What the Book of Mormon Is (Concluded)

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An analysis of the text of 3 Nephi to Moroni. Third Nephi was written by Nephi, the son of Nephi, the son of Helaman. Fourth Nephi in turn was written by the son of Nephi, also called Nephi, and Nephi’s son Amos and grandsons Amos and his brother Ammaron. The book of Mormon was principally inscribed by Mormon and Moroni. The book of Ether exposes the terrible end of a people persisting in wickedness. The book of Moroni shows his love for his enemies.
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Third Nephi

The book known to us as 3 Nephi was originally called "The Book of Nephi," as the caption immediately below the title in our modern editions indicates. The title "Third Nephi" was first added by Elder Orson Pratt in the 1879 edition to distinguish this book from the first two books in the Nephite record known respectively as "The First Book of Nephi" and "The Second Book of Nephi." In other words, "3 Nephi" is not a part of the original text of the Book of Mormon. For convenience, we shall continue to use the title, since it is in common use among our people.

Third Nephi contains thirty chapters, or nearly fifty-seven printed pages in its modern dress. The first seven chapters record the events of Nephite history during the Savior's thirty-three years

This originally appeared as chapter 6 on pages 65–76 of Our Book of Mormon.
of mortality. The chapters in 3 Nephi 8–26 inclusive deal altogether with the events of about six days—the three days of darkness and destruction on this continent and the three-day ministry of the resurrected Christ among the Nephites. Third Nephi 27–28 tell us of a visit which the Savior made to his Nephite twelve, and 3 Nephi 29–30 contain some of Mormon’s warnings and admonitions. The ministry of Jesus among the Nephites seems to have taken place a considerable time after the three days of darkness and destruction. This three-day period occurred at the beginning of the Nephite year in A.D. 34 (3 Nephi 8:5), whereas Christ’s visitation took place some time near the end of the year, as the words of Mormon indicate:

And it came to pass that in the ending of the thirty and fourth year, behold, I will show unto you that the people of Nephi who were spared, and also those who had been called Lamanites, who had been spared, did have great favors shown unto them, and great blessings poured out upon their heads, insomuch that soon after the ascension of Christ into heaven he did truly manifest himself unto them. (3 Nephi 10:18)

The author of this book in its original form, that is to say before Mormon abridged it, was Nephi, the son of Nephi, the son of Helaman, after whom the preceding book was named.

This book has two superscriptions; the first appears over 3 Nephi 1 and traces Nephi’s genealogy; the second, over 3 Nephi 11, announces the ministry of Jesus Christ to the Nephite people as recorded in that and following chapters.

In my chapter on the “American Gospel,”¹ I have analyzed in considerable detail those chapters dealing with Jesus and his ministry. In the following outline of 3 Nephi we therefore curtail our analysis of the chapters dealing with that subject:

I. Nephite history from the birth of Christ to his death (3 Nephi 1–7).
A. Nephi receives the sacred records and artifacts from his father Nephi, who disappears. Annunciation of the Savior’s birth (part of American Gospel). The Gadianton robbers. Right-

¹ See pages 48–68 in this issue.
eous Nephites and Lamanites unite in common defense. Lachoneus, the governor, receives ultimatum from Giddianhi, the robber chieftain, to surrender his people. Lachoneus refuses and appoints Gidgiddoni as general over Nephite armies (3 Nephi 1–3).

B. Gadianton robbers are beaten in battle and their chieftain slain. Nephites triumph over Giddianhi’s successor and repent of their sins. Mormon’s comments concerning himself and the sacred records. Nephites prosper, but pride, dissensions, and works of darkness follow. The chief judge murdered. The people are divided into tribes. Jacob, so-called king. Nephi’s powerful ministry (3 Nephi 4–7).

II. The American Gospel (3 Nephi 8–28; this Gospel also includes 3 Nephi 1:12–21).

A. Signs of the crucifixion and death of Christ (3 Nephi 8–10).

B. Three-day ministry of the resurrected, redeemed Savior among the Nephites (3 Nephi 11–26).

C. Last recorded appearance of Jesus to his disciples, giving them sundry items of instruction and a blessing (3 Nephi 27–28).

III. Mormon’s warning and call for repentance (3 Nephi 29–30).

A. Mormon gives stern warning to those Gentiles who spurn the revelations of the Lord, his works, and his people (3 Nephi 29).

B. Mormon calls the Gentiles to repentance in accordance with the Lord’s command (3 Nephi 30).

Third Nephi is by all means the most important book in the Nephite record because of the ministry and witness of the resurrected Christ on this continent. Its message is the heart and core of the book, and the one which all students of the Book of Mormon should thoroughly master.

Fourth Nephi

The book commonly known among us as 4 Nephi was, like 3 Nephi, originally known as “The Book of Nephi.” For convenience in reference Elder Orson Pratt, in the 1879 edition of the
Book of Mormon, put the caption "Fourth Nephi" over the original title. According to the superscription of the book it is named after Nephi, the son of the Nephi mentioned in 3 Nephi, who was the chief disciple of Jesus Christ. It seems strange that his father should give up the sacred records to him so quickly after the coming of Christ. Perhaps the work of the ministry was so exacting and occupied so much of his time that he felt obliged to turn them over to his son in order that the great events of the time could be recorded adequately. The superscription declares that this book gives an account of the people of Nephi "according to his record." However, a quick glance at the single chapter of this book—it contains only 49 verses—reveals that it is the abridgment of the work of four men. It is unfortunate—at least vexing—that the great Golden Era of Nephite history, a period of about two hundred and eighty-five years, should be so sparingly treated by Mormon, the abridger. We shall have to content ourselves with the thought that Mormon was commanded to refrain from revealing details of the great social system of having all things in common, which was developed among the Nephites during the period immediately following the Savior's appearances to them.

The original authors of this book, other than Nephi, were two men, both named Amos, who were Nephi's son and grandson, respectively, and Ammaron, also a grandson. It is convenient to analyze the text according to the authorship of its various parts:

I. Abridgment of the record of Nephi. A.D. 35–110.
   A. All people converted to the Lord. They have all things in common. Their great happiness (4 Nephi 1:1–19).
   II. Abridgment of the record of Amos, son of Nephi. A.D. 111–194.
      A. A small part of the people revolt and call themselves Lamanites (4 Nephi 1:20).
   III. Abridgment of the words of Amos, grandson of Nephi. A.D. 194–306.
      A. Nephites become wealthy. They begin to divide into classes. Deny parts of the gospel. Disciples of Jesus exhibit great power in overcoming their enemies. In A.D. 231 there occurs a great division among the Nephites. Gadianton robbers reappear. Nephites begin to be proud (4 Nephi 1:21–47).

A. Constrained by the Holy Ghost, Ammaron hides up the sacred records unto the Lord in A.D. 321 (4 Nephi 1:48–49).

A study of the above analysis of 4 Nephi reveals how severely Mormon abridged the writings of the four record keepers. One gets the impression from the book that Mormon was not only cautioned not to reveal many important matters of Nephite history during this period, but was also in a great hurry to finish his literary labors.

Mormon

The next book to be described has, unfortunately, received the same name as the whole Nephite record. The book of Mormon consists of the brief memoirs of Mormon plus two chapters from the pen of his son Moroni. Mormon writes seven chapters, which means that the book contains a total of nine chapters. It occupies a little over sixteen printed pages in the current edition.

Ammaron, who came from a different family than Mormon, noticed Mormon’s abilities as a youth, for he bequeathed to him at the age of ten the responsibility of taking over the sacred records and of writing the history of the Nephites in his time (Mormon 1:2–4). The purpose of Mormon in writing is thus made clear. In the very first verse of the book he writes:

And now I, Mormon, make a record of the things which I have both seen and heard, and call it the book of Mormon. (Mormon 1:1)

In a later chapter he indicates that what he writes is but a small account of what he has seen:

Therefore I write a small abridgment, daring not to give a full account of the things which I have seen, because of the commandment which I have received, and also that ye might not have too great sorrow because of the wickedness of this people. (Mormon 5:9)
The seven chapters written by Mormon cover Nephite history from about A.D. 322 until 385. It should be kept in mind that Mormon did not obtain the large plates of Nephi upon which to write in accordance with Ammaron's request until about the year 335, when he was twenty-four years old (Mormon 1:3–4). We are probably justified in assuming that his seven chapters are an abridgment of the detailed history written by him on the large plates.

The two chapters written by Moroni were not completed until some time between the years A.D. 401 and 421. In fact, he did not begin to write until the year 401, about sixteen years after the last great battle between the Nephites and Lamanites (Mormon 8:6). The reader's attention is called to chapter 1, "An Epic Story of Moroni," in which I deal in considerable detail with some of Moroni's literary activities.

It is convenient to analyze the book of Mormon under two divisions, following its authorship:

I. Brief memoirs of Mormon, including some of his commentaries and addresses to the Lamanite remnant A.D. 322–385 (Mormon 1–7).


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The Literary Labors of Moroni

II. Brief memoirs of Moroni, his description of calamities and conditions of the latter days, and an address to unbelievers. A.D. 385–421 (Mormon 8–9).

A. Moroni finishes his father’s record, writing about A.D. 401. Conditions after the great battle of Cumorah. Moroni alone. Has little to write and finishes—as he supposes—the record (Mormon 8:1–13).

B. At a later time Moroni begins to write again (see chapter 1).3 Mormon’s record to come forth. The calamities and conditions of the latter days (Mormon 9:1–37).

Ether

The abridgment of the book of Ether was the next literary labor of Moroni. When he decided to do this work we do not know, but it is probable that he commenced not long after completing the book named after his father. The book of Ether was written by the last Jaredite prophet, whose name was Ether, upon the twenty-four gold plates found by King Limhi’s people in the days of King Mosiah (see Mosiah 8:7–9). These records were preserved among the Nephite historians until the days of Mormon, when they were hidden with the other sacred writings in the hill Cumorah (Mormon 6:6).

From Ether 1:2 one naturally assumes that Moroni made his abridgment directly from the plates. If he did, we are driven directly to the conclusion that it was necessary for him to find his way into the hill Cumorah, where the plates were hidden (Mormon 6:6). Since the language of the plates was that of the Jaredite people, it would have been incumbent upon Moroni to translate them by means of the Urim and Thummim before he could abridge them. This would be a tremendous task and quite unnecessary if he had used Mosiah’s translation, which had been made many years before (Mosiah 28:11–20). The attention of the reader is again called to chapter 1,4 in which the problem of translation is discussed in greater detail. In its present form the book of Ether

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3 Ibid.
4 Ibid.
contains fifteen chapters or thirty printed pages. The title of the book is now "The Book of Ether"; in the early editions of the Book of Mormon the title was simply "Book of Ether." The article seems to have first been added by Elder Orson Pratt in the 1879 edition. Immediately beneath the title there now occurs an explanatory note which reads:

The record of the Jaredites, taken from the twenty-four plates found by the people of Limhi in the days of king Mosiah.

This is only found in the later editions of the Book of Mormon and is not to be regarded as part of the original text. The note seems to have been inserted by the committee appointed to edit the text now in common use.

The book of Ether deals with the history of a people called the Jaredites, who came from the Tower of Babel to this continent and became a great nation. They were led by prophets and were acquainted with the gospel, but finally, because of wickedness, they were destroyed at about the time the Nephites came to possess the land. The book appears to be a severely condensed version of Ether's original, except in the first three and the last two chapters in which certain personalities are dealt with in considerable detail. The personality of Moroni, the abridger, impresses itself strongly at intervals on the reader.

His spiritual commentaries and admonitions to the future readers of the book are notable. The philosophy of history underlying the writing of the book of Ether is clearly expressed in Ether 2:8–12 and also in Ether 8. In the latter, Moroni explains the nature of the secret orders, oaths, and combinations of a sinister nature that existed among the Jaredites and that threatened to destroy them as a nation. After pointing out that the Lord "worketh not in secret combinations, neither doth he shed blood" (Ether 8:19), Moroni says:

And whatsoever nation shall uphold such secret combinations, to get power and gain, until they shall spread over the nation, behold, they shall be destroyed; for the Lord will not suffer that the blood of his saints, which shall be shed by them, shall always cry
unto him from the ground for vengeance upon them
and yet he avenge them not.

Wherefore, O ye Gentiles, it is wisdom in God that
these things should be shown unto you, that thereby ye
may repent of your sins, and suffer not that these mur­
derous combinations shall get above you, which are
built up to get power and gain—and the work, yea,
even the work of destruction come upon you, yea, even
the sword of the justice of the Eternal God shall fall
upon you, to your overthrow and destruction if ye shall
suffer these things to be.

Wherefore, the Lord commandeth you, when ye
shall see these things come among you that ye shall
awake to a sense of your awful situation, because of this
secret combination which shall be among you; or wo
be unto it, because of the blood of them who have been
slain; for they cry from the dust for vengeance upon it,
and also upon those who built it up....

Wherefore, I, Moroni, am commanded to write
these things that evil may be done away, and that the
time may come that Satan may have no power upon the
hearts of the children of men, but that they may be per­
suaded to do good continually, that they may come
unto the fountain of all righteousness and be saved.
(Ether 8:22–24, 26)

The words in italics indicate the philosophy of history which
dominated Moroni in his abridgment. The thoughtful reader will
compare this philosophy with that in Ether 2:8–12, which is
essentially that found in other books of the Nephite scripture.5 In
other words, if men keep God's commandments on this land they
shall prosper; otherwise, they shall be cut off.

The purposes of Moroni in abridging the book of Ether are
clear. Aside from showing God's loving care over the nation that
preceded the Nephites, his desire was to expose for our profit and
benefit the terrible end of a people who persisted in wickedness.

The book of Ether may be analyzed under three major head­
ings as follows:

5 See pages 81–85 of this issue.
I. Early history of the Jaredite people before coming to this continent (Ether 1–4).
   A. Moroni’s discussion concerning the twenty-four plates. Genealogy of the prophet Ether. Language of the Jaredites and their friends not confounded. Brother of Jared told by the Lord to prepare his people for migration (Ether 1).
   B. Jaredites go into the valley of Nimrod. They gather together flocks, fowls, bees, and seeds. The Lord talks again with the brother of Jared and tells him of his decree concerning the promised land. The people build barges for their journey (Ether 2).
   C. Because of the brother of Jared’s great faith the Lord manifests marvelous things to him. The premortal Christ appears. He commands the brother of Jared to write the great things revealed to him. Two stones or “interpreters” provided for the purposes of translation (Ether 3).
   D. Moroni’s commentary; his solemn admonition to the Gentiles (Ether 4).

II. Moroni writes to future translator of his abridgment (Ether 5).
   A. Translator of the Book of Mormon forbidden to touch the sealed portion of the plates. Plates to be shown to those who assist in bringing forth the Book of Mormon. Three witnesses to be shown plates by the power of God (Ether 5:1–4).
   B. Those who repent shall be received into the kingdom of God. Moroni asserts his authority for what he says (Ether 5:5–6).

III. History of Jaredite people from when they set sail for the promised land until their final destruction as a nation. With commentaries and admonitions by Moroni (Ether 6–15).
   A. Jaredite vessels, lighted in miraculous manner, reach promised land. Leaders oppose kings as rulers but give way to demands of people. Death of Jared and his brother. During reign of kings from Orihah to Com there is much strife and contention. Secret and murderous combinations. When people were righteous they prospered, when they were wicked destruction followed (Ether 6–10).
   B. Many prophets in days of Com predict utter destruction of Jaredites except they repent. In days of the kings from
Com to Coriantumr the words of the prophets generally remained unheeded. Moroni bids farewell to the Gentiles. Words of Ether, the last Jaredite prophet, disregarded and he lives to write of the entire destruction of his people. Moroni quotes Ether’s last words (Ether 11–15).

In studying the book of Ether one is struck by an expression of Moroni with certain variations, which nearly always appears after he has been diverted from his main task of abridging. After a lengthy commentary or admonition of his own he may say: “And now I, Moroni, proceed to give an account”; “and now I proceed with my record”; “and now I, Moroni, proceed to give the record”; “and now I, Moroni, proceed with my record”; “and now I, Moroni, proceed to finish my record” (Ether 1:1; 2:13; 6:1; 9:1; 13:1; cf. 1 Nephi 10:1).

**Moroni**

The book of Moroni was the last of Moroni’s literary labors and concludes the Nephite volume of scripture. It contains ten chapters comprising over twelve printed pages in its present form. This book was written as the result of an afterthought on the part of its author. After finishing his abridgment of the book of Ether, Moroni had concluded not to write any more (Moroni 1:1). Then he changed his mind, for as he says:

I write a few more things, that perhaps they may be of worth unto my brethren, the Lamanites, in some future day, according to the will of the Lord. (Moroni 1:4)

These words not only reveal to us Moroni’s purpose in writing the book, but lay open to our minds the magnanimous character of the man. A person who can love his enemies so much that he contributes to the eternal welfare of their descendants has a great soul.

The book of Moroni was written sometime between A.D. 401 and 421 (Mormon 8:6; cf. Moroni 10:1). I am inclined to believe that the later date is nearer the actual time of writing.

The content of the book is confined roughly to about three classes of material: Moroni’s historical and admonitory remarks,
the discipline and procedures in the Nephite church, the teachings and epistles of Mormon. We may divide the book more or less logically into four parts:

I. Moroni’s preliminary remarks. Historical and explanatory items (Moroni 1).
   A. Moroni continues to write; he successfully evades Lamanites. Wars among Lamanites are exceedingly fierce. Any Nephite who does not deny the Christ is slain by them (Moroni 1:1–3).
   B. Moroni explains his motives in writing; he has in mind the future welfare of the Lamanites (Moroni 1:4).

II. Items of Church discipline and procedure among the Nephites (Moroni 2–6).
   A. The Savior’s instructions to Nephite twelve concerning bestowal of the Holy Ghost (Moroni 2).
   B. Manner in which Nephite twelve ordained priests and teachers (Moroni 3).
   C. Manner in which sacramental bread and wine was administered (Moroni 4–5).
   D. Conditions and mode of baptism among the Nephites. Matters of Church discipline (Moroni 6).

III. Moroni presents certain teachings of his father and two of his epistles (Moroni 7–9).
   A. Mormon’s teachings on faith, hope, and charity (Moroni 7).
   B. Mormon’s epistle to Moroni concerning the question of repentance and baptism for little children (Moroni 8).
   C. A second epistle of Mormon to Moroni concerning Lamanite and Nephite atrocities, the work of the ministry, together with an affectionate admonition (Moroni 9).

IV. Moroni’s final farewell to the Lamanites. A.D. 421 (Moroni 10).
   A. How an individual may gain a testimony of the truth of the Book of Mormon (Moroni 10:1–7).
   B. The gifts and power of God. An exhortation to lay hold upon every good gift (Moroni 10:8–30).
   C. An appeal to Zion of the latter days to be no more confounded, to come unto Christ and be perfected in him (Moroni 10:31–34).
Judged by his writings, Moroni must have been a remarkably spiritual man. He holds the keys of the “stick of Ephraim” as the Book of Mormon is known in the Doctrine and Covenants (D&C 27:5) and in the Bible (Ezekiel 37:16, 19). His last written words were:

And now I bid unto all, farewell. I soon go to rest in the paradise of God, until my spirit and body shall again reunite, and I am brought forth triumphant through the air, to meet you before the pleasing bar of the great Jehovah, the Eternal Judge of both quick and dead. Amen. (Moroni 10:34)