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## Which Path Do We List?

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7:21–39). In the second passage, Moroni uses the same quotation (either here in an alternate translation or a paraphrase) to show that God “worketh by power, according to the faith of the children of men, the same today and tomorrow and forever” (Moroni 10:3–33).


The third quotation is the most lengthy of the quotations:

For behold, thus said Jesus Christ, the Son of God, unto his disciples who should tarry, yea, and also to all his disciples, in the hearing of the multitude: Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature; and he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned; and these signs shall follow them that believe—in my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new

tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick and they shall recover; and whosoever shall believe in my name, doubting nothing, unto him will I confirm all my words, even unto the ends of the earth. (Mormon 9:22–25)

Moroni uses this third quotation in his long discourse about God being a God of miracles (Mormon 9:7–29) to show “that whoso believeth in Christ, doubting nothing, whatsoever he shall ask the Father in the name of Christ it shall be granted to him; and this promise is unto all, even to the ends of the earth” (Mormon 9:21).

These three quotations Moroni explicitly attributes to Jesus during his ministry, and all were written after the death

of Mormon, and thus after Mormon “hid up . . . all the records which had been entrusted to [him] by the hand of the Lord, save it were these few plates which I gave unto my son Moroni” (Mormon 6:6). Moroni’s quotations might come from a remarkable memory (the parallel quotations from Moroni 7:33 and 10:23 might indicate that), but they may also have come from the sealed portion of the plates that he had. None of the quotations are included in what Mormon terms the “lesser part of the things which [Jesus] taught the people” (3 Nephi 26:8) and therefore may safely be included among “greater things” that were to “be made manifest” unto the Gentiles “if it shall so be that they shall believe these [lesser] things” (3 Nephi 26:8–10). 

**By John Gee**

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#### SCRIPTURE INSIGHT

## Which Path Do We List?

Reading King Benjamin’s speech, we come upon a passage in which the verb *list* is used four times: “Beware lest there shall arise contentions among you, and ye *list* to obey the evil spirit. . . . For behold, there is a wo pronounced upon him who *listeth* to obey that spirit; for if he *listeth* to obey him, and remaineth and dieth in his sins, the same drinketh damnation to his own soul. . . . The man that doeth this, the same cometh out in open rebellion against God; therefore he *listeth* to obey the evil spirit, and becometh an enemy to all righteousness” (Mosiah 2:32, 33, 37).

Alma 3 contains a forceful indictment of the Amlicites, who had willfully chosen to mark themselves “with red in their foreheads after

the manner of the Lamanites” (v. 4). Benjamin’s words from Mosiah 2 are echoed in Alma 3:18: “Now the Amlicites . . . had come out in *open rebellion* against God; therefore it was expedient that the curse [of God] should fall upon them.” Later, in a reflective commentary on the tens of thousands who had died in recent battles between the Nephites and their Lamanite and Amlicite enemies, we read that the dead will “reap eternal happiness or eternal misery, according to the spirit which they *listed* to obey, whether it be a good spirit or a bad one. For every man receiveth wages of him whom he *listeth* to obey” (Alma 3:26–27). Benjamin had also spoken of wages in Mosiah 2:33: “for he receiveth for his wages an everlasting punishment, having transgressed the

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law of God contrary to his own knowledge.” These two passages teach that one can *list* to do right or wrong only with sufficient knowledge to make an informed choice.

*List* is an English word with several archaic meanings<sup>1</sup> that have generally not survived into our time. In one meaning, *list* is simply a shortened form of *listen*, as in these lines from a hymn: “List! the merry children singing! What a pleasing, joyful sound!”<sup>2</sup> However, the reading “*listen* to obey the evil spirit” poses a grammatical difficulty and is clearly not the intended meaning, especially given Benjamin’s concern with serious, active involvement with sin. The same can be said of another meaning of *list*, one still in use: “leaning to one side,” as is said of a ship. Benjamin’s warnings to his people suggest a concern with more than just a leaning toward the side of evil—a boat that is only listing has not yet capsized (the marine equivalent of the damnation referred to in verses 38 and 39).

The verb *list* was often spelled before 1600 as *lust* and is derived from and related to words denoting appetite, desire, or longing. Its Indo-European root word means “to be eager” and is also the source of *lascivious* (“lewd, lustful”) and *listless* (“without desire”), both of which remain in modern usage. *List* also once carried the active meaning of “to choose.” Rather than indicating a mere inclination, *list* was used as a verb of action that fits exactly with Benjamin’s description of “open rebellion.”<sup>3</sup>

These meanings of wishing, desiring, and choosing are preserved in the Bible in only a few passages: John 3:8 (“The wind bloweth where it

listeth”), Matthew 20:15 (“Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own?” though William Tyndale’s 1526 translation seems closer to the mark: “ys yt not lawfull ffor me to do as me listeth with myne awne?”),<sup>4</sup> James 3:4 (“whithersoever the governor listeth”), and Matthew 17:12 and Mark 9:13 (“they have done unto him whatsoever they listed”). These same meanings of *list* appear in Webster’s 1828 dictionary, namely, “to lean or incline, to be propense; hence to desire or choose.”

Properly understood, the verb *list* is a powerful word that should encourage us to fervently desire and choose righteousness. Surely that was the hope expressed by King Benjamin in this earnest appeal: “I would desire that ye should consider on the blessed and happy state of those that keep the commandments of God. . . . If they hold out faithful to the end they are received into heaven, that thereby they may dwell with God in a state of never-ending happiness” (Mosiah 2:41). 📖

### By Barbara Cramer

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#### Notes

1. *Oxford English Dictionary* (1961), s.v. “list.”
2. “Welcome, Welcome, Sabbath Morning,” *Hymns of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1985), no. 280.
3. See the commentary on the phrase *list to obey* in “Complete Text of Benjamin’s Speech with Notes and Comments,” appendix to John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks, eds., *King Benjamin’s Speech: “That Ye May Learn Wisdom”* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 533–34.
4. As cited in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “list”; original spelling preserved.

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preparatory events leading up to it were revealed long before they occurred—and paralleled in the meridian dispensation, which likewise saw a great restoration of priesthood power, eternal principles, and sacred ordinances under the direction of Jesus Christ, who was an Elias of restoration foreshadowing Joseph Smith’s similar role (see John

1:20–28 JST). Careful study of Nephi’s panoramic vision in 1 Nephi 13 increases our own broad understanding of how the Lord orchestrated events in preparation for restoring the gospel on the American continent.

• *John W. Welch, Robert K. Thomas Professor of Law at BYU and FARMS founder and board member, “All Their Creeds Were an Abomination”: A Brief Look at Creeds as Part of the Apostasy.”*