

General Comments on Words of Mormon

Mormon wrote this insertion late in his life, just before giving the plates to Moroni (v. 1). However, he is also commenting on things he did early in his career as editor-in-chief of the Nephite records (v. 3).

Early in his career, he had already abridged the large plates of Nephi from Lehi to Benjamin when he discovered the small plates of Nephi (v. 3). He either didn't know they existed and stumbled upon them, or he was apprized of their existence through his abridgement of the large plates. It is likely the latter is the case as v. 3 says he "searched among the records...and I found these plates" suggesting he knew he was looking for something specific rather than "I came upon these plates". Now at the end of his career (v. 5), he has decided to insert the small plates of Nephi "as is" into his record with this piece of explanatory text because he deems their content beneficial (v. 4) and the Spirit is encouraging him to do so (v. 7).

The next question is, "Why don't we have the rest of Mormon's abridgement from Nephi to Mosiah?" We know 116 pages entitled "The Book of Lehi" was lost when Smith lent it to Harris, so that explains what happened there. But what of the rest of Mormon's abridgement, which he references in v. 3 when he says "I had made an abridgement from the plates of Nephi, down to the reign of this king Benjamin"? Smith had already translated it before the 116 pages of the Book of Lehi were lost. Then, after the loss of those pages, the Lord told Smith to forget about the portion of the text he has already translated but retained, and to translate the small plates of Nephi instead (cf. D&C 10:38-42).

Thus, Smith translated Mormon's abridgement from Lehi to Benjamin. He lent 116 pages of this, which was just the portion dealing with Lehi, to Harris and it was lost. This apparently left Smith with the translation of Mormon's abridgement from Nephi to Benjamin, that "which you have retained" (cf. D&C 10:41). But, the Lord told him not to publish that, but to use the record of the small plates of Lehi in their place. Whatever happened to Smith's translation of Mormon's abridgement from Nephi to Benjamin is unknown to us.

Comments on Words of Mormon

1 AND now I, Mormon, being about to deliver up the record which I have been making into the hands of my son Moroni, behold I have witnessed almost all the destruction of my people, the Nephites. 2 And it is many hundred years after the coming of Christ that I deliver these records into the hands of my son; and it supposeth me that he will witness the entire destruction of my people. But may God grant that he may survive them, that he may write somewhat concerning them, and somewhat concerning Christ, that perhaps some day it may profit them.

v1-2 Mormon informs the reader of the context and chronology of the present writing. As he is inserting something into the text that chronologically out of step, explanation is necessary. He laments the destruction of the Nephites, and hopes his son Moroni, whom he is turning his abridgement over to, survives the annihilation of the Nephites.

3 And now, I speak somewhat concerning that which I have written; for after I had made an abridgment from the plates of Nephi, down to the reign of this king Benjamin, of whom Amaleki spake, I searched among the records which had been delivered into my hands, and I found these plates, which contained this small account of the prophets, from Jacob down to the reign of this king Benjamin, and also many of the words of Nephi. 4 And the things which are upon these plates pleasing me, because of the prophecies of the coming of Christ; and my fathers knowing that many of them have been fulfilled; yea, and I also know that as many things as have been prophesied concerning us down to this day have been fulfilled, and as many as go beyond this day must surely come to pass--

5 Wherefore, I chose these things, to finish my record upon them, which remainder of my record I shall take from the plates of Nephi; and I cannot write the hundredth part of the things of my people. 6 But behold, I shall take these plates, which contain these prophesyings and revelations, and put them with the remainder of my record, for they are choice unto me; and I know they will be choice unto my brethren. 7 And I do this for a wise purpose; for thus it whispereth me, according to the workings of the Spirit of the Lord which is in me. And now, I do not know all things; but the Lord knoweth all things which are to come; wherefore, he worketh in me to do according to his will. 8 And my prayer to God is concerning my brethren, that they may once again come to the knowledge of God, yea, the redemption of Christ; that they may once again be a delightsome people.

v3-8 Mormon explains that some years earlier after abridging the large plates of Nephi from Lehi to Benjamin, he came upon the small plates of Nephi as well (v. 3). Now, many years after the fact, he decides to end his tenure as keeper of the plates (v. 5-6) by inserting the small plates of Nephi into his records because they please him (v. 4). He also feels the promptings of the Spirit in doing so, but is uncertain why (v. 7). He then

closes his explanation expressing his hope the record will go to future generations who will accept it (v. 8), just as all of his righteous predecessors did (cp. Enos 1:13, 18).

v3 "from the plates of Nephi down to the reign of this king Benjamin", while this phrase does not explicitly say he just finished abridging the record from Lehi to Benjamin, it is plain from cross reference with 3 Ne. 5:15 that he did write a condensed version of the large plates of Nephi from Lehi to his own time.

9 And now I, Mormon, proceed to finish out my record, which I take from the plates of Nephi; and I make it according to the knowledge and the understanding which God has given me. 10 Wherefore, it came to pass that after Amaleki had delivered up these plates into the hands of king Benjamin, he took them and put them with the other plates, which contained records which had been handed down by the kings, from generation to generation until the days of king Benjamin. 11 And they were handed down from king Benjamin, from generation to generation until they have fallen into my hands.

And I, Mormon, pray to God that they may be preserved from this time henceforth. And I know that they will be preserved; for there are great things written upon them, out of which my people and their brethren shall be judged at the great and last day, according to the word of God which is written.

12 And now, concerning this king Benjamin--he had somewhat of contentions among his own people. 13 And it came to pass also that the armies of the Lamanites came down out of the land of Nephi, to battle against his people. But behold, king Benjamin gathered together his armies, and he did stand against them; and he did fight with the strength of his own arm, with the sword of Laban. 14 And in the strength of the Lord they did contend against their enemies, until they had slain many thousands of the Lamanites. And it came to pass that they did contend against the Lamanites until they had driven them out of all the lands of their inheritance.

15 And it came to pass that after there had been false Christs, and their mouths had been shut, and they punished according to their crimes; 16 And after there had been false prophets, and false preachers and teachers among the people, and all these having been punished according to their crimes; and after there having been much contention and many dissensions away unto the Lamanites, behold, it came to pass that king Benjamin, with the assistance of the holy prophets who were among his people-- 17 For behold, king Benjamin was a holy man, and he did reign over his people in righteousness; and there were many holy men in the land, and they did speak the word of God with power and with authority; and they did use much sharpness because of the stiffneckedness of the people-- 18 Wherefore, with the help of these, king Benjamin, by laboring with all the might of his body and the faculty of his whole soul, and also the prophets, did once more establish peace in the land.

v9-18 Mormon closes the insertion with explanatory historical material providing a segue between the record of the small plates of Nephi and his own abridgement of the large plates of

Nephi (v. 9-18). Verse 10 picks up the historical record ending at Omni 1:30. Verse 11 is a parenthesis on the transmission of the Nephite record on plates.

Mormon then informs us concerning the early activities of Benjamin (v. 12-18). Initially, his reign was one filled with contention from both warring Lamanites without (v. 13-14) and apostate self-promoting religionist Nephites within (v. 15-16). But, Benjamin was a righteous man who was supported by many prophets among the Nephites, and by dealing with these contentions they established peace among the Nephites (v. 17-18).

v12 "contentions among his own people", i.e., the contents of v. 13-16.

v13-18 After a rather lengthy slouch into apostasy a great deal of conflict is required to get the Nephites out of it and establish peace. This is classical covenant theology at work, cp. Lev. 26:14-45.

v13 "with the sword of Laban", the sword appears to become a symbol of kingship. However, it would also be a tangible object from the Old World, proving their Israelite origins and therefore implicitly representing the Lord's covenant with them.

v14 "in the strength of the Lord", this is not an idle phrase meaning they militarily crushed the Lamanite invaders. This phrase figures prominently in King Benjamin's ensuing farewell speech where he repeatedly references the "Lord God Omnipotent".

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