

ENCYCLOPEDIA OF MORMONISM



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of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*

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finds confirmation in the Book of Mormon. Certainly, Methodists had no corner on that linkage, for Baptist preachers, Charles G. Finney's Congregationalists, Alexander Campbell's Disciples of Christ, and Unitarians like William E. Channing affirmed it. Ancient Nephites heeded the word of their prophets and looked forward to the second coming of Jesus Christ, the Son of Righteousness. When he appeared to their descendants in the New World, Jesus repeated even more understandably the words of the SERMON ON THE MOUNT that he had proclaimed in the Old.

Fourth, Joseph Smith's translation of an ancient sacred book helped bring to fruition another movement, long growing among Puritans, Pietists, Quakers, and Methodists, to restore to Christian doctrine the idea of the presence of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers. Charles G. Finney came eventually to believe, for example, that the baptism of the Holy Spirit, or the experience of entire SANCTIFICATION, would remedy the inadequacies of righteousness and love that he saw in his converts. So, of course, did almost all Methodists. Observers from both inside and outside the restored Church testified that in the early years something akin to modern pentecostal phenomena took place among at least the inner circle of the Saints. By the 1830s, evangelicals in several traditions were greatly expanding their use of the example of the Day of Pentecost to declare that God's power is at work in the world.

Fifth, the Book of Mormon shared in the restoration of some Christian expectations that in the LAST DAYS biblical prophecies will be literally fulfilled. Those who by faith and baptism become Saints will be included among God's people, chosen in "the eleventh hour." They, too, should gather in ZION, a NEW JERUSALEM for the New World, and a restored Jerusalem in the Old; and Christ will indeed return.

Whatever LDS interpretations of the King James Version of the Holy Scriptures developed later, the mutually supportive role of the Bible and the Book of Mormon was central to the thinking of Joseph Smith, the early missionaries, and their converts.

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TIMOTHY L. SMITH

BOOK OF MORMON CHRONOLOGY

The Book of Mormon contains a chronology that is internally consistent over the thousand-year NEPHITE history, with precise Nephite dates for several events, including the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. However, its chronology has not been unequivocally tied to other calendars because of uncertainties in biblical dates and lack of details about the Nephite calendars. Even less information exists about JAREDITE chronology (Sorenson, 1969).

INTERNAL NEPHITE CHRONOLOGY. Nephites kept careful track of time from at least three reference points:

1. Years were counted from the time LEHI left Jerusalem (Enos 1:25; Mosiah 6:4); not only was this an important date of origin, but also an angel had said that the Savior would come "in 600 years" from that time (1 Ne. 19:8).
2. Time was also measured from the commencement of the reign of the judges (c. 91 B.C.; cf. 3 Ne. 1:1), which marked a major political reform ending five centuries of Nephite kingship (Jacob 1:9-11; Alma 1:1), during which the years of each king's reign were probably counted according to typical ancient practices (1 Ne. 1:4; Mosiah 29:46).
3. The Nephites later reckoned time from the sign of the birth of Christ (3 Ne. 2:8).

The Book of Mormon links all three systems in several passages that are apparently consistent. Table 1 lists several events using the Nephite systems.

Most of the Nephite record pertains to three historical periods: the time of Lehi and his sons (c. 600-500 B.C.), the events preceding and following the coming of Christ (c. 150 B.C.-A.D. 34), and the destruction of the Nephites (c. A.D. 300-420). Thus, the relatively large book of Alma covers only thirty-nine years, while the much smaller books of Omni and 4 Nephi each cover more than two hundred years.

LDS editions of the Book of Mormon show dates in Nephite years, deduced from the text, at the bottom of the pages. The exact nature of the Nephite year, however, is not described. The Nephite year began with the "first day" of the "first month" (Alma 51:37-52:1; 56:1), and it probably had twelve months because the eleventh month was at "the latter end" of the year (Alma 48:2, 21;

TABLE 1 SELECTED EVENTS IN NEPHITE HISTORY

Lehi	Nephtite Years		Event	Reference
	Judges	Christ		
1		(-600)	Lehi departs from Jerusalem	1 Ne. 10:4; 19:8
9		(-592)	Lehi's group arrives in Bountiful	1 Ne. 17:4-5
56		(-545)	Jacob receives plates from Nephi	Jacob 1:1
200		(-401)	Law of Moses strictly observed	Jarom 1:5
477		(-124)	King Benjamin's speech	Mosiah 6:3-4
510	1	(-91)	Alma ₁ , Mosiah die; Alma ₂ first judge	Mosiah 29:44-46
	9	(-83)	Nephihah becomes judge	Alma 4:20-8:2
	15	(-77)	The return of the sons of Mosiah	Alma 17:1-6
	18	(-74)	Korihor refuted	Alma 30
		Alma's Mission to the Zoramites	Alma 31:6-35:12	
	18	(-74)	War because of Zoramites	Alma 35:13; 43:3-4
		Moroni leads army	Alma 43:17	
	37	(-55)	Nephites begin migrating northward	Alma 63:4-6
	42	(-50)	Helaman ₂ becomes judge; Gadianton	Hel. 2:1-5
	53	(-39)	Helaman ₂ dies; Nephi ₂ chief judge	Hel. 3:37
	58	(-34)	Zarahemla captured	Hel. 4:5
	67	(-25)	Most Nephites join Gadianton	Hel. 6:16, 21
	73	(-19)	Nephi invokes a famine	Hel. 11:2-5
	75	(-17)	Gadianton robbers expelled	Hel. 11:6-17
	77	(-15)	Most Nephites reconverted	Hel. 11:21
	80	(-12)	Robbers return	Hel. 11:24-29
	86	(-6)	Samuel the Lamanite prophesies	Hel. 13:1-16:9
601	92	(1)	Sign of the birth of Christ	3 Ne. 1:1,4,19
609	100	9	Begin to reckon time from Christ	3 Ne. 2:5-8
		13	Severe war with robbers begins	3 Ne. 2:11-13
		19	Major Nephtite victory	3 Ne. 4:5, 11-15
		26	Nephites prosper	3 Ne. 6:1-4
		30	Nephite society disintegrates	3 Ne. 6:14-7:13
		34	Destruction; Christ appears	3 Ne. 8:2-28:12
		36	All converted; property held in common	4 Ne. 1:2-3
		201	Private ownership reinstated	4 Ne. 1:24-25
		231	Tribalization reemerges	4 Ne. 1:35-38
		245	The wicked outnumber righteous	4 Ne. 1:40
		300	Nephites as wicked as Lamanites	4 Ne. 1:45
		326	Mormon leads army	Morm. 2:2
		350	Treaty with Lamanites and Robbers	Morm. 2:28
		362	Mormon refuses to lead Nephites	Morm. 3:8-11
			385	Nephites destroyed; Mormon dies
	421	Moroni seals up the record	Moro. 10:1-2	

NOTE: Years in parentheses are calculated, with the year -600 beginning just over 600 Nephtite years before the birth of Christ.

49:1), but the lengths of the months and of the year itself are not mentioned.

Until the coming of Christ, the Nephtites observed the LAW OF MOSES (2 Ne. 25:24; Alma 25:15), which generally used lunar months (new moon to new moon). The Savior was crucified on the *fourteenth* day of the first lunar month of the

Jewish calendar (John 19:14; Lev. 23:5), but on the *fourth* day of the first Nephtite month (3 Ne. 8:5). This may imply that Nephtite months at that time were not lunar and that their civil calendar may have differed from their religious calendar.

John L. Sorenson (1990) has observed that during the reign of the judges warfare was mostly

limited to four consecutive Nephite months. These months can be approximately correlated with our calendar because even today warfare in Mesoamerica (the probable area of BOOK OF MORMON GEOGRAPHY for most of Nephite history) is conducted mostly during the dry season after the fall harvest. This correlation implies that the Nephite year at that time began in December (*see* BOOK OF MORMON, HISTORY OF WARFARE IN). This would mean that because the crucifixion of Christ (presumably in early April) occurred in the first Nephite month, the Nephites probably shifted their calendar to begin the first month in April at the same time they began reckoning time from the birth of Christ. This conclusion is consistent with the Nephite record that Christ was born some time after the end of the Nephite year (3 Ne. 1:1–9).

EXTERNAL CHRONOLOGY. Evidence supports two possible lengths for Nephite years: 365 days and 360 days. Each can be correlated to external history. The internal chronology is consistent, so that if the exact nature of the Nephite calendar were known, only one reference point in external history would be needed to fix the entire Nephite chronology. However, at least two such dates would be required to determine the length of the Nephite year. Three principal events are common to both Nephite and Old World sources: (1) the first year of the reign of Zedekiah, King of Judah; (2) the birth of Christ; and (3) the death of Christ. Because there are varying degrees of uncertainty about these three reference points, alternative correlation methods have been proposed, each using two of these dates.

First, Orson PRATT proposed that the Nephites used a 365-day year, as had the Egyptians previously and as did the Mesoamericans afterward (*Millennial Star* 28 [Dec. 22, 1866]:810). It has been noted (Lefgren) that such a year agrees, to the very day, with one choice for the birth and death dates of Christ—namely, Thursday, APRIL 6, 1 B.C., and Friday, April 1, A.D. 33, respectively (Gregorian calendar). Both of these dates are supported by other arguments (J. Pratt, 1985 and 1990). This theory assumes that the third system of Nephite reckoning began on the very day of the birth of Christ, which is not explicitly stated in the Book of Mormon but is consistent with Sorenson's conclusions above.

Second, most historians believe that the first year of King Zedekiah began in 598–96 B.C. Lehi

left Jerusalem shortly afterward (1 Ne. 1:4; 2:4). The date of the birth of Christ is not known directly from historical sources, but it is believed that King Herod died in 5–4 B.C., implying that Christ was born shortly before (Matt. 2:1). Using these two events as reference points, Huber has proposed a 360-day Nephite year because 600 such years fit the interval from Lehi to Christ (3 Ne. 1:1); such a system has historical precedent, and apparently underlies certain prophecies in which the word “time” may equal 360 days (e.g., Rev. 12:6, 14).

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BOOK OF MORMON COMMENTARIES

Because the Book of Mormon is the best known and most widely circulated LDS book, many commentaries on and reference books about it have been written to assist readers. Inasmuch as its historical timeline spans from c. 2200 B.C. to A.D. 421 and its doctrinal content is extensive, it is difficult for a one-volume work to meet the many needs and interests. The references cited herein contain bibliographies that will provide readers with additional sources.

George Reynolds and Janne M. Sjodahl coauthored a *Commentary on the Book of Mormon* (1955–1961), a seven-volume work (published posthumously to both authors) that has been widely circulated. Hugh Nibley’s *Lehi in the*