

ENCYCLOPEDIA OF MORMONISM



Edited by
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*The History, Scripture, Doctrine, and Procedure
of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*

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CHARACTERISTICS OF MORMON'S EDITING. The Book of Mormon is quite complicated. The foregoing summary of the plates and other records from which the book was derived is drawn from a number of scattered but consistent comments included in the present text. The narrative itself is often complex. For instance, in Mosiah 1–25, Mormon narrates the stories of three separate groups and subgroups of people—principally the people of Mosiah, of Limhi, and of Alma—with their respective histories and interactions with each other and with the Lamanites (*see* BOOK OF MORMON PEOPLES). The story might have been quite confusing, as it jumps from one people to another, and back and forth in time, but Mormon has kept it remarkably clear. Alma 17–26 is a lengthy flashback recounting the histories of several missionaries on the occasion of their reunion with old friends, and Alma 43–63 narrates the history of a war with the Lamanites, keeping straight the events that happened on two fronts.

Mormon's account might have been much more complex. He emphasizes that he is presenting less than one hundredth of the material available to him (e.g., W of M 1:5; 3 Ne. 26:6–7). Furthermore, his source materials give a lineage history of one family, Lehi and his descendants, and do not encompass all events in the ancient western world (Sorenson, 1985, pp. 50–56). Mormon further simplifies his record by continuing Jacob's practice of lumping diverse peoples into two major groups:

Now the people which were not Lamanites were Nephites; nevertheless, they were called Nephites, Jacobites, Josephites, Zoramites, Lamanites, Lemuelites, and Ishmaelites. But I, Jacob, shall not hereafter distinguish them by these names, but I shall call them Lamanites that seek to destroy the people of Nephi, and those who are friendly to Nephi I shall call Nephites, or the people of Nephi, according to the reigns of the kings [Jacob 1:13–14; *see also* Morm. 1:8–9].

The vast editing project that produced the Book of Mormon would require clear guidelines for selecting materials for inclusion. Mormon is quite explicit about the purpose of his abridgment. Like Nephi, he is writing a history to lead people to Christ, and he is writing specifically for the people of later times (2 Ne. 25:23; Morm. 7). The plates of Mormon were created to come forth in the latter days. Mormon is interested in pointing out the principles that will be of most use to such people, and his careful editing and his “thus” and

“thus we see” passages are all directed at making the moral lessons easier to identify and understand.

Finally, Mormon took his job as record keeper and abridger very seriously. He was commanded by God to make his record (title page to the Book of Mormon; 3 Ne. 26:12). Also, Nephite society had a strong tradition of the importance of written records, and this was one of the criteria by which they distinguished themselves from the more numerous Mulekites (Omni 1:14–19). Furthermore, the various plates seem to have been handed down from one prophet or king to another as sacred relics and symbols of authority (Mosiah 28:20; 3 Ne. 1:2). In addition, the Nephites had a ceremonial record exchange when different branches of the family were reunited (Mosiah 8:1–5; 22:14). Most important, the Nephites knew that they would be held responsible for and would be judged by what was written in the records, just as all people will be (2 Ne. 25:21–22; 33:10–15; Morm. 8:12).

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BOOK OF MORMON RELIGIOUS TEACHINGS AND PRACTICES

Most of the Book of Mormon is about a group of Israelites who were guided by prophets, had the doctrines and ordinances of the gospel of Jesus

Christ, but lived the law of Moses until the coming of Christ. After his resurrection, Jesus appeared to some of them, and organized his church, and for four generations they lived in peace and happiness. Many details about the religious teachings and practices of these people are found in the Book of Mormon. Latter-day Saints believe that these Christian teachings are applicable in the world today, both because the eternal DOCTRINE of God is as binding on one generation as on the next and because the contents of the Book of Mormon were selected and preserved by prophets with the modern world in mind. These teachings are also found in the revelations that established contemporary LDS practices and ordinances.

In 3 Nephi and Moroni, documents recorded by firsthand witnesses preserve many words of the resurrected Jesus and give the basic doctrines, covenants, and ordinances of his church. Some of the main points follow:

1. Jesus defined his doctrine. Ye must “repent, and believe in me . . . and be baptized in my name, and become as a little child. . . . This is my doctrine” (3 Ne. 11:32, 38–39). The promise is given that God will visit such people “with fire and with the Holy Ghost” (3 Ne. 11:35).

2. Jesus instructed the people to be baptized by immersion, and gave the words of the BAPTISMAL PRAYER (3 Ne. 11:26–27). Only those who were “accountable and capable of committing sin” were baptized (Moro. 8:9–15; cf. 6:3).

3. Jesus ordained twelve disciples and gave them AUTHORITY to baptize (3 Ne. 11:21–22). Moroni 2:2 preserves the words that Jesus spoke when he laid his hands on these disciples and gave them power to give the Holy Ghost (3 Ne. 18:36–37). The words the disciples used in subsequent ordinations of priests and teachers are found in Moroni 3:1–4.

4. The SACRAMENT PRAYERS are recorded in Moroni 4–5. The words of these prayers derive from the first-person expressions that Jesus spoke when he administered the sacrament in 3 Nephi 18:6–11.

5. The Nephite church met together often “to fast and to pray, and to speak one with another concerning the welfare of their souls, and . . . to partake of bread and wine, in remembrance of the Lord Jesus” (Moro. 6:5–6).

6. These Christians regularly renewed their covenant to keep the commandments Jesus had given them: for instance, to have no contention, anger, or derision; to offer a sacrifice of a broken heart and contrite spirit; to keep the law of chastity in thought and in deed; to love their enemies; to give sustenance to the poor; to do secret acts of charity; to pray alone and with others; to serve only God, not the things of the world; and to strive to become perfected like God and Jesus (3 Ne. 11–14; *see* SERMON ON THE MOUNT). They were promised that Jesus’ spirit would continue with them and that they would be raised up at the last day.

7. This church was led by Nephi³, one of the twelve disciples chosen by Jesus and sent out to preach the things they had heard him say and had seen him do (3 Ne. 27:1). The people were admonished to “give heed unto the words of these twelve” (3 Ne. 12:1).

8. At the Lord’s instruction, the church was called by the name of Jesus Christ, and members called on the Father in the name of Christ in all things (3 Ne. 27:8–9; *see* NAME OF THE CHURCH).

9. The disciples healed the sick and worked miracles in the name of Jesus (4 Ne. 1:5; *see* SICK, BLESSING THE).

10. They followed Jesus’ examples in prayer, reverencing and praising God, asking for forgiveness, and praying that the will of God would be done (3 Ne. 13:9–13; 19:16–35). The people were commanded to “pray in [their] families” (3 Ne. 18:21; *see* FAMILY PRAYER).

11. They had “all things common among them, every man dealing justly, one with another. . . . Therefore there were not rich and poor” (3 Ne. 26:19; 4 Ne. 1:3; *see* CONSECRATION).

12. As Jesus had instructed, his followers were strict in keeping iniquity out of their communities and synagogues, with “three witnesses of the church” being required to excommunicate offenders; nevertheless, all were helped, and those who sincerely repented were forgiven (3 Ne. 18:28–32; Moro. 6:7–8; *see* DISCIPLINARY PROCEDURES).

During the centuries before Christ, Nephite prophets had taught the fulness of the gospel and prepared the people for the coming of Jesus Christ. With respect to the points mentioned above, compare the following antecedents in Nephite history. Some can be traced back into an-

cient Israel; others were introduced at various times through inspiration or revelation:

1. The doctrine of Christ—faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, repentance, baptism, and the purging of sin by the fire of the Holy Ghost—was taught in the Book of Mormon as early as the time of Nephi₁ (2 Ne. 31). Nephite prophets frequently spoke about the “plan of redemption” or, as Alma called it, “the great plan of happiness” (Alma 42:8). They looked forward to the coming of God himself to earth to redeem mankind from their lost and fallen state. They knew that he would atone for the transgression of Adam and for all the sins of those who would “not procrastinate the day of [their] repentance” (Alma 34:33), and that all mankind would be physically resurrected and then judged according to the JUSTICE AND MERCY of God (Alma 40–42).

2. Covenantal baptisms were performed from the beginning of the record, notably by Alma₁ at the waters of Mormon (Mosiah 18). His baptismal prayer sought sanctification of the heart as the covenantor promised to serve God “even until death” so that he or she might be granted eternal life through the redemption of Christ (Mosiah 18:12–13). Alma’s group remained intact even after they took up residence among other Nephites, and those Nephites who submitted to baptism “after the manner he [had baptized] his brethren in the waters of Mormon” belonged to this church (Mosiah 25:18).

3. Centuries before the time of Christ, Nephite priests and teachers were consecrated (2 Ne. 5:26), appointed (Mosiah 6:3; Alma 45:22–23), or ordained by the laying-on of hands (Alma 6:1; cf. Num. 27:23). They watched over the church, stirred the people to remember their covenants (Mosiah 6:3), preached the law and the coming of the Son of God (Alma 16:18–19), and offered their firstlings in “sacrifice and burnt offerings according to the law of Moses” (Mosiah 2:3; cf. Deut. 15:19–23), which they understood to be a type of Christ (2 Ne. 11:4). Nephites and Lamanites had temples, the first one being built “after the manner of the temple of Solomon” (2 Ne. 5:16). The altar was a place of worship where the people assembled, “watching and praying continually, that they might be delivered from Satan, and from death, and from destruction” (Alma 15:17). Nephite priests also taught in synagogues, or gathering places, and ideally no one was excluded (2 Ne. 26:26; Alma 32:2–

12). Because they held the Melchizedek Priesthood (Alma 13:6–19), they could function in the ordinances of the Aaronic Priesthood even though they were not Levites. Nephite priests were ordained in a manner that looked “forward on the Son of God, [the ordination] being a type of his order” (Alma 13:16).

4. The covenantal language used by King BENJAMIN (c. 124 B.C.) was similar to the language of the Nephite sacrament prayers. Benjamin’s people witnessed that they were willing to keep God’s commandments, took upon them the name of Christ, and promised to “remember to retain the name written always in [their] hearts” (Mosiah 5:5–12; cf. Num. 6:27).

5. The Nephites gathered to fast and pray for spiritual blessings (Mosiah 27:22; Hel. 3:35). In addition, like their Israelite ancestors, they fasted in connection with mourning for the dead (Hel. 9:10; cf. 2 Sam. 3:35).

6. Covenant renewals were a long-standing part of the law of Moses, pursuant to which all men, women, and children were required to gather around the temple at appointed times to hear and recommit themselves to keep the law of God (Deut. 31:10–13; cf. Mosiah 2:5). Nephite religious law at the time of Alma₂ prohibited sorcery, idol worship, idleness, babbling, envy, strife, wearing costly apparel, pride, lying, deceit, malice, reviling, stealing, robbing, whoredom, adultery, murder, and all manner of wickedness (Alma 1:32; 16:18). In addition, Nephi₂ counseled against oppressing the poor, withholding food from the hungry, sacrilege, denying the spirit of prophecy, and deserting to the Lamanites (Hel. 4:12).

7. The righteous Nephites were accustomed to being led by prophets, inspired kings, high priests, and chief judges. These leaders kept the sacred records that were frequently cited in Nephite religious observances. The institutions of Nephite prophecy varied from time to time: some prophets were also kings; subsidiary prophets worked under King Benjamin (W of M 1:17–18); others, like ABINADI, were lone voices crying repentance. Their surviving messages, however, were constant and accurate: they preached the gospel and the coming of Christ, and they knew that when he came he would ordain twelve authorized leaders both in the East (1 Ne. 1:10; 11:29) and in the West (1 Ne. 12:7–10).

8. The name of Jesus Christ was revealed to the early Nephite prophets (2 Ne. 10:3; 25:19), and thereafter the Nephites prayed and acted in the name of Jesus Christ (2 Ne. 32:9; Jacob 4:6). Alma₁ called his followers “the church of Christ” (Mosiah 18:17).

9. Like the Israelite prophets, the Nephite prophets performed miracles in the name of the Lord. As had Elijah (1 Kgs. 17), for example, Nephi₂ closed the heavens and caused a famine (Hel. 11:4), and Nephi₃ raised the dead and healed the sick (3 Ne. 7:19–22).

10. The Nephites watched and prayed continually (Alma 15:17). They were counseled to pray three times a day—morning, noon, and night—for mercy, for deliverance from the power of the devil, for prosperity, and for the welfare of their families (Alma 34:18–25; cf. Ps. 55:17). They taught that effective prayer had to be coupled with charitable actions (Alma 34:26–29), which are necessary to retain a remission of sin (Mosiah 4:26).

11. Regarding wealth and possessions, many early Book of Mormon prophets condemned the evils of seeking power and riches. The cycle leading from prosperity to pride, wickedness, and then catastrophe was often repeated, echoing formulas characteristic of DEUTERONOMY. The righteous Nephites covenanted to give liberally to the poor and to bear one another’s burdens.

12. Typically, those who entered into the required covenant became “numbered” among the Nephites. If they transgressed, their names were “blotted out,” presumably being removed from a roster (Mosiah 5:11; 6:1). Detailed procedures for excommunicating transgressors were established by Alma₁, who was given authority by King MOSIAH₂ to judge members of the church. Forgiveness was to be extended “as often as [the] people repent” (Mosiah 26:29–30).

Teachings and practices such as these specifically prepared the way for the personal coming of Jesus Christ after his resurrection. Despite years of preparation, the immediate reaction of some of the Nephite multitude to the initial words of the resurrected Christ was still to wonder “what he would concerning the law of Moses” (3 Ne. 15:2). Even though the prophets had long explained the limited function of the law, it remained a sacred and integral part of their lives until it was fulfilled by Jesus (e.g., 2 Ne. 25:24–25; Alma 30:3; 3 Ne. 1:24).

When Jesus spoke, it became evident how old things “had become new” (3 Ne. 15:2).

The diversity of religious experience in the Book of Mormon is further seen in the great number of religious communities it mentions in varying situations. Outside of orthodox Nephite circles (whose own success varied from time to time), there were an extravagant royal cult of King Noah and his temple priests (Mosiah 11); a false, rivaling church in Zarahemla formed by Nehor (Alma 1); centers of worship among the Lamanites (Alma 23:2); the wicked and agnostic Korihor (Alma 30); an astounding aristocratic and apostate prayer stand (an elevated platform for a single worshipper) of the Zoramites (Alma 31:13–14); and secret combinations or societies with staunch oath-swearing adherents intent on murder and gain (3 Ne. 3:9). Frequent efforts were made by Nephite missionaries, such as Alma₂, Ammon, and Nephi₂, to convert people from these groups to the gospel of Jesus Christ and to organize them into righteous churches and communities. On occasion, the converts became more righteous than all their contemporaries. Even among the righteous, there were varying degrees of comprehension and knowledge, for the mysteries of God were imparted by God and his prophets according to the diligence of the hearers (Alma 12:9–11).

Many doctrinal points and practical insights fill the pages of the Book of Mormon. A few of them are the following: Alma₂ explains that by his suffering Jesus came to “know according to the flesh how to succor his people” (Alma 7:12). Alma₂ describes how faith may be nurtured into knowledge (Alma 32). Benjamin identifies sin as “rebellion against God” (Mosiah 2:36–37) and presents a hopeful outlook for all who will “yield to the enticings of the Holy Spirit and put off the natural man” (Mosiah 3:19). Alma₂ depicts the condition of spirits after death as they return to God, “who gave them life” (Alma 40:11). Jacob speaks poignantly of the nakedness of the unrepentant, who will stand filthy before the judgment of God (2 Ne. 9:14). Benjamin extols the “blessed and happy state” of the righteous who taste the love and goodness of God (Mosiah 2:41; 4:11). And Lehi states the purpose of existence: “Men are that they might have joy” (2 Ne. 2:25). The Book of Mormon teaches the one pathway to eternal happiness by numerous inspiring images, instructions, and examples.

Many Book of Mormon prophetic teachings have already been fulfilled (e.g., 1 Ne. 13; 2 Ne. 3;

Hel. 14), but several still look to the future. One reason some people were puzzled when Jesus declared he had fulfilled the law and the prophets was that many prophecies of Isaiah, Nephi¹, and others remained open—in particular, the Nephites had not yet been reunited with a redeemed people of Israel. Jesus explained: “I do not destroy that which hath been spoken concerning things which are to come” (3 Ne. 15:7). Yet to be fulfilled in the prophetic view of the Book of Mormon are promises that the branches of scattered Israel will be gathered in Christ and will combine their records into one (2 Ne. 29:13–14), that the remnants of Lehi’s descendants will be greatly strengthened in the Lord (2 Ne. 30:3–6; 3 Ne. 21:7–13), and that a great division will occur: a New Jerusalem will be built in the Western Hemisphere by the righteous (3 Ne. 21:23; Ether 13:1–9), while the wicked will be destroyed (1 Ne. 30:10). “Then,” Jesus said, “shall the power of heaven come down among them; and I also will be in the midst” (3 Ne. 21:25).

[See also Jesus Christ in the Book of Mormon.]

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Most Latter-day Saint doctrinal writings refer to the Book of Mormon on particular topics, but no comprehensive analysis of Nephite religious experience as such has been written.

In general, see Sidney B. Sperry, *Book of Mormon Compendium* (Salt Lake City, 1968); and Rodney Turner, “The Three Nephite Churches of Christ,” in *The Keystone Scripture*, ed. P. Cheesman, pp. 100–126 (Provo, Utah, 1988).

For a cultural anthropologist’s approach to Nephite religious institutions and practices, see John L. Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City, 1985).

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BOOK OF MORMON STUDIES

Since the publication of the BOOK OF MORMON in 1830, a substantial amount of material analyzing, defending, and attacking it has been published. Studies of this complex record have taken various approaches, for the book itself invites close scrutiny and rewards patient and reflective research.

For most Latter-day Saints the primary purpose of scripture study is not to prove to themselves the truth of scriptural records—which they

already accept—but to gain wisdom and understanding about the teachings of these sacred writings and to apply in daily life gospel principles learned there. Because of the origins of the Book of Mormon, however, many people have also explored the secondary features of this document: its vocabulary, style, factual assertions, main themes, and subtle nuances.

Book of Mormon research has generally followed many of the same forms as biblical research. In both fields, writings range from expository texts to doctrinal, historical, geographical, textual, literary, and comparative commentaries. But there are also several salient differences. For example, unlike the authors of the Bible, the prophets, compilers, and abridgers of the Book of Mormon frequently state explicitly the dates when they worked, their purposes in writing, and the sources from which they drew, thus clarifying many compositional and interpretive issues; furthermore, academic and archaeological studies of the Book of Mormon are more limited than in biblical research because the earliest extant text is Joseph SMITH’s 1829 English translation and the precise locations of Book of Mormon settlements are unknown. Nevertheless, a significant number of internal and comparative analyses have been pursued. The works of the following individuals are most notable.

ALEXANDER CAMPBELL. The founder of the Disciples of Christ and a colleague of Sidney RIGDON before Rigdon converted to Mormonism, Alexander Campbell (1788–1866) composed a response to the Book of Mormon that he published on February 7, 1831, in his paper the *Millennial Harbinger* (reprinted as a pamphlet called *Delusions*). In it, Campbell challenged the idea that the Book of Mormon had been written by multiple ancient prophets and attacked the character of Joseph Smith. He said that the book was solely the product of Joseph Smith, written by him alone and “certainly conceived in one cranium” (p. 13). Campbell claimed that the book simply represents the reflections of Joseph Smith on the social, political, and religious controversies of his day: “infant baptism, ordination, the trinity, regeneration, repentance, justification, the fall of man, the atonement, transubstantiation, fasting, penance, church government, religious experience, the call to the ministry, the general resurrection, eternal punishment, who may baptize, and even the question of