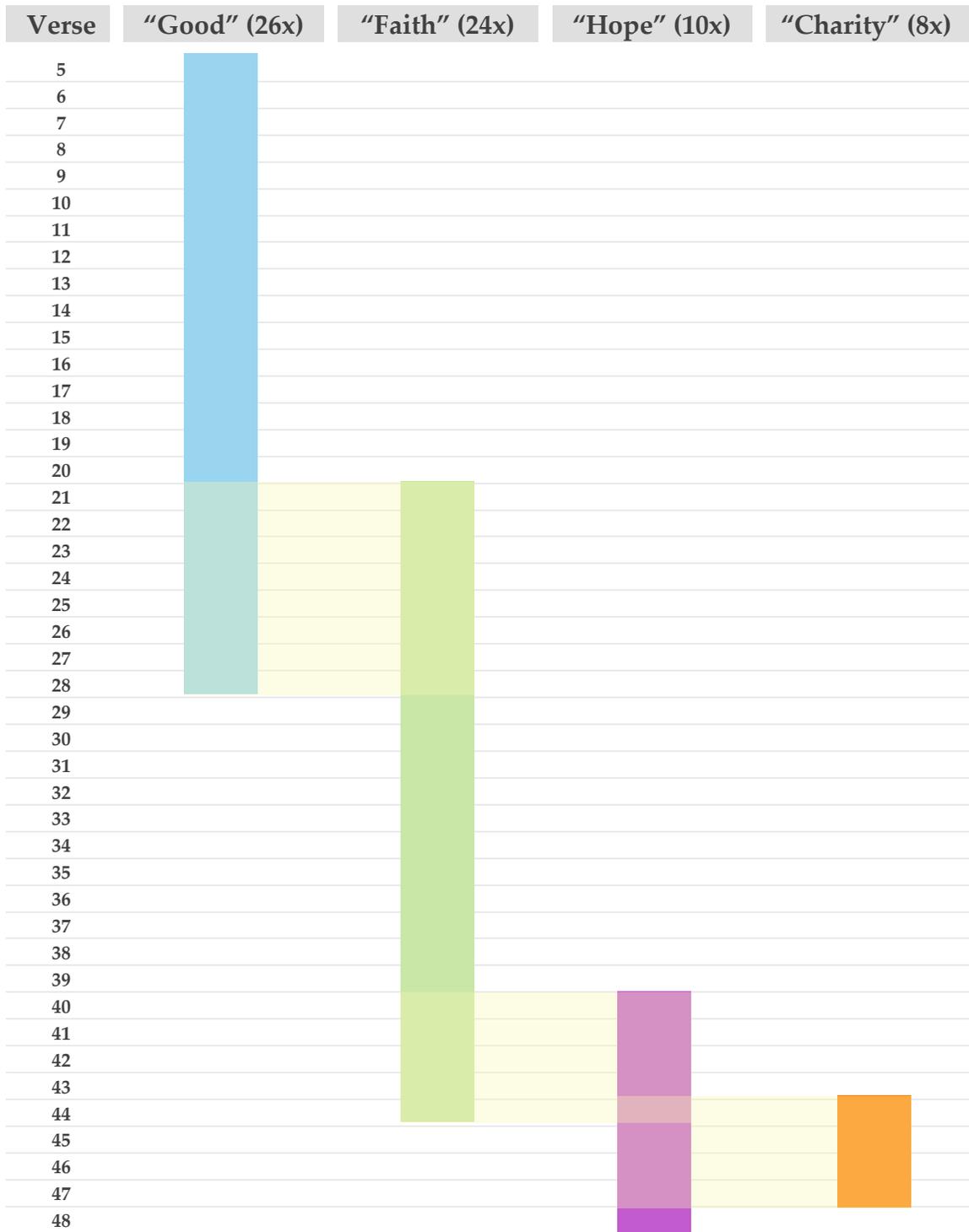
In other words, Mormon starts with “good” alone (in verses 5–20), then unites “good” with “faith” (in 21–28), then speaks of “faith” alone (29– 39), then connects “faith” with “hope” (in 40–44), and finishes with a combination of the final two, “hope” and “charity” (44–48). This is an interesting, and well thought out, meditation on the interdependent spiritual movements from good, to faith, to hope, and to charity.

### Word Usage in Moroni 7

Verse	“Good” (26x)	“Faith” (24x)	“Hope” (10x)	“Charity” (8x)
5	2x			
6	1x			
7				
8				
9				
10	2x			
11	2x			
12	1x			
13	2x			
14	1x			
15	1x			
16	2x			
17	1x			
18				
19	2x			
20	1x			
21	1x	1x		
22	1x			
23				

24	3x			
25	1x	2x		
26	1x	3x		
27				
28	1x	2x		
29				
30		1x		
31				
32		1x		
33		1x		
34		1x		
35				
36				
37		2x		
38		2x		
39		2x		
40		1x	2x	
41		1x	2x	
42		2x	2x	
43		1x	1x	
44		1x	1x	3x
45			1x	1x
46				3x
47				1x
48			1x	

### Word Usage in Moroni 7



### Further Reading

Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, “Faith, Hope, and Charity: The ‘Three Principal Rounds’ of the Ladder of Heavenly Ascent,” in *“To Seek the Law of the Lord”: Essays in Honor of John W. Welch*, ed. Paul Y. Hoskisson and Daniel C. Peterson (Orem, UT: The Interpreter Foundation, 2017), 59–112.

H. Dean Garrett, “Light in Our Vessels: Faith, Hope, and Charity,” in *The Book of Mormon: Fourth Nephi Through Moroni, From Zion to Destruction*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate, Jr. (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1995), 81–93.

### Moroni 7:21–39 — Mormon on Faith

Of the three next interrelated sections, the longest is on faith. In Mormon 1:13, Mormon had described the wickedness of his people: “But wickedness did prevail upon the face of the whole land insomuch that the Lord did take away his beloved disciples and the work of miracles and of healing did cease because of the iniquity of the people.” His congregation was aware that miracles were not happening any longer, and they likely wondered why not.

Mormon mentioned this problem three times, in verses 27, 29, and 35, in which he asks three rhetorical questions. In verse 27, he asked, “Wherefore my beloved brethren, have miracles ceased because Christ is ascended into heaven?” The people were apparently arguing that the Savior was living up in heaven and had distanced himself from them. Mormon countered in verse 29 with his second question: “And because he hath done this [ascended into heaven], my beloved brethren, have miracles ceased? Behold I say unto you, Nay; neither have angels ceased to minister unto the children of men.” As part of his evidence that miracles had not actually ceased, he taught the importance of angels and their mission, their ministry of calling people to repentance and seeing that the covenants of God are fulfilled.

After that brief clarification, he asked the same question again in a sequence of reasoning. Verse 35 Mormon again asks: “If this be the case that these things are true which I have spoken unto you, and God will show unto you, with power and great glory at the last day, that they are true, and if they are true has the day of miracles ceased?” Mormon explained that it was not because of their theories, but that it was because of the iniquity of the people, because of lack of faith. In verse 37, he concluded that, “It is by faith that miracles are wrought; and it is by faith that angels appear and minister unto men; wherefore, if these things have ceased wo be unto the children of men, for it is because of unbelief, and all is vain.” Mormon uses

questions here very effectively. In many cases, a good question is indeed half the answer, which is expressed in a German adage as: Gute Frage ist halbe Antwort.

Mormon also had spoken, in his earlier historical description, about the Holy Ghost being withheld. Mormon 1:14 declares, “And because of this iniquity there were no gifts from the Lord and the Holy Ghost did not come upon any.” Here one sees the contemporaneous problems, and the basis on which he builds his preaching. If miracles were to cease, and they had, verse 38 warns, “Awful is the state of man.”

Yet Mormon also made it clear that it was not God, or his angels, or the Holy Ghost who had ceased to appear or to work with humans here on earth. Again, he asks three more rapid-fire questions to show that God will not withhold his power so long as “there shall be one man upon the face of the earth to be saved” (7:36). (That reference to “one man upon the face of the earth” may well have haunted Moroni as he wandered as a lone survivor for many years upon the land.) Mormon also encouraged his audience by explaining that he knew that they could be faithful (7:37) and meek, and that they (and also we) could thus be “fit to be numbered among the people of his church” (7:39).

#### **Moroni 7:40–43 — Mormon on Hope**

Following his treatment of faith, Mormon delicately intertwined that theme with his teachings on hope. Here he asks his two final questions: How can a person obtain faith except together with hope? And what should one hope for? (7:40–41). Again, one learns predominantly and specifically from Mormon, as one saw briefly with Alma, that if the power of the Holy Ghost is active, one hopes to be resurrected and to stand again in the presence of God (7:41). That is the last place the wicked want to be. Cleaving to the good and developing faith leads to hope in Christ, and those elements lead to charity. Faith is a necessary and sufficient condition for hope: If you have faith, you must have hope, for without faith there is no hope (7:42). Moreover, a person cannot have faith and hope unless they are meek and lowly of heart (7:43), and that meekness necessarily leads to charity (7:44).

#### **Moroni 7:44–45 — Mormon on Charity**

Three results of true faith and hope are (1) being “acceptable before God,” (2) meekly confessing “by the power of the Holy Ghost that Jesus is the Christ,” and (3) having charity (7:44). Mormon’s logic here is that if you don’t have charity you *are* “nothing,” and, on the contrary, when a person *is* “acceptable before God,” that person must be something, not nothing, and thus must have charity. This is another way of saying that charity is essential, of the essence, even a necessary condition for existence in the presence of God.

Then, beginning in verse 45, Mormon used words that parallel some of Paul’s language in 1 Corinthians 13 about holy love (*agape*) or charity. In this text, Mormon (like Paul) told his audience what charity is and is not, and what it does and does not do:

“Charity (love) suffers long, and is kind.” (Moroni 7:45; 1 Cor. 13:4)

“Charity envies not [thou shalt not covet], is not puffed up [is not proud], seeks not its own [is not selfish or egocentric], not easily provoked [is not irritable or defensive], and thinks no evil [for as a man thinketh in his heart, so is he].” These five track 1 Corinthians 13:5, but “vaunteth not itself” and “does not behave itself unseemly” are absent in Moroni 7:45, so the two lists are not exactly the same.

Charity “rejoiceth not in iniquity but rejoiceth in the truth, beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.” (Moroni 7:45; 1 Cor. 13:4).

Then, after concluding, “wherefore, my beloved brethren, if ye have not charity, *ye are* nothing” (Moroni 7:46) [compare “and have not charity, *I am* nothing” [1 Cor. 13: 3], Mormon says, “for charity never faileth” (Moroni 7:46; 1 Cor. 13:8).

Mormon then tells his audience absolutely to “cleave unto charity, which is the greatest of all” (7:46), while Paul glosses over this by saying merely that of these three, “faith, hope, charity, . . . the greatest of *these* is charity,” and beyond that, he says that what should be desired even more than charity is “rather that ye may prophesy” (1 Cor. 13:13–14:1). Mormon, on the other hand, emphatically concludes that “charity is the pure love of Christ, and it endureth forever” (7:47).

So, these two texts, while very close, are not exactly the same, nor do they understand charity or speak of it in the same ways or for the same purposes.

But still, one wonders how these wordings in these two texts came to be so similar to each other. One possibility is that Jesus spoke these words to Mormon, who was “visited of the Lord, and tasted and knew of *the goodness of Jesus*” (Mormon 1:15). Here in Moroni 7, Mormon speaks as a personal witness of the pure love of Jesus and of obtaining “every good thing” through Him.

Additionally, Jesus may have spoken these words to his disciples, who recorded them in the fuller version of Jesus’s ministry among the Nephites briefly reported in 3 Nephi. Mormon’s abridging still left in the point that Jesus spoke a hundred times more during those days than could be written (3 Nephi 26:6).

But, one might wonder, didn’t Paul write the “hymn to charity” in 1 Corinthians 13? Maybe he did, but maybe not. In answering a question asked of him by the editors of the

Church News section of the *Deseret News* in 1961 about why Joseph Smith used King James English in translating the Book of Mormon, Hugh Nibley happily pointed out that esteemed scholars, such as Harnack, Weiss, and Reizenstein, had independently come to the same conclusion that “the Hymn to Charity” in 1 Corinthians 13 had not originated with Paul at all, but went “back to some older but unknown source: Paul is merely quoting from the record,” as other early Christians, such as Clement, also did. In addition, Nibley added, “It is the same Savior speaking in both, and the same Holy Ghost, and so we can expect the same doctrines in the same language.” (See Hugh Nibley, “Literary Style Used in Book of Mormon Insured Accurate Translation,” in *The Prophetic Book of Mormon, The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley, Volume 8* [Provo and Salt Lake City, UT: FARMS and Deseret Book, 1989], 216, 254). Other Latter-day Saint scholars have recently also allowed this as a possibility. (See Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, *Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians* [Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2017], 625).

Indeed, it is also not necessary to think that Paul invented the triad of faith, hope, and charity. While Paul was fond of using that triplet (he repeats that triad in other places in his letters; see Romans 5:1–5; Galatians 5:5–6; Ephesians 4:2–5; 1 Thessalonians 1:3; 5:8; Hebrews 6:10–12; 10:22–24), this triplet also occurs in other early Christian writings such as 1 Peter 1:3–8, 21; the Epistle of Barnabas 1:4; 11:8; and Polycarp 3:2. So, it appears that it was not unique to Paul. For it to have gained such early and widespread usage, it may well have originated with Jesus himself, who spoke often of “faith” (*pistis*), especially in the first half of the Gospel of John, and of “charity” or “love” (*agape*) particularly in the second half of John. This triad also appears in Alma 7:24. Its widespread prevalence gives substance to the theory that this cluster belonged to a more primitive stratum in Jesus’ teachings, as it also rings of divine truth.

And finally, I would add that the chiasmic structure of 1 Corinthians 13 supports the idea that this “hymn” preexisted Paul’s writing of 1 Corinthians in about AD 55. It seems to be an independent composition inserted helpfully by Paul into the flow of his thought. But it has its own literary character, and it is presented as authoritative, without any need for argument or persuasive buttressing. Moreover, the fact that the list of words that also appears in Moroni 7:45 is featured precisely at the C-D-C’ center of this chiasmic structure would help explain why those words in particular would have stood out in the early Christian collective memory as a jewel coming from a treasured source. The following chart from *Charting the New Testament* (<https://byustudies.byu.edu/charts/15-18-chiasmic-hymn-charity>) uses my translation, reflecting the Greek’s word orders and suggesting idiomatic additional meanings.

# Chiastic Hymn to Charity

## 1Cor 12:31–14:1

- A** Seek after the *greatest* gifts, and indeed here is the *greatest* way:
- B** If I speak in *tongues* with men, yea even with angels  
 But have not love  
 I am but raucous bronze and rattling cymbals.  
 If I have the gift of *prophecy* and know *mysteries* all and all knowledge  
 But have not love  
 I am nothing.  
 If I give away all I have or lay down my body to get glory  
 But have not love  
 I have gotten absolutely nothing.
- C** Love is *patient* toward others  
*Mercifully* kind is love.
- D** Not greedy  
 Not a show-off  
 Not conceited  
 Not shameless  
 Not with ulterior design, selfishness or cliquishness  
 Not irritable  
 Does not rationalize wickedness  
 Has no joy when things are not right  
 But rejoices in truth.
- C'** Love is *patient* under all circumstances  
 Always believing  
 Always hoping  
 Love endures to the end.
- B'** Love will never lose its importance  
 But *prophecy* will come to an end  
 Speaking in *tongues* will cease  
 And some day knowing *mysteries* will be nothing special.  
 For now we just know little bits  
 And we prophesy of little glimpses  
 But when Christ comes all will be perfectly whole  
 And all our partial experiences will be no more.  
 When I was a child  
 I spoke as a child  
 I had the intellect of a child  
 I figured like a child  
 When I became a man  
 I had no more use for childish things.  
 For now we just see faint images of our real selves  
 But then we shall see face to face  
 Now we just know little bits  
 But then I shall know and be known completely.  
 What lasts are faith, hope, love, these three,
- A'** But the *greatest* of these is love.

Interestingly, Joseph Smith did not include charity among the gifts of the Spirit in D&C 46:13–25 or in his Articles of Faith 7, but he often spoke of its need. And more curiously, Moroni did not include charity in his list of gifts of the spirit in Moroni 10:9–16, and neither did Paul in his list in 1 Corinthians 12:8–10. Lynne Wilson suggests that this may be because Joseph Smith (and others) may have felt that charity stood as a macro category by itself, which should be developed as an essential pervasive trait of character rather than received as a particular, received gift.

### Further Reading

See Lynne Wilson, “[1 Corinthians 8–13](#),” in *Come Follow Me Commentary: The New Testament* (Springville, UT: Book of Mormon Central, 2019), note 41.

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Do New Testament Words and Phrases Show Up in the Book of Mormon?](#) (2 Nephi 3:12),” *KnoWhy* 525 (July 19, 2019). See also Book of Mormon Central, “[Why New Testament Words and Phrases Are in the Book of Mormon Part 7: How Often Did These Commonalities Come through the Hand of Mormon or Moroni?](#) (Words of Mormon 1:1–2),” *KnoWhy* 537 (October 24, 2019).

Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, *Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2017), 625.

Hugh Nibley, “Literary Style Used in Book of Mormon Insured Accurate Translation,” in *The Prophetic Book of Mormon, The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley, Volume 8* (Provo and Salt Lake City, UT: FARMS and Deseret Book, 1989), 216, 254.

### Moroni 7:46–47 — Mormon’s Definitions of Charity

*Charity Never Faileth*, of course, is the motto of the Relief Society. Joseph Smith read 1 Corinthians 13 (apparently the whole chapter, not just these three words) in one of his first speeches to the women in Nauvoo, at the organization of the Relief Society.

In Paul’s Greek, the word for faileth literally means to “fall, i.e., dead,” and in Mormon’s war-torn world, to say something like charity would never die, or never fall dead, or come to naught, was a potent way of ending his promise about the unending salvific role of charity. Charity, Mormon claimed, was an immortal power, and that reassurance would have been very heartening for his people to hear, who were desperately worried about the survival of themselves individually and of their posterity. To be taught that they would not fail, or ultimately perish, so long as they had charity, added purpose and a desire for them to “lay hold on every good thing.”

Mormon alone then went on to provide an additional elevated definition of what the scriptures mean by charity, by this love. “Charity is the pure love of Christ” (7:47). The word “of” may be understood in several ways. It may refer to charity being Christ’s love of all mankind, and thus it may also mean that true charity refers to the love that one has when one loves as Christ loves. Additionally, it may also refer to the way that a person purely loves Christ, for His faithful flock may love Him, with charity then meaning our love of Him, of Christ. Scholars accept these different possible meanings of the English word *of* in that sentence. There is no reason it cannot be all three. Mormon provides a powerful and effective explanation of how one may develop faith, hope, and charity and weave them together to humanize the path of returning to our Father in Heaven.

### Further Reading

Matthew O. Richardson, “‘The Pure Love of Christ’: The Divine Precept of Charity in Moroni 7,” in *Living the Book of Mormon: Abiding by Its Precepts*, ed. Gaye Strathearn and Charles Swift (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and BYU Religious Studies Center, 2007), 290–301.

### Moroni 7:48 — Pray with Real Intent to Gain these Eternal Blessings

In the end, verse 48 gives the key to attaining these blessings: “Pray unto the Father with all the energy of heart that ye may be filled with his love.” Mormon had said at the beginning of this speech that one must pray with real intent (7:6, a stipulation that Moroni will reiterate in 10:4), and thus he returns at the end of his sermon, full circle, coming back to the need for the giving of offerings and prayers in their worship in their new synagogue with fullness of intent and withholding nothing.

Then, this love, or charity, which will be bestowed upon all true followers of Jesus Christ, allows that they “may become sons of God, and when he shall appear, we shall be like him for we shall see him *as he is*” (7:48). The apostle John recalls this same promise, one which he knew because he had known Jesus, but which the world did not know, as he says, “because it knew him not” (1 John 3:1–2). The idea of both the potential and also of the obligation to become “even as he is” derives, in the Nephites’ minds, from these words of Jesus: “I would that ye should be perfect *even as I [am]*” (3 Nephi 12:48) and also from his words to his disciples, “what manner of men ought yet to be? Verily, I say unto you, *even as I am*” (3 Nephi 27:27).

Mormon then finishes with encouragement that all “may have this hope that we may be purified *even as he is pure*, Amen.” What a powerful ending to this relatively brief but logically dense and spiritually potent speech!

## Moroni 8

### Moroni 8 — Background Questions

- What evidence do we have to help us date the time when Mormon wrote Moroni 8 to his son Moroni? What parallels or links can you find between the events and phrases in Mormon 3 and the words and concerns in Moroni 8 that might give some indications about the setting of this letter?
- How poignant is it that Mormon would refer in this setting to Jesus as God's "holy Child?" (Moroni 8:3)?
- How did Mormon feel about children? Why might he especially have felt that way?
- What might a person's attitude about little children reveal about that person's spiritual state and understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ?
- Why do you suppose that the baptism of little children was introduced during Mormon's day?
- Why is baptizing little children a "gross error" (8:6), a "solemn mockery" (8:9, 23), and "awful wickedness" (8:19)? These are strong words. Do we feel and speak this way about infant baptism today? If not, why not?
- How can it help us in times of trial and anxiety to be assured that "perfect love casteth out all fear"?
- How many times does the word "repent/repentance" appear in Moroni 8, and why is it so crucially central to Mormon's persuasive logic and prophetic declaration regarding infant baptism in particular and to the situation of his people in general?
- What can we do better to prepare our little children to fully appreciate and remember their baptism?

### Moroni 8:1 — Dating This Epistle of Mormon to Moroni

It is very interesting to evaluate what can be extracted from the writings in Mormon chapter 3 that may indicate when Mormon wrote this epistle to Moroni, who did not note an exact date, just that it was "soon after my calling to the ministry." The dating evidence is circumstantial, but there are enough matching pieces in each text to estimate that it was written close to the same period that Mormon addressed in Mormon chapter 3, which was just after the conclusion of the ten-year peace. Having enjoyed learning and working together with Mormon as his assistant in making plates, reading records, selecting passages to include in the abridgment, and discussing with him the spans of Nephite and Jaredite history, Moroni would have been about 29 years old in AD 362. At that time, he could have been sent out to work in the wider field of the church, especially as serious problems were already brewing.

In Mormon 3, the prophet Mormon had been commanded to preach repentance to the people. In Mormon’s letter recorded in Moroni 8, the words *repent* and *repentance* were used twelve times, five as a verb and seven as the noun. This builds upon the two nouns and one verb found in Mormon 3. Since repentance was a pressing matter at this time, it is quite possible that he wrote this letter during his period of being an idle witness.

Although Moroni 8 is commonly thought of as only being about the baptism of infants, it is also about repentance. The dominant refrain is “Repent! Repent!” Sinners are called to repentance; parents must teach repentance; parents must repent; little children need no repentance. The whole letter circles back to the issue of repentance. Little children should not be baptized because they cannot repent. They do not need to repent. They are unable to repent. The first fruits of repentance are baptism. One may not, then, baptize children until they are able to repent. Repentance makes baptism and the atonement meaningful.

#### **Further Reading and Additional Views**

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.

#### **Moroni 8:1 — Mormon Was Obviously Familiar with the Nephite Scriptures**

Mormon certainly knew the scriptures well. In Moroni 7, we recognize his superb conversance with the Sermon at the Temple and words of Jesus. In this chapter 8, it becomes clear that he is also very familiar with King Benjamin’s speech. Having abridged the book of Mosiah, which contains King Benjamin’s speech, Mormon had Benjamin’s speech well in mind and likely close at hand as he wrote this letter to Moroni.

#### **Moroni 8:3 — Why Did Mormon Call Jesus “The Holy Child?”**

In Moroni 8:3, Mormon calls Jesus the Holy Child. This is the only time in the Book of Mormon that this name of Christ appears. That is very interesting because Mormon has met Jesus. Jesus has appeared to him, and he did not appear as an infant. Why, then, did Mormon here and at this time refer to the Savior as a Holy Child? For one thing, since the theme of this whole chapter is that children are pure like Christ, by using that name for Jesus at the beginning of this epistle—seeing Jesus as God’s Holy Child—Mormon is already subtly establishing the basis of his argument that children do not need to be cleansed from any sin. As Jesus, even as a child, was holy, so are all children.

#### **Moroni 8:4–6 — Infant Baptisms Begin among the Nephites**

Why had the Nephites begun baptizing infants? Why did this start? We do not know exactly, but there may be several possibilities.

### Looking Back to Circumcision

We can assume that the Nephites practiced circumcision before the coming of Christ, since they were strict in keeping the law of Moses and were descendants of the House of Israel through Manasseh (Lehi), as well as probably Ephraim (Ishmael), and Judah (Zoram and Mulek). Circumcision, if you go back into the Old Testament, served several purposes and one of them in Exodus 4, was that if you are circumcised, it will turn away threats of death and will give you victory. Now if you have a bunch of people who are taking the offensive and going out into the battlefield and they want to enhance their chances of victory, maybe they started circumcising people as a way of imploring God to help them all.

With the coming of Christ and the introduction of baptism as the new sign of the covenant, they would not have been circumcising at that time, and so, they may have thought, “We ought to try this.” After all, before Joshua could lead the Israelites of his day into the Promised Land, the males were all circumcised so that they would be given victory. Maybe the Nephites in Mormon’s day began doing this as a way of enhancing their chances with victory by expressing this as an additional sign of covenant, and although they had it wrong, maybe they were trying to bind the Lord to help them. In addition, since baptism was a sign of spiritually dying and being reborn of God, using infant baptism as a spiritual symbol of death and rebirth is at least better than actually using infant sacrifice, which was practiced in several places in the ancient world. Whatever the background or context or their arguments may have been, the Nephites at this time started the practice of baptizing young children. Perhaps, since they circumcised newborn male infants, that ceremony influenced them to move baptism to that point in a child’s life as well.

### The Rise of Infant Baptism in the Mediterranean

In the history of Christianity in the Mediterranean world, the baptizing of infants was not done until the fourth Century, as the written and archaeological records are fairly clear. For example, there are thousands upon thousands of Christian burials in the catacombs under Rome, and dates are given for most of these burials. The dates given are usually the birth date, the baptism date, and the death date, and this information allows for analysis of their baptismal customs.

In the case of burials from the second and third centuries, there is a birth date, and then quite some time later, a baptism date, about the time when you would expect for a teenager, a young adult, or a convert—and many but not all of these people were converts to Christianity. However, there are no infant baptisms shown in these years, and the death dates were normally long after the baptism.

In the fourth century, there occurred a change in the routine. For records early in that century, there began to appear a sequence of a birth date, and then a baptism date very much later, followed a couple days later by the death date. Then there was yet another change: the birth dates began to appear with a week later the baptism date, then eventually a death date long after. Thus, it certainly appears that infant baptisms either began or became much more common about the middle of the fourth century AD.

The German scholar, Joachim Jeremias, who analyzed these dates, surmised that people had wanted to have their sins washed away right before they died, so that they could go right to heaven without any blemishes on their record. They were delaying baptism wrongly, so they could treat it as a last unction before death and not worry about living sinful lives. The reaction of the church leader in Rome was to begin baptizing everyone as infants to solve that problem. In their attempt to solve one problem, they created a new one. Christian theologians would rationalize infant baptism as a sign of the covenant, just as circumcision of infant boys eight days after birth had become a sign of the covenant of God with Abraham among the Jews. But that was always understood as a birthright, not as a rebirth following the remission of sins.

#### **Did Something Similar Happen to Cause This Change in the Nephite World?**

From the Nephite world, there is no information about why they began infant baptism, but a totally new pattern had arisen, and Mormon was astonished, even offended by it. He was appalled at how wrongly they were thinking.

Parents may have begun having their children baptized out of fear. In the absence of guidance from the Holy Ghost, people do what appears logical at the time. Perhaps some parents were getting really worried that their children were going to die. They were starving and were heading for gruesome times of warfare that did not spare the children. Parents may have been afraid that the children would never get a chance to be baptized. This may have been well intended. There are usually motivations that cause such changes, but whatever motivated this practice, Mormon did not like it. Can there be any doubt that Mormon thought that this was a bad idea? Look at the words he used, “A gross error,” “a solemn mockery,” used twice. He claimed that anyone who would do this was in the gall of bitterness. He saw this as an awful wickedness.

Mormon was most concerned because infant baptism very clearly denies the whole process of repentance that allows the whole process of the mercy of Christ to operate. It abrogates the whole purpose of Christ’s Atonement, and thus it creates a bigger problem within the entire church. If people are not willing to teach their children to repent so that they can be baptized and then they cease repenting, wicked conditions would certainly ensue.

Mormon's response leads to an important question: What does a person's attitude about the baptism of little children reveal about a person's spiritual state and his understanding of the gospel? Mormon wanted people to understand how the gospel really worked. He declared that they were denying Christ's Atonement by not recognizing that children are alive in Christ. They may have been administering ordinances, but they had lost the point of them.

One may wonder if in an effort to have power, they had started their own splinter church organizations by deciding to do something differently in order to appease the people and to stay in control of the situation. Such people, one might say, would have the appearance of good efforts, but they would lack the authority to make such changes. In response, Mormon was quite harsh, and did not identify any righteous reason for the change. In Mormon 3:2, the Lord says to Mormon, "Cry unto my people, repent ye ... and build up again my church," which may indicate that there actually had arisen another church competing for the people's minds and hearts. Forming alternative religious orders, as with the Order of Nehors, had a long history among the Nephites.

#### Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[Why Did Moroni Include Mormon's Condemnation of Infant Baptism?](#) (Moroni 8:12)," *KnoWhy* 253 (December 15, 2016).

#### Moroni 8:8 — The Whole Need No Physician

Mormon countered this new trend by turning also to practices and revelations from previous Nephite eras, especially King Benjamin. Back in Mosiah 3:11, Benjamin had talked about how little children are free from any transgression, and he also explained, as does Mormon, that (1) through the atonement of Christ the effects of the Fall of Adam are taken away, that (2) Jesus Christ's infinite sacrifice atones for the sins of all who die without the law. It also (3) covers all of the transgressions that are committed ignorantly or unaccountably. Mormon mentions all three of those features of the atonement of Jesus Christ. Compare Moroni 8:8 with Mosiah 3:11:

Mosiah 3:11	Moroni 8:8, 22
<p>For behold, and also his blood atoneth for the sins of those <i>who have fallen by the transgression of Adam</i>, who have died not knowing the will of God concerning them, or who have <i>ignorantly sinned</i>.</p>	<p>The whole need no physician, but they that are sick; wherefore, little children are whole, for they are <i>not capable</i> of committing sin; wherefore the <i>curse of Adam is taken from them</i> in me, that it hath no power over them ... [as] on all them that have no law.</p>

### Moroni 8:10 — All Parents Must Become Like Children

In his letter to his son in Moroni 8:10, Mormon also says that parents must humble themselves like their little children, which again is very reminiscent of King Benjamin’s Speech, specifically, Mosiah 3:18–19. One must put off the natural man by becoming a child, submissive, meek, and humble.

#### Mosiah 3:18–19

For behold he judgeth, and his judgment is just; and *the infant perisheth not* that dieth in his infancy; but men drink damnation to their own souls except they *humble themselves and become as little children*, and believe that *salvation* was, and is, and is to come, in and through the atoning blood of Christ, the Lord Omnipotent. For the natural man is an enemy to God, and has been from the fall of Adam, and will be, forever and ever, unless he yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, and putteth off the natural man and becometh a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord, and *becometh as a child*, submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon him, even as a child doth submit to his father.

#### Moroni 8:10

Behold I say unto you that this thing shall ye teach—repentance and baptism unto those who are accountable and capable of committing sin; yea, teach parents that they must repent and be baptized, and *humble themselves as their little children*, and *they shall all be saved with their little children*.

### Moroni 8:17 — How Did Mormon Perceive Children?

In this letter, one may observe how Mormon felt about children. Mormon’s childhood was a rare one. He was a very observant, precocious child, and he probably had quite fond memories of his childhood. He was entrusted with important responsibilities. He liked childhood, and apparently liked children generally. He was certainly especially pained at seeing the children around him being killed. They were starving; they were deprived; they were maltreated in the war. He must have been enormously pained. In our modern day, people worry about what the economy is going to be like for their children and grandchildren. Mormon knew what the future was going to be like for his civilization’s children and grandchildren. It was likely to be very bleak at best.

In verse 17, he said that he loved little children, “I love little children with a perfect love; and they are all alike and partakers of salvation.” That statement says a great deal about

a military commander-in-chief. They are alike to him because of their purity, their freedom from blame. A person who truly believes that, who has it embedded in their understanding of the gospel and humanity, will demonstrate that in the way they deal with little children who are all perfectly pure. Now, that is a great ideal for Latter-day Saints as they interact with children, grandchildren, children in the Primary, or any engagement with children.

### **Moroni 8:20–22 — All Children Are Clean and Need No Repentance Thanks to the Atonement**

Mormon makes clear the status of little children, as does King Benjamin:

Mosiah 3:16	Moroni 8:20
<p>And even if it were possible that little children could sin they could not be saved; but I say unto you they are blessed; for behold, as in Adam, or by nature, they fall, even so the blood of Christ atoneth for their sins.</p>	<p>And he that saith that little children need baptism denieth the mercies of Christ, and setteth at naught the atonement of him and the power of his redemption.</p>

Surely from these passages we can see that Mormon was familiar with King Benjamin’s speech when the topic of child baptism arose. Since it was so relevant, he rightly used it to address the current topic of concern. Besides being a prophet, King Benjamin had been a mighty warrior, even wielding the sword of Laban in successful battles. Mormon would clearly have admired and identified with Benjamin on many accounts. Mormon must also have lamented his own inability to bring his people to a mighty change of heart and covenant renewal, as Benjamin had done.

Notice the universality of Mormon’s repeated affirmation that *all* children are clean: “all children are alike unto me,” “they are all alike and partakers of salvation,” “for they are all alive in him because of his mercy,” and “all little children are alive in Christ” (8:17, 17, 19, 22). Mormon leaves no room for questions about the certitude and the scope of his conviction that infant baptism sets “at naught the atonement of [Christ] and the power of his redemption,” and “is mockery before God, denying the mercies of Christ, and the power of his Holy Spirit” (8:20, 23).

### **Moroni 8:27 — Fighting Might Resume Soon**

In Moroni 8:27, Mormon said that he would write again unless he had to go back out to battle soon. How would he have known that he might need to go back out to battle soon? In Mormon 3, he referred to a warning letter from the Lamanite king reminding him that

the ten years of peace was over. Thus, there may be a connection between Mormon's epistle in Moroni 8 and that setting in Mormon 3. There are a few clues like this that potentially suggest a shared context.

### **Moroni 8:28–29 — The Nephites Were Rebellious in Nature**

Finally, we know from the ending of Moroni 8, in verse 28, that the people were rejecting all religious power and authority: "They are also seeking to put down all power and authority which cometh from God." This condition was terminal, as is also clearly reflected in Mormon 3, when the people were reported as refusing to listen to Mormon's leadership. In Mormon 3:3, Mormon had similarly written:

And I did cry unto this people, but it was in vain; and they did not realize that it was the Lord that had spared them, and granted unto them a chance for repentance. And behold they did harden their hearts against the Lord their God.

## Moroni 9

### **Moroni 9 Thought Questions**

- Moroni 9 begins with Mormon's tender expression of love for his son Moroni, but that sentiment is soon overwhelmed. How bad was their situation?
- What factors might have contributed to the complete collapse of military order, martial law, and diplomatic communication at this time?
- The question of cannibalism is surely going to come up in Moroni 9:8–10. Is there evidence that this type of behavior was practiced anciently? If so, why would people do this? And why would Moroni include his father's letter with such gruesome details?
- Do genocides really happen? If so, why? And why does the Book of Mormon tell us about this one?

### **Moroni 9:1 — Mormon's Final Epistle to Moroni**

The approximate timing of Mormon's letter to Moroni (recorded in Moroni 9) may be identified through triangulation with other data from Mormon's writings, comparing it with the description of the same events in Mormon chapters 4, 5, and 6. The historical accuracy of what we have here shines through quite magnificently.

Comparing the contents of Mormon 4–6 and Moroni 9 provides an opportunity to triangulate the events that Mormon described there with details that he covers in greater detail in this personal letter. Indeed, in his historical account, Mormon gave a general

story about what was happening, and his letter elucidates those events and clarifies why the events in his narrative record were happening.

It is very unlikely that Joseph Smith, after he had encountered the narrative in Mormon 4–6, then continued to translate, finished Mormon 7–9, went on through the whole story of the Jaredites in Ether 1–15, and then finished most of the book of Moroni in chapters 1–8, only at that point finally included this letter that fit right into a previous historical moment mentioned briefly much earlier. Those who witnessed his translating never even suggested that Joseph ever went back to consult previously translated passages or to check back on details.

Scholars generally, but not always, concur that Moroni 9 was probably written at the end of the hiatus between the years AD 367 to 375 (see Mormon 4:15–16), right before that last big invasion in 375, when the Nephites were on the run for ten years. For a chart comparing nine details found in Mormon 4 with specific statements found in Moroni 9, see my previous Notes on Mormon 1–6, pp. 1059–1060, and the discussions below. See also a similar chart by Robert F. Smith, “Epistolary Form,” pp. 131–132. As a rule, I favor the idea that Moroni 7, 8, and 9 were written in the same order in which Moroni gives them to us. Without giving some indication of a “flashback,” Mormon and Moroni use a strict chronological framework for their introduction of documents into the finished record. This would mean that Moroni 9 comes last of these three, and not in the earlier 345–350 AD time frame, which would be the only other possible time period. (Since it is not likely that Moroni 8 was written before 345–350 AD, when Moroni was too young to have been called to the ministry, and also since the speech in Moroni 7 would have to have been given even earlier, at a time before Mormon would have had worked extensively on abridging 3 Nephi, I would suggest that that earlier time frame for Moroni 9 seems improbable.)

There are several beautiful pearls among the descriptions of the horrendous sufferings and trials in Moroni 9. Perhaps they are things that one may want to remember, and maybe they are all the more memorable, because they come out of this crucible of intensity. If Mormon could say such poignant things when he was in the midst of horrific struggles, readers may gain great strength from them, especially during times of their own intense trials and disappointments. Below, are some of those pearls. As a reader, you may find many more!

### Further Reading

John W. Welch, “[Mormon 1–6](#),” in *John W. Welch Notes* (Springville, UT: Book of Mormon Central, 2020), 1037–1068.

Book of Mormon Central, “When Did Mormon Write His Letter Recorded in Moroni 9? (Mormon 9:1),” *KnoWhy* 477 (October 18, 2018).

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

Robert F. Smith, “Epistolary Form in the Book of Mormon,” *FARMS Review* 22, no. 2 (2010): 125–135, dates Moroni 9 to ca. AD 366 AD.

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.

### **Moroni 9:2 — Nephites Did Not Conquer in Battle (see Mormon 4:13)**

In Moroni 9:2, Mormon reported a battle in which the Nephites ultimately did not conquer. This may have been the result of several earlier skirmishes in which Mormon was personally involved, but this time it seems to have been a major turning point. In Mormon 2:19 the Nephites had been routed temporarily, but in 2:25 they regrouped and stood their ground and in 2:27 they retook their lands of inheritance. In Mormon 4:13, for the first time, there will be no such recovery.

The fact that Mormon says here “I have had a sore battle with the Lamanites in which we did not conquer” is admittedly an important statement. It would mean that Moroni 9 was not written between AD 362 and 375, during the period when Mormon was not serving as the leader, unless it is possible that Mormon was involved in the battle mentioned in Moroni 9:2 in some way other than as the commander or leader. But, more likely, that battle in which the Nephites “did not conquer” occurred at the time when Mormon had just begun again as commander and the Nephites were forced to flee from the battlefield, taking refuge in the city of Jordan (Mormon 5:3, about AD 376).

Mentioning over a dozen specific points or words found in Mormon 4, the letter in Moroni 9 then goes on to describe the awful depths to which the Nephites had sunk during the decade from AD 366 to 375. Recapping that deterioration of Nephite faith, civility, and worthiness before God, Moroni 9 sets forth Mormon’s justifications for his despondent assessment of the hopeless condition of the Nephites around AD 375–376.

#### **Further Reading**

John W. Welch, “Mormon 1–6,” in *John W. Welch Notes* (Springville, UT: Book of Mormon Central, 2020), 1059–1060.

### **Moroni 9:3–5 — The Nephites Fought to Sate Their Anger (see Mormon 4:15)**

Both documents convey intense emotion. In Mormon 4:15 the Nephites were overwhelmed with anger because the Lamanites had taken their women and children

captive and offered them up unto idol gods. They wanted revenge for the atrocities inflicted upon their fellow Nephites. Similarly, in Moroni 9:5, Mormon records, “For so exceedingly do they anger that it seemeth me that they have no fear of death; ... and they thirst after blood and revenge continually.”

### **Moroni 9:5 — The Nephites Lost Their Love One Towards Another**

Losing love towards one another eliminates the critical characteristic of Eternal Life, and prevents guidance by the Holy Ghost. Other motivations for action take precedence, and righteousness is not part of the equation.

Hate and anger, which become so prevalent in times of war, can take over the hearts of both sides. Hatred and anger are even used as a viable strategy for winning. According to our brother here in the Edgemont Stake, Dr. Demetrius Kepas (who was a teenager in Athens), intense hate and anger permeated the Greek Civil War with the communists; as he personally reported in class, he observed that hate, and how anger took over.

In a much earlier example, the *Iliad* is the great epic of the Greek war against Troy. The whole story is about Achilles throwing temper tantrums. For years, he was so angry and obsessed with the anger, that he drove out all feeling of love and concern, even for his dearest friend, Patroclus, who eventually was killed.

### **Moroni 9:6 — Mormon and Moroni Remain Faithful (see Mormon 5:1)**

Back in Mormon 5:1, after he had moved the records, Mormon said, “And it came to pass that I did go forth among the Nephites and I did repent of the oath which I had made.” He had previously sworn an oath that he would not lead the Nephites in battle anymore. He was planning to stand by as an idle witness. In order to break that oath, he had to retract or redeem his vow, and doing that in ancient times would have required him to seek the approval or forgiveness of the Lord. He had sworn to God that he would no longer lead them, and even if it was for what he now thought was a more righteous need, Mormon was still needing to rescind his previous oath.

Now, in a parallel text in Moroni 9:6, Mormon wrote, “...notwithstanding their hardness, let us labor diligently for if we should cease to labor, we should be brought under condemnation for we have a labor to perform whilst in this tabernacle of clay.” Mormon was talking about his spiritual decision to repent of his oath. He was essentially saying, “Well, we are still here. God has spared our lives. As long as we are alive, he expects us to be working. We must carry on with the responsibilities that he has given us.” Again, the history and the letter carry parallel information. Plainly, Mormon’s letter here is describing the same conditions and events as are reported in the historical records in

Mormon 4 and 5. These details securely place the letter in Moroni 9 in the same context as Mormon's previous historical writings.

### **Moroni 9:6 — Rest Our Souls in the Kingdom of God**

In Moroni 9:6, Mormon had retained a feeling of peace throughout the crises, retaining an eternal perspective in the midst of all the awful chaos. He pleaded, "that we may conquer the enemy of all righteousness and rest our souls in the Kingdom of God." This is how most readers would like to feel at a time like that.

### **Moroni 9:7 — Nephites Taken Prisoners (see also Mormon 4:2, 14)**

For the first time, many Nephites were taken prisoner by the Lamanites, and this is clearly recorded in both the history in Moron 4:2 and 14, and also here in Mormon's letter.

### **Moroni 9:8, 16 — Human Sacrifice Performed (see also Mormon 4:11, 14–15, 21)**

Each record describes unspeakable suffering and even human sacrifice being inflicted extraordinarily upon the prisoners.

#### **Further Reading**

Evidence Central, "[Book of Mormon Evidence: Human Sacrifice and Ritual Cannibalism](#)," September 19, 2020, online at [evidencecentral.org](http://evidencecentral.org).

Book of Mormon Central, "[Why Did the Lamanites Sacrifice Women and Children to Idols? \(Mormon 4:14\)](#)," *KnoWhy* 229 (November 11, 2016).

### **Moroni 9:9–10 — Nephite Wickedness Explained (compare Mormon 4:12, 15)**

In these verses, Mormon recounted the wickedness of the Nephites in carrying out their revenge. Their efforts failed miserably, and they lost again, as is likewise reported in Mormon 4:12, 15.

### **Moroni 9:11–15 — Mormon's Lamentation**

Here Mormon offers up another lamentation, not unlike his final lament over his fallen "fair ones" in Mormon 7. Foreshadowing his final extended elegy (see JWW Notes, 1063–1068), here Mormon cries out: "O my beloved son, how can a people like this ... , how can a people like this ... , how can we expect ... , Wo unto this people. Come out in judgment, O God."

Here also, Mormon loves the repeated refrain of terms of affectionate address. As his speech in Moroni 7 had repeated "my beloved brethren," here in Moroni 9 Mormon calls out "my son," "my son," even "my beloved son," exactly ten times.

**Moroni 9:20 — The Nephites Were “Without Principle, and Past Feeling”**

One may ask whether order is related to principle. In verse 18, the Nephites were without order, without mercy, and then in verse 20, they were without principle and past feeling. In fact, their civilization had fallen apart. When these people became unprincipled and past feeling, their actions were no longer for the advantage of their own side of the war. They became obsessed with killing, lost all sense of obedience and order, and eventually the military system and society devolved into disorder, disarray, and then chaos.

**Moroni 9:24 — Securing the Records (see Mormon 4:23)**

In Mormon 4:23, Mormon wrote that he had been to the Hill Shim to remove the records. He decided to get the records, protect them, and do whatever he could to complete his responsibility. He needed to hide the records and convey them to his son Moroni. It was clear that he was not going to be able to protect them for very long.

And here Mormon already mentions the Jaredites (9:23), whose demise was a foreboding precursor of what would happen to the Nephites and also a prescient reminder to Moroni that he, someday, would be the one who would abridge the Jaredite plates of Ether.

Then in Moroni 9:24, Mormon wrote to Moroni, “But I trust that I may see thee soon, for I have sacred records that I would deliver up unto thee.” This has a strong connection with the way Mormon ended chapter 4: “And now, I, Mormon, seeing that the Lamanites were about to overthrow the land, therefore I did go to the Hill Shim and did take up all the records which Ammaron had hid up unto the Lord.” This was likely referring to the same situation, and since Mormon was saying, “I hope to see you soon,” he probably had just been to the hill. He was apparently saying to himself, I now have the records, and I have to get together with my son Moroni. I will write him this letter and tell him what is happened.

**Moroni 9:24 — Nephites Swept Off “As Dew Before the Sun” (see Mormon 4:18)**

In Mormon 4, Mormon said that at that time the Nephites were being swept off as “a dew before the sun.” One may picture the ancient weapons such as the macuahuitl weapon and visualize it sweeping away the losers. How graphic that is. Many were on the run or involved in mass desertions, and women and children were captured and abused.

In Moroni 9:24, Mormon ended his letter by saying likewise, “Many of our brethren have deserted over to the Lamanites.” One may ask why they would have done that. They likely did not want to die, but how could they have avoided being killed? They would have been required to “deny the Christ” (as we learn from Moroni 1:2–3). This was more than a political war. The people that chose to stay with Mormon did so at least partly for religious reasons, and some chose to die rather than default on their faith.

**Moroni 9:25–26 — Be Faithful in Christ**

In conclusion, Mormon explained that he did not tell Moroni about these great sorrows to weigh him down. He was saying that great suffering could allow Christ to lift people.

He offered a blessing, that his son would have divine peace and hope in Christ despite the awful circumstances. He asked that Christ would lift his son, and plant in his mind the time when Jesus visited the Nephites and showed his body unto Mormon and Moroni’s “fathers.” This is a message of great hope. Mormon issues a powerful request that all the attributes and achievements of Christ may “rest in your mind forever” (9:25).

In verse 26, Mormon, trusting in the Savior, pronounced a further blessing for his son to have the same confidence in the Father and the Son that he had. He asked that the grace of God the Father and Jesus Christ would abide with his son forever. These two joyous blessings are assertions that can be quoted in any time of trial, raising hope and refocusing one’s mind on Eternal Life.

This attitude is reminiscent of when Jesus healed the blind man in Jerusalem in John 9:1–3. The witnesses asked who had sinned to make the man blind, the man or his parents. Jesus answered that no one had sinned. The man was blind so the glory of God could be made manifest. Mormon was essentially of the same view. As awful as the circumstances were, he did not want his son to feel the sorrow to the point of death, or focus on who had sinned to bring about this calamity, but he pleaded that he would be brought to Christ with an understanding that the Savior’s sufferings and death were even worse than those he was hearing of, or that he could even imagine. Those thoughts were uplifting enough for Moroni that he kept this otherwise awful letter for over 45 years. Mormon’s closing words of blessing here, as he faced his final extremities, can be equally heartening for the modern reader as well.