

ZARAHEMLA RECORD

The Meaning of the Name "Mormon"



Issue 43
June 1989

by David Lamb

Tradition has taught us over the years that the Book of Mormon was so named for Mormon, the main abridger. While this is a logical assumption, it does raise an interesting question. Why would God's holy word be named after a man? The Holy Scriptures were not named after any one author nor was the Doctrine and Covenants called the "Book of Joseph Smith." Why then would the Book of Mormon be the exception to the rule and bear the name of a man? This was a question which I had carried in my mind for a number of years. However, during personal study in March of 1987, my mind was quickened and a new understanding given.

The name Mormon does not make reference to Mormon the abridger, it refers to the land of Mormon and the events which took place there. It was in the land of Mormon that Alma established the church of Christ after many years of transgression. It was in the land of Mormon that the Nephites once again became a covenant-keeping people. The events which took place in the land of Mormon evidently carried a special meaning for the Nephites from that time forward.

Identification of a Hebrew tradition and close reading of the text indicates that the word Mormon symbolically meant "restoration of the covenant." This will be further explained in the following paragraphs.

To properly explain the true Nephite connotation associated with the word Mormon, we must examine some background information and establish four basic principles which are as follows:

1. According to the book of Omni, the Nephite nation experienced a long period of transgression during which they lost contact with God.
2. A restoration of the covenant took place in the land of Mormon and this restoration was of great significance.
3. In many cases the ancient Hebrews/Nephites gave their children names which had specific significance. In turn, as part of their heritage, the children were taught the true significance of their names.
4. Mormon personally gives in-

formation concerning the sacred connotation associated with his name.

The Nephites lose contact with God

After the time of Enos and his son Jarom, the Nephites began to lose contact with God and his covenant which culminated in a long period of transgression. The climax of this gradual decline is found in the few words of Abinadom in Omni 1:17. Abinadom tells us he knows of no revelation or prophecy in his lifetime. This sad commentary tells us the spiritual condition of the nation.

This last book written on the small plates of Nephi portrays a picture of a spiritually deteriorating nation. We see the fulfillment of the covenant made to Lehi and his seed: if they will serve God, he will preserve them; if not, they will be destroyed.

Amaleki, the final writer in the book of Omni, tells of God's provision for those few Nephites who believe. He tells of God directing Mosiah to lead those who will follow

into the wilderness and eventually down to the land of Zarahemla.

Once again the Lord separated the righteous from the wicked.

Amaleki's final words include an invitation to "come unto Christ."

A Nephite restoration

Under Mosiah and then his son Benjamin, the Nephite nation once again turned to God. A group of Nephites, however, wanted to return to their original homeland in the land of Nephi. This group eventually settled in the land of Nephi and made their leader, Zeniff, the king. Upon Zeniff's death, his wicked son Noah became king.

In Mosiah 9:28-31 we find that after being driven from the court of wicked King Noah, Alma secretly began to teach the people the words of the prophet Abinadi. Alma gained a following of new believers who began to gather to a place called Mormon which was not far from the city of Nephi. While we are told in Mosiah 9:32 that the land of Mormon was so named by the king, there is no additional information pertaining to the origin or literal meaning of the word. Mosiah 9:33-49 tells us that the people repented, entered into a covenant with their Lord, were baptized in the waters of Mormon, and were called the church of Christ from that time forward. Thus we see that a great restoration took place in the land of Mormon. (This took place about twenty years before the covenants made by King Benjamin's people down in the land of Zarahemla.) In Mosiah 9:65-67 the author uses beautiful Hebraic poetry to express the great spiritual significance of the event which took place in this land. Years later we find God speaking to Alma in Mosiah 11:121-124, telling him that he and his people have been greatly blessed because of the restoration which took place. In effect, God is telling Alma that the event which took place in the land of Mormon was no small thing.

The naming of children

In the last phrase of Helaman 2:66 and continuing in verses 68 and 69, we have evidence of a beautiful Hebrew custom which was also carried on by the Nephites in the New World. It was a custom of the ancient Hebrews to oftentimes name a child after a great ancestor, particularly an ancestor who had been a spiritual leader. As described in verses 68 and 69, the parents of the child would then tell the child about the ancestor and his great deeds. The child would then be encouraged to identify with this respected person of the past and thus follow the example of his ancestor.

Behold, I have given unto you the names of our first parents who came out of the land of Jerusalem; And this I have done that when ye remember your names, That ye may remember them; And when ye remember them, Ye may remember their works; And when ye remember their works, Ye may know how that it is said and also written, That they were good.

It was also customary in some cases for children of Hebrew descent to be named after mountains or sites at which great events took place. The same rule applied to children who were named after mountains or great events; they were told about the heritage which was associated with their names. (Mountains or high places were considered sacred to the ancient Hebrews and their names carried sacred connotations.)

The meaning of the name "Mormon"

In Mormon 1:6 Mormon identifies his lineage. He states that he is a descendant of Nephi and that his father's name was Mormon. However, he does not state that he was named after his father and this should not be assumed. In fact, he

tell us in 3 Nephi 2:96 that he was not named after his father, but rather he was named after the land in which a great event took place—the restoration of Christ's covenant people, Christ's church.

And behold, I am called Mormon,
Being called after the land of Mormon,
The land in the which Alma did establish the church among his people;
Yea, the first church which was established among them after their transgression.

Mormon was not named after his father; he was named after the land of Mormon. He had been taught about his heritage by his parents and understood the sacred significance associated with the name Mormon. No doubt his father also bore the name Mormon for the same reason. In 3 Nephi 2:96 he gives us a clear indication that the name Mormon is symbolically synonymous with the restoration of the covenant which took place in the land of Mormon by Alma and his people.

A study of the title page of the Book of Mormon tells us its main purpose is to restore a knowledge of the covenants to the house of Israel. This adds weight to the understanding that the name Mormon was always associated with the place of the restoration of the covenant to the Nephites. In fact, the name Mormon became synonymous with the concept of restoring the covenants.

In light of this understanding, the Book of Mormon is not named for a man. It is named for the place where the covenant was restored. Symbolically the Book of Mormon bears the name "Book of the Restoration of the Covenant." Is it any wonder that God used this book to spearhead the Restoration Movement of the 1820's and 1830's? The purpose of the book as stated on the title page, "that they may know the covenants of the Lord," is confirmed even in the title. ZRF

The most neglected, underrated and misunderstood portion of the Book of Mormon contains significant information about the meaning and purpose of the book.

Moroni's Title Page

Ask someone what the first page of the Book of Mormon is called and the answer will probably be, "the preface." Ask who wrote it and Joseph Smith's name will inevitably come up. Both answers are inaccurate and the time has come to correct these misconceptions.

These mistaken ideas are not new. Even during his lifetime, Joseph Smith was confronted with these erroneous notions. He responded in his personal history in *Times and Seasons* (1842:943):

I wish to mention here, that the *title page* of the Book of Mormon is a literal translation, taken from the very last leaf, on the left hand side of the collection or book of plates, which contained the record which has been translated; the language of the whole running the same as all Hebrew writing in general; and that, said *title page* is not by any means a modern composition either of mine or of any other man's who has lived or does live in this generation. Therefore, in order to correct an error which generally exists concerning it, I give below that part of the *title page* of the English version of the Book of Mormon, which is a genuine and literal translation of the *title page* of the Original Book of Mormon, as recorded on the plates. . . The remainder of

the *title page* is of course, modern. (italics added)

Notice that Joseph refers to the "title page" five times; he has no doubt as to its purpose. He also states that it is a "literal translation, taken from... the plates." From the content of his statement it is clear that his intent is to refute the idea being circulated that it was a "modern composition." To further establish beyond all question what he means, he presents a complete transcript of the title page. Clearly it was not written by Joseph Smith, but most likely by Moroni, the last writer of the book. Following the title we find the words beginning with "An account written by the hand of Mormon. . ." This distinctive style of wording is employed throughout the Book of Mormon in the introductory headings which are called superscriptions. Moroni, as the last writer, used this writing device to create a "giant" superscription to the entire book. Understanding that the title page is a superscription is helpful in

THE BOOK OF MORMON.

AN ACCOUNT WRITTEN BY THE HAND OF MORMON
UPON PLATES TAKEN FROM THE
PLATES OF NEPHI.

Wherefore, it is an abridgment of the record of the people of Nephi, and also of 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 the way of 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 founded the language of the people, when they were building a tower to get to heaven: which is to shew 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.

MORONI

Title Page of the 1840 Edition

analyzing its content as an introductory summary for the entire Book of Mormon. (For more information on superscriptions, see ZR 37, 38.)

Poetic arrangement brings purpose into sharper focus

For years the frequent response to the question, "What is the purpose of the Book of Mormon?" has been that it is "a second witness" or "to the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ." We now know and can show by a poetic

arrangement that this is a sub-point following the word "also." The primary point stands out in the following alternating pattern:

- A written to the Lamanites who are a **remnant of the house of Israel**;
- B *and also to Jew and Gentile. . .*
- A' to shew unto the **remnant of the house of Israel. . .** that they might know the *covenants of the Lord...*
- B' *and also to the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ. . .*

The main purpose (A/A') of the Book of Mormon is that the Lamanites who are a remnant of the house of Israel "may know the covenants of the Lord." The italics "*and also to Jew and Gentile*" (B/B') give the secondary purpose.

David Lamb's testimony (in this issue) is that the name of the Book of Mormon symbolically stands for "Book of the Covenant" or "Book of the Restoration of the Covenant." Moroni's title page helps confirm this new understanding.

Placement of the title page in the editions

The title page is the first page in the 1830 First Edition and in the 1837 edition. The editors of the 1840 edition were the first to insert a page with the title and publishing information in front of Moroni's title page. The name "Moroni" was placed at the end of the title page in the 1840 edition and this was carried over in the 1874 and 1892 editions. We know that Joseph used the original manuscript to make some corrections in the 1840 edition. Was Moroni's name on the original manuscript? Unfortunately this portion no longer exists but it is plausible to assume that such was the case.

The first edition published by the Reorganization (1874) continued in the same form as the 1840 with the additional page inserted in front of Moroni's title page. However, the 1892 large-print edition removed the additional page. The 1908 Authorized Edition returned to the same form as the 1840 with the additional

page inserted before Moroni's title page. Following the title page is a three-page preface, written by the committee which prepared the 1908 edition for printing. Unfortunately, as a result of the additional pages, Moroni's title page which Joseph stated was translated from the plates has come to be called the "preface" by most people.

Let's begin today to correctly refer to Moroni's title page and remember that the primary purpose of the Book of Mormon as stated on the title page is to restore a knowledge of the covenants of the Lord to the heritage people. ^{ZRF}

Have you made your annual donation?

The date of your last contribution is on the top right side of the mailing label below.

We need to hear from you!

Editor-in-Chief Raymond C. Treat **Editor** Mya Lynn Treat **Copy Editor** Barbara Burrow **Assistants** Mary Lee Treat, Shirley Heater **Layout** Mya Lynn Treat **Art Consultant** J. Robert Farley Copyright © 1989 by Zarahemla Research Foundation. **Photo** page 3 courtesy of RLDS Church Library-Archives. No portion of this newsletter may be reproduced without permission. The *Zarahemla Record*, the newsletter of the Zarahemla Research Foundation is published on a bi-monthly basis. The *Record* is sent to all annual contributors to the Foundation. Contributions of any amount may be mailed to Zarahemla Research Foundation, P.O. Box 1727, Independence, MO 64055. The Zarahemla Research Foundation is a non-profit, tax-exempt corporation dedicated to Book of Mormon research. A major goal of the Foundation is to correlate information from the appropriate scientific fields to the Book of Mormon. Individual research in the areas of archaeology, geography, linguistics or doctrinal insights is encouraged. Such research, as well as personal testimonies, may be submitted to the editor for possible publication. Zarahemla Research Foundation is not associated with any specific religious organization and the work of the Foundation is funded completely by your donations.



Zarahemla Research Foundation
P. O. Box 1727
Independence, Missouri 64055

**Address Correction
Requested**

Non-Profit Org.
Bulk Rate
U. S. Postage
PAID
Independence,
Missouri
Permit No. 219

MOVING? PLEASE SEND US YOUR CHANGE OF ADDRESS!