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H. Donl Peterson

The Lord chose Moroni to complete the Nephite dispensation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. He finished his father's inspired abridgment of the Nephite millennial-long history; he commanded 10,000 soldiers at Cumorah in their final battles with the Lamanites; he abridged the writings of Ether, the record of the Jaredites, a once mighty civilization that preceded his own on this western hemisphere; and he recorded the lengthy writings of the brother of Jared on the gold plates and sealed them up. He wandered alone about the land for many years, not only concerned about his personal safety, but also fully aware of his responsibility to preserve the plates until he was commanded to hide them in the earth. Finally, after traveling extensively and fulfilling priesthood responsibilities, he deposited the plates in a hillside in what is now western New York state. What Moroni accomplished has blessed many people and will yet bless many more. This chapter attempts to highlight his illustrative and productive life.

The Formative Years

Moroni was probably born close to the middle of the fourth century AD. The only other member of his family mentioned is his father Mormon, the Nephite military commander-in-chief and the Lord's chosen prophet. We do not know his mother's name or whether he had siblings or was married. Mormon, who was well aware of the prophecies about his people, knew that his newly-born son would

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experience a lifetime of bloodshed, turmoil, and strife. Prophecies in the scriptures were clear that the once-mighty Nephite civilization would deteriorate, divide, and finally end in tragic destruction during Moroni's lifetime (see 1 Nephi 12:11–15; Alma 45:9–14; Hel 13:5–10).

Moroni's Name

Mormon, a brilliant student of the scriptures, realized that their prophecies foretelling the destruction of his people would soon be fulfilled because they were not willing to humble themselves before the Lord. He aptly described the people of his day as being “past feeling” (Moroni 9:20). Knowing the difficulties his son would encounter, Mormon, no doubt, named his infant son after the legendary prophet and military leader Captain Moroni, whose history he had abridged (see Alma 43:16–62:43).

Moroni—A Church Leader

The size, organization, and prominence of the Church of Jesus Christ as Moroni was maturing is not clear from the Book of Mormon. It is clear that Mormon was the prophet and that some organization of the Church was still intact. Moroni included a letter in his writings that his father had sent to him on the occasion of his first call to the ministry. It begins: “My beloved son, Moroni, I rejoice exceedingly that your Lord Jesus Christ hath been mindful of you, and hath called you to his ministry, and to his holy work” (Moroni 8:2, 6). After expressing additional words of hope, Mormon directed his remarks to a problem that had been reported to him relative to an apostate practice being carried out in Moroni's area of authority—that of infant baptism. Mormon exhorts Moroni, as the newly ordained leader, to “labor diligently, that this gross error should be removed from among you” (v 6). He further tells Moroni that where he was “in this part of the land they are also seeking to put down all power and authority which cometh from God; and they are denying the Holy Ghost” (v 28). This correspondence suggests that Moroni presided over a body of believers, some of whom were perverting the ways of the Lord. Mormon also admonishes Moroni to “teach—repentance and baptism unto those who are accountable and capable of

committing sin . . .” (Moroni 8:10). We can conclude that some semblance of church organization still existed when Moroni was a young man.

In a second epistle, Mormon reports on the despicable level to which the Nephites had degenerated and exhorts Moroni, thus:

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, that we may conquer the enemy of all righteousness, and rest our souls in the kingdom of God. (Moroni 9:6)

Moroni’s Military Career

Mormon spares his readers most of the horrid, graphic details of the annihilation of his godless society who only a few generations before he had described as follows: “Surely there could not be a happier people among all the people who had been created by the hand of God. . . . They were in one, the children of Christ, and heirs of the kingdom of God. And how blessed were they!” (4 Nephi 1:16–18).

In preparation for the final battles with the Lamanites, Mormon led the badly outnumbered Nephites to the land of Cumorah, where they gathered to face their more powerful foes in a setting they hoped would give them advantage over the Lamanites (see Mormon 6:4). There were 23 Nephite captains at Cumorah, each commanding 10,000 troops in the final battle. Moroni and Mormon were two of these military leaders (vv 10–15).

In the horrendous slaughter at Cumorah, Mormon was wounded and left for dead, the Lamanites passing him by, assuming he was dead. Only 24 Nephites survived the final battle at Cumorah, and they included Mormon and Moroni, who observed the mutilated bodies of the Nephite soldiers and their wives and children. In his last two entries on the plates, Mormon laments over the Nephite’s utter destruction (Mormon 6:16–22) and leaves a final message of hope to the posterity of the Lamanites (Mormon 7:1–10).

Moroni Was Entrusted with the Plates of Mormon

To complete and preserve the great abridgment of the Nephite history from destruction, Mormon asked Moroni to finish it and then “hide up the records in the earth” until the Lord would have them discovered (Mormon 8:4). Moroni’s entry is brief and factual. Writing 400 years after the birth of Christ, Moroni states that the remaining Nephites, including his father, were hunted down and killed until they were “no more” (v 7). He alone remained “to write the sad tale of the destruction of [his] people” (v 3). And although he desired to bear testimony of the worth of the plates, there was no room on them to do so, and he had no ore with which to make additional plates.

Moroni testifies in closing the record that if readers would not belittle the abridgment for its imperfections they would be given even more. Finally, he finishes the record about his people by engraving this closing sentence: “Behold, I make an end of speaking concerning this people. I am the son of Mormon, my father was a descendant of Nephi” (Mormon 8:13). We assume at this time Moroni also wrote the following on the last leaf of the gold plates:

The Book of Mormon an account written by the hand of Mormon upon plates taken from the plates of Nephi. Wherefore, it is an abridgement of the record of the people of Nephi and also the Lamanites—Written to the Lamanites, who are a remnant of the house of Israel; and also to Jew and Gentile—Written by way of commandment, and also by the spirit of prophecy and of revelation—Written and sealed up, and hid up unto the Lord, that they might not be destroyed—To come forth by the gift and power of God unto the interpretation thereof—Sealed by the hand of Moroni, and hid up unto the Lord, to come forth in due time by way of the Gentile—The interpretation thereof by the gift of God.

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

A New Beginning

We assume that at the time Moroni wrote the title page to the Book of Mormon he thought his work with the plates was completed and all he needed to do further was to bury them, but the Lord had other things for him to do. Called to a new assignment, Moroni returned to the plates once again to write upon them. He also had somehow acquired new plates upon which to write since his father's record was full. In the time between burying his father's record, and beginning a new, Moroni had been shown several visions of the future importance of the sacred Nephite record. Sometime in these years the Lord gave Moroni the "keys of the record of the stick of Ephraim" (D&C 27:5). Moroni's new calling extended beyond the grave to the glorious last dispensation in which he would give the sacred text to a new, young prophet.

The Prophecies of Moroni

As the Lord unfolded the events in this last dispensation to him, Moroni recorded them upon the plates. The following list comprises Moroni's prophecies contained in the last three books within the Book of Mormon:

1. No one shall have the plates to get financial gain even though the plates contain a considerable amount of gold (Mormon 8:14).
2. Whoever brings the plates to light will be blessed of the Lord (vv 14, 15).
3. The golden plates shall be brought out of darkness and will shine forth by the power of God (v 26).
4. In the day the plates are revealed it will be taught that miracles are done away (v 26).
5. The plates shall come as one will speak from the dead (v 26).
6. The era in which the plates will come forth will be troubled by secret combinations and works of darkness (v 27).
7. The book will come forth at a time that the power of God is denied (v 28).
8. Churches will be defiled because of pride (v 28).

9. Church leaders and teachers will envy those who belong to their churches (Mormon 8:28-37).
10. There will be great destruction, e.g. fires, tempests and vapors of smoke, in foreign lands (v 29).
11. There will be wars and rumors of wars and earthquakes in divers locations (v 30).
12. There will be great pollutions upon the face of the earth, e.g., murders, robbing, lying, deceivings, whoredoms, and all manner of abominations. It will be taught that God will uphold such at the last day (v 31).
13. Sins will be forgiven for money (v 32).
14. Very fine apparel will be a mark of the day because of pride and all manner of iniquities (v 36).
15. Every church has become polluted because of pride (v 36).
16. They love their money, substance, fine apparel and the adorning of their churches more than they love the poor and they needy, the sick and afflicted (v 37).
17. When the Lord comes, the earth shall be rolled as a scroll and the elements shall melt with fervent heat (9:2).
18. "This is a choice land, and whatsoever nation shall possess it shall be free from bondage . . . captivity, and from all other nations . . . if they will serve the God of the land, who is Jesus Christ . . ." (Ether 2:12).
19. The future translator (Joseph Smith) may be privileged to "show the plates unto those who shall assist to bring forth this work" (5:1-5).
20. Three witnesses shall be shown the plates by the power of God (vv 1-5).
21. Three sets of witnesses, the three witnesses, the eight witnesses, and the Godhead, shall all stand as a testimony against the world at the last day who reject this work (v 4).
22. Whatever nation shall uphold secret combinations until they get power and gain and spread over that nation shall be destroyed (8:22).
23. Moroni prophesied of a specific wicked combination in the last days that would attempt to overthrow the freedom of all lands. It will bring to pass destruction (Ether 8:25).
24. The Lamanites shall receive the Holy Ghost (Moroni 10:1-7).

25. Moroni shall be at the judgment bar of God where God shall ask the world's inhabitants, "Did I not declare my words unto you, which were written by this man?" (Moroni 10:27).

It is significant to note how many prophecies are directly related to Moroni's continued service in the last days.

Moroni Abridges the Book of Ether

After Moroni's return, he writes nearly two more chapters on his fathers record, Mormon 8:14–9:37, which contain many prophecies that he had seen of this last dispensation. He then seems to assume that this then really completes his work with the plates and once again ends his writings with an appropriate conclusion. But sometime later he returns and abridges the book of Ether, which itself is an abridgment of the 2,000-year history of the Jaredite civilization, made on 24 plates of gold by Ether, the last Jaredite prophet. The book of Ether was discovered by the Nephites about 92 BC, and translated by the prophet Mosiah with the aid of the Urim and Thummim (see Mosiah 28:11–19). The 24 plates containing Ether's abridgment appear to have been passed down, along with Mosiah's translation of them, from prophet to prophet until they came into Mormon's hands.

In wondering why Moroni included his abridgment of Ether's work on the plates of Mormon, we have to assume Mormon told him that he had intended to include those things "hereafter; for behold, it is expedient that all people should know the things which are written in this account" (Mosiah 28:19). Moroni completed the abridgment of the book of Ether on the plates of Mormon, which we often call the Gold Plates.

The Sealed Portion of the Book of Mormon

While abridging the Jaredite records, Moroni was so impressed with the writings of the first prophet of that gospel dispensation, referred to in the Book of Mormon as "the brother of Jared," that he wrote, "There never were greater things made manifest than those which were made manifest unto the brother of Jared" (Ether 4:4).

Prior to leading his people from the tower of Babel to the New World, the brother of Jared received a series of revelations, the Lord

personally talking with him from a cloud (Ether 2:4). The premortal Savior explained that the Jaredites' inheritance "is a land which is choice above all other lands; wherefore he that doth possess it shall serve God or shall be swept off" (v 10).

As the brother of Jared grew spiritually, the Lord taught him greater truths. He said to him, "never has man come before me with such exceeding faith as thou hast" (Ether 3:9). Finally, the Lord showed himself to the brother of Jared explaining "for never has man believed in me as thou hast" (v 15). In addition to this great theophany, Jesus showed him "all the inhabitants of the earth which had been, and also all that would be; and he, withheld them not from his sight, even unto the ends of the earth" (v 25). The Lord commanded the brother of Jared to write the visions in a language that could not be read and seal them up (v 22). The Lord gave his prophet two stones to enable a future translator to read the language which had been confounded (see vv 22–27).

The Lord told the brother of Jared that the things which he saw and heard should not be revealed to the world until after Jesus should glorify his name in the flesh (Ether 3:21). In keeping with this command these great revelations were not revealed to the Nephites by king Mosiah in 92 BC. They were made available to the Nephites after Jesus ascended to heaven in AD 34, and they enjoyed them for several generations. Moroni was also commanded to write his own words and seal them all up with the interpreters (4:4–5). The Lord told Moroni that when the Gentiles in the last days exercise faith in Christ even as the brother of Jared did, then will they have the words of the brother of Jared "even to the unfolding unto them all my revelations" (v 7).

The Size of the Sealed Portion of the Book of Mormon

We are not told specifically how many of the Book of Mormon plates were sealed, but Elder Orson Pratt stated that it was two-thirds of them. This figure has been widely accepted because of the popularity of Elder Pratt's writings (see *Journal of Discourses* 3:347). David Whitmer, one of the three special witnesses who actually saw the plates is reported to have said that "about the half of the book was sealed" (Poulson 2). Elder George Q. Cannon wrote that one-third of the plates were sealed (25), while the Prophet Joseph

Smith simply stated, "The volume was something near six inches in thickness, a part of which was sealed" (*History of the Church* 4:537). If the highest estimate is correct and two-thirds of the plates were sealed, that would mean there are the equivalent of 1,062 pages sealed since there are 531 pages in the current Book of Mormon. That would make a total of 1,593 possible pages had the whole set of plates been translated. Since Moroni engraved the sealed-portion plates as well as 51 pages in the Book of Mormon, his total of 1,113 pages written would be about 70 percent of the total plates delivered to Joseph Smith.

If the smaller estimate is correct, then the numbers would be lower with about 266 pages sealed, making a total of 797 pages. Moroni would then have written 317 pages, or approximately 40 percent of the plates handed to Joseph Smith (see Peterson 47). However much Moroni wrote, he clearly fulfilled a very important writing assignment, possibly even larger than father.

Many Miles Traveled and Many Sites Dedicated

Book of Mormon geography is not an exact science, and Church leaders do not often specify exact locations of Book of Mormon sites. Relationship-type maps are found in Church manuals and periodicals, showing, for example, the land of Zarahemla was north of the land of Lehi-Nephi, and the land of Desolation was north of the narrow neck of land, but we are not instructed just where those lands are presently located. In the last fifty years theories of the geography and archeology of the Book of Mormon have proliferated. With the increased participation in travel to Central and South America, and with the popularity of antiquities, ancient history, and geographical documents, many Latter-day Saints have turned their interests to the external evidences of the Book of Mormon. But those theories remain theories, and there is no hard evidence of specific Book of Mormon lands.

Moroni in Manti, Utah

Some members of the Church are aware that at the dedication of the site for the temple in Manti, Utah, the following incident took place:

At a conference held in Ephraim, Sanpete County, June 25th, 1875, nearly all the speakers expressed their feelings to have a temple built in Sanpete County, and gave their views as to what point and where to build it, and to show the union that existed, Elder Daniel H. Wells said "Manti," George Q. Cannon, Brigham Young, Jr., John Taylor, Orson Hyde, Erastus Snow, Franklin D. Richards, Lorenzo Young, and A. M. Musse said "Manti stone quarry." I have given the names in the order in which they spoke. At 4 p.m. that day President Brigham Young said: "The Temple should be build on Manti stone quarry." Early on the morning of April 25, 1877, President Brigham Young asked Brother Warren S. Snow to go with him to the Temple hill. Brother Snow says: "We two were alone: President Young took me to the spot where the Temple was to stand; we went to the southeast corner, and President Young said: "Here is the spot where the prophet Moroni stood and dedicated this piece of land for a Temple site, and that is the reason why the location is made here, and we can't move it from this spot; and if you and I are the only persons that come here at high noon today, we will dedicate this ground." (Whitney 436)

That Moroni dedicated the Manti Temple site is one of the few statements the Brethren have made connecting a Book of Mormon figure with a specific current place and action. This aids us in documenting one of Moroni's travels and priesthood assignments. Another reference happened when William McBride, patriarch from the Richfield Utah Stake, spoke at a prayer meeting in St. George in January 1881. After recalling many experiences from the Nauvoo period and quoting the Prophet Joseph Smith on many issues, Patriarch McBride referred to

the Route the old Nephites took travelling to Cumorah from the south and south west; of having to bury their tr[e]asures as they journeyed and finally burying the Records and precious things in the Hill Cumorah; of Moroni dedicating the Temple site of what we now call St. George, Nauvoo, Jackson Co., Kirtland, and others we know not of as yet. (Walker 2:525-26)

Two Interesting Maps

Several years ago, I came across two copies of a map in the Archives Division of the Historical Department of the Church relative to Moroni's North American journeys (see Figures 1 and 2). On the back of the map in Figure 1 is written the following:

A chart, and description of Moroni's travels through this country. Got it from Br. Robert Dickson. He got it from Patriarch Wm. McBride at Richfield in the Sevier and also from Andrew M. Hamilton of same place. And they got it from Joseph Smith the Prophet.

On the map "land Bountifull [sic]" is listed in "Sentral [sic] America." The cartographer wrote "starting point" below the reference to Central America. Above the "land Bountifull" is "Sand hills in south part of Arizona," and above it to the left is "Salt Lake." To the right is "Independens, Jackson Co, Mo," and above that is "Adam on Diamon, Davis Co, Mo." To the right of that is "Nauvoo, Hancock C. Ill." Below that is "Mound Kinderhook, Pike, Co, Ill, 6 Plates Bell shape were found" (*were* was *was* on one copy). Then to the right and above that is "Kirtland, Ohio," and to the right of that is "Commorre [Cumorah], N.Y." Below this on the right-hand side of the map is written: "Moroni's Travels starting from Sentral America to the Sand hills Arizona then to Salt Lake U[tah], T[erritory], then to Adam on Diammon Mo, then to Nauvoo, Ill, then to Independence Mo, then to Kirtland Ohio then to Cumoro NY."

The second map appears to have been drawn by the same hand and is quite similar to the first, though it twice spells Arizona as Arisony (one "y" has an "a" written over it); "eden" is written near the circle identifying "Independense"; "where adam blessed his posterity" is written near the circle identifying "Adam on Diammon"; the "missisipy river" is listed near Nauvoo; Kirtland is twice misspelled "kertland"; and Cumorah is misspelled "Cunora" and "Cumora."

It is interesting to note that the brethren mentioned on these documents were contemporaries of the Prophet Joseph Smith, and they credited him with the notion that the travels of Moroni began in the land Bountiful, which was in Central America, and went through the western Great Basin area prior to going east to Cumorah in western New York. Why Moroni took the route he did is still without answers. These men stated that the Prophet Joseph believed Bountiful is in Central America while the Hill Cumorah, the burial place of the plates, is in New York State.

The Plates of the Book of Mormon Are Buried

Sometime around AD 421, Moroni took the sacred plates, the breastplate, and the Urim and Thummim to the Hill Cumorah and buried them near the top of the hill in a stone box that he made for them. The box was made of flat stones laid on the bottom and sides which were cemented together to make it waterproof. When the Prophet Joseph Smith first met the angel Moroni at the hill Cumorah

about 1,400 years later on the evening of 22 September 1823, Moroni showed him the sacred contents and told Joseph that the sacred objects had been “sealed by the prayer of faith” (Cowdery 198). The plates remained there until 27 September 1827, when Moroni gave them to Joseph to allow him to translate them into English.

Joseph Smith published the following in the July 1838 issue of the *Elders' Journal* in answer to the question: “How and where you obtain The Book of Mormon?” His reply:

“Moroni, the person who deposited the plates, from whence the Book of Mormon was translated, in a hill in Manchester, Ontario County, New York, being dead, and raised again therefrom, appeared unto me, and told me where they were; and gave me directions how to obtain them” (42–43).

The Death of Moroni

I have found only one account which speaks of Moroni's death:

At a meeting at Spanish Fork, Utah Co., in the winter of 1896, Brother Higginson stated in my presence that Thomas B. Marsh told him that the Prophet Joseph Smith told him (Thomas B. Marsh, he being then President of the Twelve), that he became very anxious to know something of the fate of Moroni, and in answer to prayer the Lord gave Joseph a vision, in which appeared a wild country and on the scene was Moroni after whom were six Indians in pursuit; he stopped and one of the Indians stepped forward and measured swords with him. Moroni smote him and he fell dead; another Indian advanced and contended with him; this Indian also fell by his sword; a third Indian then stepped forth and met the same fate; a fourth afterwards contended with him, but in the struggle with the fourth, Moroni, being exhausted, was killed. Thus ended the life of Moroni. (Evans)

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to highlight some of the lesser-known facts about the life of Moroni, one of the greatest prophets that has lived upon the earth. His contributions both during his mortal and his post-mortal ministries have affected and will yet affect the lives of literally millions of God's children.

Latter-day Saints and non-Mormons alike first identify Moroni as the angel, the “messenger sent from the presence of God” who visited the boy-prophet Joseph Smith (JS-H 1:33). He is probably the most easily identifiable person connected with the Restoration since

statues representing him appear on many temple spires heralding the glorious restoration mentioned in the book of Revelation. He is the angel flying “in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to them that dwell in the earth” (Rev 14:6). His picture is commonly seen on copies of the Book of Mormon, LDS jewelry, LDS military dog-tags, the official logo, and on tombstones for LDS servicemen. He is usually depicted as blowing a trumpet.

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