

General Comments on Mormon

Large and Small Plates

We are informed in 2:18 that Mormon is making two sets of records, one more detailed in addition to the record we presently have. Thus, Mormon continues the tradition of the large and small plates started by Nephi.

It seems odd Mormon would write a more detailed record as he knows full well the Nephites are doomed to extinction. So, who is he writing the more detailed record for? He may simply be doing it out of duty with respect to the concept of 3 Ne. 27:23-26. Or, he may have written the more detailed record first, and then this condensed account by editorializing the larger record afterwards as 2:18 and 6:6 suggest.

Perhaps Mormon's larger account and all the records of the Nephites are still preserved somewhere, yet to be revealed to man. Along this line is the Brigham Young Quote concerning something Oliver Cowdery apparently said:

When Joseph got the Plates, the angel instructed him to carry them back to the Hill Cumorah, which he did. Oliver Cowdery says that when Joseph and he went there, the hill opened, and they walked into a cave, in which there was a large and spacious room. He says that he did not think, at the time, whether they had the light of the sun or artificial light, but it was as light as day. They laid the Plates on a table. It was a large table that stood in the middle of the room. Under this table there was a pile of plates as much as two feet high, and there were altogether in this room more plates than many wagon loads. They were piled up in the corners and along the walls. The first time they went there, the Sword of Laban hung upon the wall, but when they went again, it had been taken down and laid upon the table across the Gold Plates. It was unsheathed, and on it was written these words, "This Sword will never be sheathed again until the kingdoms of this world become the Kingdom of our God and His Christ." (Journal of Discourses, Vol. 19, p. 38)

As appealing as the imagery may be, this statement is not reliable. There is no firsthand account on the matter by Cowdery, and Young doesn't indicate when or under what circumstances Cowdery related this to him. Furthermore, it contradicts what Smith said of the return of the plates to Moroni, cf. JS-H 1:60. It also doesn't correspond with Smith's retrieving the original plates from the cemented stone box (cf.

JS-H 1:51-52), as why would there be a separate cemented stone box if there were a full library nearby? The attributed statement also states the two of them went back twice, once the sword was sheathed and the second time the sword was unsheathed. No explanation is given for the second visit, assuming the first was to replace the BofM plates.

The lack of reliability of this particular quote does not impeach the possibility of there being something like it elsewhere. It is possible there is another larger library of records, the original Cumorah (cf. 6:6) or perhaps the original hill Shim (cf. 1:4), somewhere else which still contains all of the Nephite records. And, perhaps someday, these will be revealed to their fullest extent, cp. 2 Ne. 30:16-18.

Textual Quality

Mormon's account alternates between spiritual and secular events treating the history in a linear fashion. For example, in ch. 1 Mormon recounts Ammaron's commissioning him to take over the plates (v. 1-5), discusses the expansion of the population and subsequent wars (v. 6-12), then comments on the spiritual condition of the population (v. 13-19). This pattern continues through ch. 7 with Mormon's farewell to the Lehite remnant.

This pattern is a simple one and requires relatively little time to compose. We are informed why Mormon took such a straightforward approach in 6:6. When he saw the imminent destruction of the Nephites he wrote his final portion of the record (ch. 1-5) while the armies were gathering to Cumorah for the final battle and then apparently appended his closing comments and farewell after the battle at Cumorah (v. 6-7). During this time Mormon would have been under considerable stress preparing for the final conflict (cf. 6:1-6) and then fleeing for his life from Lamanites (cf. 8:2-3). He certainly wouldn't have had the luxury of writing under ideal spiritual or creative circumstances.

When we compare and contrast this text to that of the original Nephi we see that Nephi's is longer, structurally complex, and contains numerous quotes of other authors. Mormon's present text is quite the opposite. This comparison is instructive in that we can discern how circumstances influence the manner in which Scriptural texts are written. Mormon was clearly a capable and inspired author, but under the great stress of the events of his later life the text is not of the same quality as his earlier writings. This is not to suggest the text is not Scripture or uninspired, only that it is not what it might have been had Mormon had more time and better circumstances.

Another plainer example would be that of the book of Omni. A series of authors weigh in only out of a sense of duty, with

one of them confessing he was a sinner and the rest simply passing it on. The priestly line of Nephi and Jacob had clearly fallen apart so the small plates languish and are largely forgotten.

Both of these examples indicate that Scripture composition is a complex matter. It is much more than God dictating words to people. It is often influenced by the quality of the people, or the lack thereof, God is dealing with at the time and the circumstances those people are in.

Comments on Mormon 1

1 AND now I, Mormon, make a record of the things which I have both seen and heard, and call it the Book of Mormon. 2 And about the time that Ammaron hid up the records unto the Lord, he came unto me, (I being about ten years of age, and I began to be learned somewhat after the manner of the learning of my people) and Ammaron said unto me: I perceive that thou art a sober child, and art quick to observe; 3 Therefore, when ye are about twenty and four years old I would that ye should remember the things that ye have observed concerning this people; and when ye are of that age go to the land Antum, unto a hill which shall be called Shim; and there have I deposited unto the Lord all the sacred engravings concerning this people. 4 And behold, ye shall take the plates of Nephi unto yourself, and the remainder shall ye leave in the place where they are; and ye shall engrave on the plates of Nephi all the things that ye have observed concerning this people. 5 And I, Mormon, being a descendant of Nephi, (and my father's name was Mormon) I remembered the things which Ammaron commanded me.

v1-5 Mormon has completed the task of condensing and editorializing the historical records that preceded him, so he now addresses the events which have occurred during his own lifetime (v. 1).

When Mormon was about ten years old, Ammaron hid up the plates and, observing Mormon's character, speaks to him concerning the plates (v. 2). Ammaron tells him concerning all of the records of the Nephites (v. 3), but instructs him to only keep up the large plates of Nephi (v. 4). As Mormon is a descendant of the original Nephi, he doesn't forget the things Ammaron tells him (v. 5).

v1-3 Ammaron's comments in v. 3 concerning the sacred nature of the record and hiding it for the Lord's sake, as well as his being inspired in 4 Ne. 1:48, indicate he was a God-fearing man. It is therefore safe to assume Ammaron's decision to select Mormon was inspired.

There is no indication in the text that Ammaron and Mormon were related. Ammaron being a descendant of the priestly line of Alma and Mormon being a descendant of what would have been the kingly line of Nephi (cf. 8:13) had the system of judges not been instituted, suggests they were not closely related.

v5 "being a descendant of Nephi", we are informed Mormon is a direct descendant of Nephi (8:13) as well as a pure Lehite (cf. 3 Ne. 5:20), suggesting there was no mixing with Mulekites in his lineage. Aside from the record being scripture, it was also family history for him. Being of the lineage of Nephi he easily remembered Ammaron's command to get the plates of Nephi and add to them.

6 And it came to pass that I, being eleven years old, was carried by my father into the land southward, even to the land of Zarahemla. 7 The whole face of the land had become covered with buildings, and the people were as numerous almost, as it were the sand of the sea.

8 And it came to pass in this year there began to be a war between the Nephites, who consisted of the Nephites and the Jacobites and the Josephites and the Zoramites; and this war was between the Nephites, and the Lamanites and the Lemuelites and the Ishmaelites. 9 Now the Lamanites and the Lemuelites and the Ishmaelites were called Lamanites, and the two parties were Nephites and Lamanites. 10 And it came to pass that the war began to be among them in the borders of Zarahemla, by the waters of Sidon. 11 And it came to pass that the Nephites had gathered together a great number of men, even to exceed the number of thirty thousand. And it came to pass that they did have in this same year a number of battles, in which the Nephites did beat the Lamanites and did slay many of them. 12 And it came to pass that the Lamanites withdrew their design, and there was peace settled in the land; and peace did remain for the space of about four years, that there was no bloodshed.

v6-12 When he is eleven, Mormon and his father go to Zarahemla (v. 6), where the city had grown to spread over all the land (v. 7). War breaks out between the Lamanites and Nephites (v. 8-9) in the borders of Zarahemla (v. 10). The Nephites have gathered a considerable force and over the course of a series of battles they beat the Lamanites back. After heavy casualties (v. 11) the Lamanites give up their assault on the Nephites. They have peace for a few years (v. 12).

v6 Mormon is taken by his father to the land of Zarahemla, which is where war breaks out (cf. v. 10) and we are informed the Nephites had deliberately gathered 30,000 men to that location for the war (cf. v. 11). It is reasonable to assume Mormon's father was part of this gathering for war.

This and Mormon's early start in a military career (cf. 2:1-2) suggest his father was involved in such things, and probably educated Mormon along those lines. Having a father as a prominent military leader would explain why he was subsequently chosen at such a young age to lead the armies. We might also speculate that Mormon's father died in the conflict mentioned in v. 11 as after this there is no further mention of him and Mormon is chosen as a military leader.

13 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. 14 And there were no gifts from the Lord, and the Holy Ghost did not come upon any, because of their wickedness and unbelief. 15 And I, being fifteen years of age and being somewhat of a sober mind, therefore I was visited of the Lord, and tasted and knew of the goodness of Jesus. 16 And I did endeavor to preach unto this people, but my mouth was shut, and I was forbidden that I should preach unto them; for behold they had wilfully rebelled against their God; and the beloved disciples were taken away out of the land, because of their iniquity. 17 But I did remain among them, but I was forbidden to preach unto them, because of the hardness of their hearts; and because of the hardness of their hearts the land was cursed for their sake. 18 And these Gadianton robbers, who were among the Lamanites, did infest the land, insomuch that the inhabitants thereof began to hide up their treasures in the earth; and they became slippery, because the Lord had cursed the land, that they could not hold them, nor retain them again. 19 And it came to pass that there were sorceries, and witchcrafts, and magics; and the power of the evil one was wrought upon all the face of the land, even unto the fulfilling of all the words of Abinadi, and also Samuel the Lamanite.

v13-19 Despite the lack of conflict with the Lamanites, the wickedness among the Nephites results in internal problems. The three beloved disciples are no longer present (v. 13) and spiritual gifts and blessings effectively cease because of sin (v. 14).

Despite his relative youth, Mormon knows the love and word of the Lord (v. 15) so he tries to preach repentance to the people. But, his mouth is shut and he is forbidden from doing so (v. 16) because of their deliberate rebellion. The result is they are cursed (v. 17).

The Nephites are cursed with a resurgence of the Gadianton Robbers, who steal everything they can get their hands on (v. 18), and also many evil practices which exploit the power of the devil. All of this occurs just as the prophets had predicted (v. 19, cp. Mos. 12:8, Mos. 18:16-18, Hela. 12:18, Hela. 13:18).

v15 "tasted", Mormon uses imagery probably derived from either Alma's seed of faith (cf. Alma 32:42) or Lehi's tree of life (cf. 1 Ne. 8:11-12), or both.

v16 "my mouth was shut", given the general context of v. 16-17 we would assume it is the Lord who forbids Mormon from preaching as opposed to anyone else. In v. 16 the Lord takes away the beloved disciples and then in v. 17 the Lord curses them because of their wickedness. These verses present the Lord as the active agent, so following this pattern we would conclude He is the one who forbid's Mormon's preaching as well.

v19 "sorceries", in the KJV English this term generally refers to alchemy, necromancy and magical arts. As the term appears in conjunction with "witchcrafts, and magics" we can assume Mormon is referring more specifically to alchemy (as does John in Revelation), which in modern terms would be referring to hallucinatory drug use.

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