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**Title** What the Book of Mormon Is (Continued)

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**Abstract** An analysis of the Words of Mormon to Helaman, including Mormon's abridgment between the small and large plates of Nephi. The teachings of Benjamin, Mosiah, Abinadi, Alma, and his son, Alma the Younger. Helaman's and Shiblon's writings in the book of Alma are set forth. Alma the Younger is to the Book of Mormon as Paul is to the New Testament. The book of Helaman covers fifty years of Nephite history.

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### **Mormon's Explanatory Notes**

#### **Words of Mormon**

Having examined the small plates of Nephi, or Division I, according to our plan of dividing the Book of Mormon in the last chapter, let us proceed to analyze Division II, "Mormon's Explanatory Notes." These "notes" are formally designated by the Nephite record as "The Words of Mormon" and occupy in our current edition less than two printed pages. Why does this little book of Mormon, if we may call it such, appear in the Nephite text between the small plates of Nephi and Mormon's abridgment of the large plates of Nephi? It appears that when Mormon began the task of abridging the Nephite scriptures, he commenced with the book of Lehi on the large plates. When he came to the reign

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*This originally appeared as chapter 5 on pages 55-64 of Our Book of Mormon.*

of King Benjamin, of whom Amaleki speaks in the last part of the book of Omni, he searched among the records in his possession and found the small plates of Nephi. These pleased him much, and, prompted by the Spirit of the Lord, he included them with the plates he had abridged. Because of the fact that they covered in point of time the same period as his abridgment of the book of Lehi, he probably deemed it advisable to add a little explanation for their presence among his collection of plates. In our last chapter, we explained why the Prophet Joseph Smith translated the small plates instead of retranslating Mormon's abridgment of the book of Lehi, the original translation of which fell into the hands of Martin Harris. The Lord's foreknowledge of what would happen caused him to inspire Mormon to put the small plates with his abridged records.

The Words of Mormon consist of only eighteen verses in one chapter, which may, for purposes of analysis, be divided into four parts: (1) Words of Mormon 1:1-2, (2) 1:3-8, (3) 1:9-11, (4) 1:12-18.

The first two verses are preliminary in nature. In them Mormon points out that he is about to deliver the record which he had been making into the hands of his son Moroni. It is many hundreds of years after Christ's coming (ca. A.D. 385), and he has witnessed almost the entire destruction of his people. He supposes that his son Moroni will view the remainder of the destruction, and trusts that he will write about it and also something concerning Christ which will be of profit.

In Words of Mormon 1:3-8 we have Mormon's account of his early work of abridgment, and of his finding the small plates of Nephi, which "for a wise purpose" (Words of Mormon 1:7) were put with the remainder of his record, as we have already seen. He also prays for the redemption of his brethren (doubtless the Lamanites), that they may once again be a "delightful people" (Words of Mormon 1:8).

Words of Mormon 1:9-11 tell us that Mormon is proceeding to finish out his record from the "plates of Nephi," meaning the large plates, and that after Amaleki had delivered up "these plates" (i.e., the small plates) to Benjamin, the latter put them with the "other plates" containing the records which had been handed down by the kings from generation to generation until King

Benjamin's time; and, finally, that they were handed down through the generations until they reached the hands of Mormon, who says that they will be used to judge his people and their brethren at the last day.

In the last part of the editorial (Words of Mormon 1:12-18), Mormon tells about King Benjamin; the contentions among his people; their battles with the Lamanites; the false Christs, prophets, and preachers among them; and the king's success in finally establishing peace and harmony in the land with the assistance of holy prophets (cf. Omni 1:23-25). These seven verses are very important in helping one to get a clear perspective of the life and work of King Benjamin. The first six chapters of the book of Mosiah tell us little or nothing of the great difficulties Benjamin encountered in the early years of his reign.

### **The Literary Labors of Mormon**

Now, let us proceed to the analysis of our Division III of the Book of Mormon, "The Literary Labors of Mormon." This division is the largest in the Nephite record and consists, as we have already seen, of the books of Mosiah, Alma, Helaman, 3 Nephi, 4 Nephi, and Mormon (Mosiah 1-7).

### **Mosiah**

The book of Mosiah contains no summary of contents at its head such as we found in 1 Nephi, 2 Nephi, and Jacob. The reader will observe, however, brief superscriptions over Mosiah 9 and Mosiah 23. This book falls into four natural divisions:

I. The events of King Benjamin's declining years (Mosiah 1-6).

A. Benjamin counsels his three sons. Chooses Mosiah to succeed him and conveys sacred relics and records into his keeping. Mosiah charges the people to gather and listen to his father's last words (Mosiah 1).

B. Benjamin's oration (Mosiah 2:9-3:27; 4:4-30). Great spiritual and practical advice given his people (Mosiah 2-4).

C. Effect of Benjamin's address. Christ is the name he wants retained in people's hearts. Names of people recorded who

covenant with the Lord. Priests appointed to teach. Mosiah begins reign. Death of Benjamin (Mosiah 5–6).

II. The discovery of Zeniff's people (Mosiah 7–8).

A. Mosiah sends expedition under Ammon's leadership to discover Zeniff's people in city of Lehi-Nephi. Ammon finds them but is thrown in prison by their king. Limhi and his people overjoyed when they learn identity of Ammon and his men (Mosiah 7).

B. How the twenty-four engraved gold plates were discovered by Limhi's people. Ammon suggests that Mosiah, the seer translate the plates (Mosiah 8).

III. History of Zeniff's people from time of departure until reunited with Mosiah's subjects in Zarahemla (Mosiah 9–24).

A. Zeniff's personal memoirs. Confers kingship of his people on Noah, an unworthy son (Mosiah 9–10).

B. Wicked administration of Noah and corrupt priests. Ministry of Abinadi the prophet who courageously opposes Noah by preaching true meaning of law of Moses and the mission of Christ. Abinadi finally burned to death (Mosiah 11–17).

C. Alma, convert of Abinadi, preaches secretly. Baptizes at Waters of Mormon and organizes Church of Christ. He and followers pursued by Noah's army. Depart into wilderness (Mosiah 18).

D. Gideon's insurrection against Noah. Lamanite invasion. Death of Noah by fire. Limhi, a just son of Noah, becomes tributary monarch. Wicked priests of Noah abduct daughters of Lamanites. Lamanites plan revenge but are pacified by Limhi. Ammon and Limhi plan deliverance from Lamanites. Lamanites plied with wine. Their captives escape and return safely to Zarahemla. End of Zeniff's record (Mosiah 19–22).

E. Account of Alma's people from time they were driven into wilderness until they find their way to Zarahemla (Mosiah 23–24).

IV. Mosiah's reign from time of the return of Zeniff's people until his death (Mosiah 25–29).

A. Mosiah's people (including the Mulekites) gather together to hear records of Zeniff and Alma read. Alma receives authorization to establish a church and ordain priests and teachers

throughout Zarahemla. The Lord instructs Alma how to deal with unbelievers and evildoers (Mosiah 25–26).

B. Persecution of Church members enjoined. Equality urged among all men. Miraculous conversion of the younger Alma and the four sons of Mosiah, who had endeavored to destroy the Church. They preach righteousness. The younger Alma made custodian of sacred records. Mosiah translates the twenty-four plates of Ether (Mosiah 27–28).

C. King Mosiah urges representative form of government—a government by judges democratically chosen. Death of Mosiah and Alma (ca. 91 B.C.) (Mosiah 29).

The reader should observe that the account of Mosiah's reign is interrupted after Mosiah 8 by the introduction of the records of Zeniff and Alma (Mosiah 9–24). Without these interesting but interpolated histories, the book of Mosiah would have been much smaller indeed—eleven chapters or less.

The great characters of this book are Benjamin, Mosiah, Abinadi the prophet, the older Alma, and Alma the Younger. The great characteristics of the younger Alma are more fully brought out in the book which bears his name; Benjamin's oration is one of the spiritual gems of the Book of Mormon. All of these men are noble characters and portray a vital and dynamic idealism of value for men in all walks of life. They all exhibit a love for righteousness, for freedom and liberty, and for the spirit of service to their fellow men. Mosiah is to be distinguished also by the fact that he urged and successfully brought about a vital change in the form of Nephite government. Perhaps we should also observe that Mosiah translated the gold plates found by Limhi's men, which contained the record of Ether, the last prophet of the Jaredite nation (Mosiah 28:11–17).

No special reasons are assigned for the writing of this book; it finds its justification in the way that history always vindicates and upholds the acts and words of great men.

## **Alma**

The book of Alma is the largest in the Book of Mormon, containing one hundred and sixty-one printed pages in the current edition. It constitutes, therefore, about one-third of the total

text in the Nephite record. The book deals with a great variety of topics, and it is necessary to break it up into many parts for purposes of analysis. It may be divided into sections—two large and one small—without any difficulty, because the first forty-four chapters are an abridgment of the younger Alma's record, and chapters 45-62 are taken from Helaman's record, leaving Alma 63 to itself. We may assume that this chapter is principally an abridgment of the writings of Shiblón, Helaman's brother. In light of these observations let us present the following scheme of study for the book:

I. The abridgment of Alma the Younger's record (Alma 1-44).

A. Alma chief judge for nine years. Death of Nehor and Amlici, Nephite dissenters. Prosperity, pride, and iniquity in the Church. Alma delivers up judgeship to Nephiah for the work of the ministry (Alma 1-4).

B. Missionary labors of Alma and also Amulek, a convert. Zeezrom, a Nephite lawyer, confounded. He later joins Church (Alma 5-16).

C. Missionary labors of the sons of Mosiah. Their success in converting Lamanite kings and subjects (Alma 17-26).

D. Ammonites (converted Lamanites) given the land of Jershon in which to live. Great battles of Nephites with the Lamanites. The ministry of Alma. Korihor the Anti-Christ. The apostate Zoramites. The testimony of Amulek (Alma 27-35).

E. Alma's commandments to his sons Helaman, Shiblón, and Corianton. Helaman entrusted with the records and sacred artifacts (Alma 36-42).

F. Wars with the Lamanites. The strategy of Moroni and Lehi, two great Nephite generals (Alma 43-44).

II. Abridgment of the record of Helaman, the son of Alma the Younger (Alma 45-62).

A. Mysterious disappearance of Alma. Amalickiah's dissension; incites Lamanites against Nephites. Generalship of Moroni and Lehi. Morianton's rebellion. Death of Nephiah the second chief judge (Alma 45-50).

B. Accession of Pahoran, the third chief judge. Suppresses Nephite dissenters. Amalickiah leads Lamanite armies. He is slain. Continued battles with the Lamanites. Helaman's two



thousand young men. Difficulties of Pahoran the chief judge in maintaining his government. Nephites successful in war against Lamanites. Death of Helaman (Alma 51–62).

III. Abridgment of the record of Shiblon, brother of Helaman (Alma 63).

A. Shiblon takes over sacred records. The ships of Hagoth. Nephite migrations. Death of Shiblon, who conferred sacred records into the hands of Helaman, son of his brother Helaman (Alma 63:1–11).

B. Mormon's remarks concerning the scriptures in hands of Helaman. Moronihah defeats Lamanites (Alma 63:12–17).

The attention of the reader is called to the unusually large number of superscriptions scattered throughout the book of Alma. It should be kept in mind that these are an integral part of the text of the Book of Mormon and are not to be regarded as modern editorial devices in the same way as are the synopses found immediately above each chapter of the current edition. They will be found over the following chapters: 1, 5, 7, 9, 17, 21, 36, 38, 39, 45. The superscription at the head of Alma 1 reads as follows:

The account of Alma, who was the son of Alma, the first and chief judge over the people of Nephi, and also the high priest over the Church. An account of the reign of the judges, and the wars and contentions among the people. And also an account of a war between the Nephites and the Lamanites, according to the record of Alma, the first and chief judge.

The one above Alma 45 reads:

The account of the people of Nephi, and their wars and dissensions, in the days of Helaman, according to the record of Helaman, which he kept in his days. Comprising chapters 45 to 62 inclusive.

These two superscriptions explain the two large sections in our analysis of the book of Alma. Alma and Helaman, as we have seen, are responsible for the bulk of the historical matter in the book as abridged by Mormon. The reasons for writing the book may be deduced from the above superscriptions.

From what has been observed in our study of the book, we perceive that although Helaman and Shiblon are responsible for about eighteen chapters of the subject matter, the complete record is named after Alma. Perhaps Mormon, the editor, is responsible for this arrangement. In the superscription at the head of Alma 1 (see above) it will be noticed that nothing is said about the writings of Helaman, though attention might well have been called to them. It may be that Mormon deliberately included Helaman's writings in the book of Alma in order to avoid the confusion of having two books named after the same individual (notice that the book of Helaman immediately follows the book of Alma; it is named after the son of Helaman<sub>1</sub>; see Helaman 2:2).

The younger Alma is undoubtedly one of the greatest characters of the Book of Mormon. He is to the Book of Mormon what Paul is to the New Testament. It is well to have a book named in his honor. Other notable figures in the book of Alma are Amulek, the four missionary sons of Mosiah, Moroni and Teancum (Nephite generals), Helaman the son of Alma, and Pahoran the chief judge. The record of Alma is distinctive for its account of missionary activities. Alma, Amulek, and Mosiah's four sons—Ammon, Aaron, Omner, and Himni—are the great missionaries of the Book of Mormon (see Alma 5–26 for typical missionary history). The book is also remarkable for its doctrinal aspects—probably more so than any other part of the Nephite scriptures. Alma's discourse on faith (Alma 32) is one of the finest in all scripture. Amulek's testimony (Alma 34) concerning the great and last sacrifice, justice, mercy, and repentance should be read by everyone. The explanations given by Alma to his son Corianton (Alma 40–42) concerning man's state in the hereafter; the purpose of mortality, and repentance, atonement, law, and punishment are most enlightening and valuable.

## **Helaman**

The book of Helaman contains sixteen chapters only, or about thirty-eight printed pages in the modern edition. It has three superscriptions; the first, over Helaman 1, is the largest and most interesting; the second, over Helaman 7, assigns most of the remainder of the book to Nephi, the son of Helaman<sub>2</sub>; and the

third, over Helaman 13, calls attention to the prophecy of Samuel the Lamanite in Helaman 13–15. The first superscription at the head of Helaman 1 is concerned with the contents and authorship of the whole book. Differing markedly from the one at the head of the first chapter of Alma, it reads as follows:

An account of the Nephites. Their wars and contentions, and their dissensions. And also the prophecies of many holy prophets, before the coming of Christ, according to the records of Helaman, who was the son of Helaman, and also according to the records of his sons, even down to the coming of Christ. And also many of the Lamanites are converted. An account of their conversion. An account of the righteousness of the Lamanites, and the wickedness and abominations of the Nephites, according to the record of Helaman and his sons, even down to the coming of Christ, which is called the book of Helaman.

It will be observed, as has already been pointed out, that this superscription refers to the contents of the book as a whole, because it emphasizes by repetition the fact that the book is based on the records of Helaman and his sons. The one at the head of the book of Alma does not do this. It refers to the record of Alma only, that is to say, to the contents of the first forty-four chapters. No attention is paid to the fact that the remainder of the book (Alma 45–63) is dependent upon the writings of Helaman<sub>1</sub> and Shiblon.

Mormon did not write much of what was recorded by Helaman<sub>2</sub>, because in Helaman 3:37 we are informed of Helaman's death and of the accession of his eldest son, Nephi, to the judgeship. It may be assumed, therefore, that Nephi took over the sacred records from his father. This supposition is correct, as 3 Nephi 1:2 makes clear. Since Nephi had the plates, it may be taken for granted that he did most of the writing, though it is not improbable that he instructed his brother Lehi to do part of it. That part of the text for which Lehi may have been responsible was not dictated by Mormon when he made his abridgment.

The book of Helaman covers Nephite history for a period of over fifty years (52–1 B.C.). As the superscription over Helaman 1

indicates, the book records history "even down to the coming of Christ."

The contents of the book may be exhibited under three major divisions, as the following scheme shows:

- I. From Pahoran<sub>2</sub> to death of Helaman<sub>2</sub> (Helaman 1-3).
  - A. Sons of Pahoran<sub>1</sub> contend for the judgeship. Pahoran<sub>2</sub> named chief judge. He is murdered by Kishkumen. Lamanites capture Zarahemla, but Nephites retake it (Helaman 1).
  - B. Helaman<sub>2</sub> appointed chief judge. Kishkumen is slain. The Gadianton robbbers (Helaman 2).
  - C. Many Nephites migrate into land northward. Many records kept. Helaman dies and is succeeded by his son Nephi (Helaman 3).
- II. From Nephi's accession to his prophecy (Helaman 4-6).
  - A. Nephites lose Zarahemla to the Lamanites. They are weak because of transgression (Helaman 4).
  - B. Nephi yields judgment seat to Ceezoram because of his people's iniquity. He and his brother Lehi devote themselves to the ministry. Great spiritual manifestations. Converted Lamanites restore Nephite lands (Helaman 5).
- III. Nephi's prophecy (Helaman 7-16).
  - A. Nephi's prayer and the episode of the chief judge's death (Helaman 7-9).
  - B. Great powers of sealing given Nephi. These are used to bring his people to repentance. The Gadianton band. A commentary (Helaman 12), presumably by Mormon (Helaman 10-12).
  - C. Prophecy of Samuel the Lamanite, to the Nephites. He predicts that great signs will be shown forth at Christ's birth and death (Helaman 13-15).
  - D. Effect of Samuel's words. Nephi continues his ministry (Helaman 16).

The book of Helaman is in many respects a remarkable record. Its greatest characters are Helaman<sub>2</sub>, Nephi, Lehi, and Samuel the Lamanite. A noteworthy military leader of the Nephites is found in the shrewd but righteous Moronihah. The spiritual powers of Nephi, Lehi, and Samuel are outstanding among many great Nephite leaders mentioned in the Book of Mormon. No special reasons are assigned for the writing of the book.