



1-31-2003

## Moroni: The Final Voice

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Thomas, Mark D. (2003) "Moroni: The Final Voice," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*: Vol. 12 : No. 1 , Article 11.

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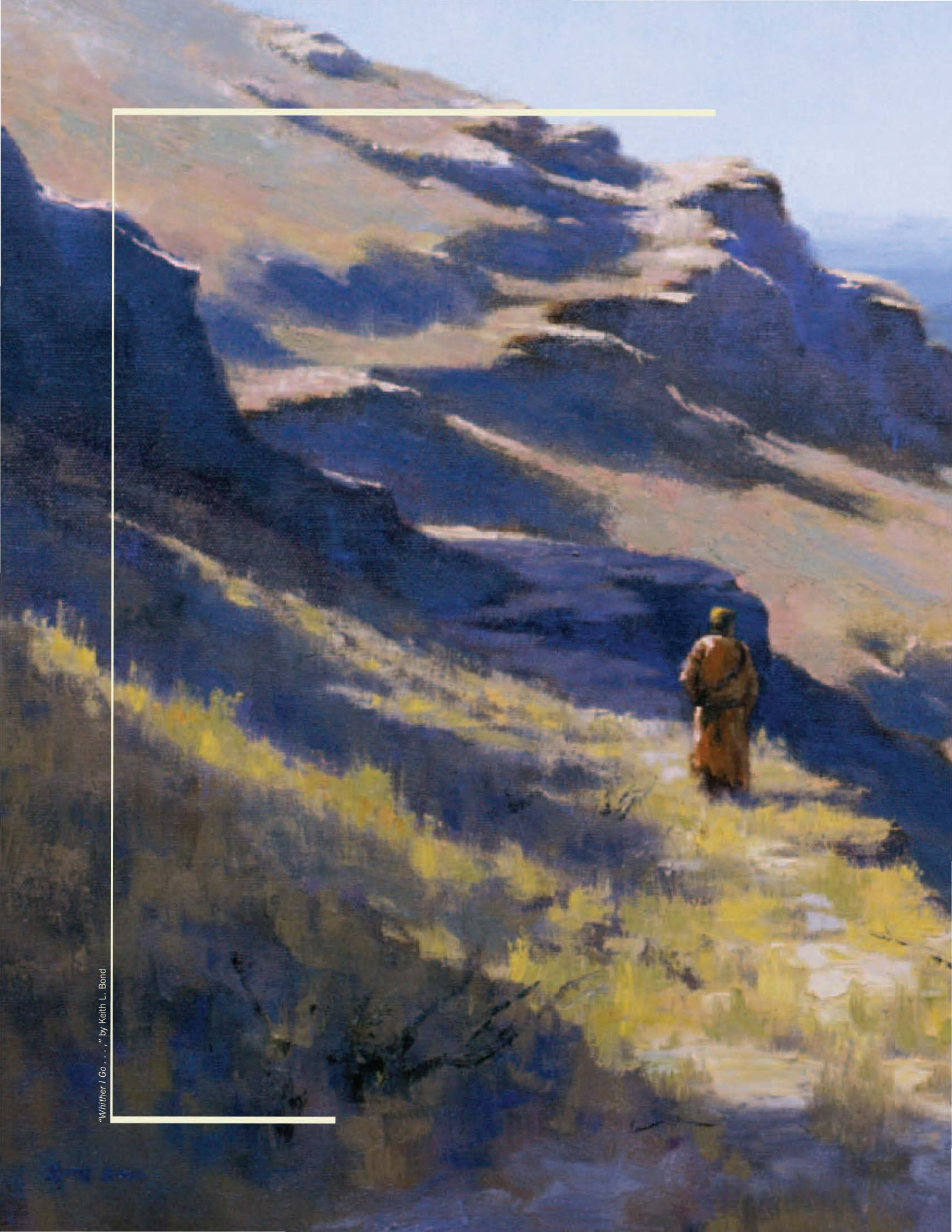
**Title** Moroni: The Final Voice

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**Reference** *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 12/1 (2003): 88–99, 119–20.

**ISSN** 1065-9366 (print), 2168-3158 (online)

**Abstract** Moroni, the final writer and compiler of the Book of Mormon, provides three endings to the book. His first ending, in Mormon 8–9, can be called a “signature ending”—the primary purpose here is to state that the writing is finished and to identify the author and his father and nation. Moroni, yet alive, provides a second ending, a “farewell ending,” in Ether 12. This type of ending both concludes the work and wishes the reader well but then warns or rejoices that the narrator will meet the reader at the final judgment. In the final farewell ending (in Moroni 10), Moroni, the lone survivor of his people, expresses joy and hope. The three endings remind latter-day readers to acknowledge the destruction of the Nephite and Jaredite nations and provide doctrinal, logical, and scriptural arguments in defense of the Book of Mormon and its doctrines.



"Whither / Co. . . ." by Keith L. Bond

An aerial landscape painting in a style reminiscent of J.M.W. Turner, showing a wide valley with rolling hills and a prominent ridge in the foreground. The colors are soft and atmospheric, with a palette of blues, greens, and earthy tones. The sky is a pale, hazy blue. The overall mood is serene and expansive.

# MORONI

*The Final Voice*

MARK D. THOMAS

# W

E WERE ALL CREATED WITH AN INSTINCT TO FIND MEANING IN OUR LIVES THROUGH STORIES. OUR MINDS SEEM TO BE PROGRAMMED TO SEARCH FOR NARRATIVE WALLS THAT SHAPE WHO WE ARE, THUS FULFILLING WHAT, ACCORDING TO ONE HASIDIC RABBI, IS OUR PURPOSE: “GOD MADE MAN BECAUSE [H]E LOVES STORIES.”<sup>1</sup> WE PASS THROUGH LIFE FROM ONE HOUSE OF THE MIND TO THE NEXT. WE MOVE FROM STORY TO STORY THAT EMPOWERS US WITH MEANING EVEN AS IT RESTRICTS US IN A NARROW SPACE OF THOUGHT AND ACTION.

Jews place a piece of the Torah on the doorpost of their houses so that the physical house mirrors the spiritual home. Yet on every person’s doorway is an invisible story. When we leave the confines of our physical house, we walk in the path of an ever-present narrative of meaning. These stories cling to us like shadows and influence our daily speech, thought, and actions. We ritually repeat our varied stories to friends in casual conversation, to fellow church members in testimony meeting, to prospective employers through our résumés, to medical doctors probing our ailments, and in countless other situations that reflect our innate and insatiable hunger for social and individual meaning.

When we hear or tell a story, it may reinforce, undermine, or simply describe the foundation of the stories in which we live. For example, the parables of Jesus effectively took a sledgehammer to the house of first-century Judaism with revolutionary teachings such as blessed are the poor, blessed is the oxymoronic “good” Samaritan, blessed are the persecuted, honored is the penitent prodigal son, and so on.

But the primary function of the Book of Mormon narratives, which differs from that of the parables of Jesus, is to help build a house of meaning in

which individuals and societies may live. In fact, the Book of Mormon presents the principles of the universal human home: the new birth of the natural man and the elimination of secret combinations are two of its bearing walls.

The Book of Mormon is particularly appealing to those whose house of meaning has fallen—spiritual wanderers who have lost or misplaced their home somewhere along the way. The Nephite stories build a pattern from which anyone might—and everyone can—construct a home.

But Moroni provides an ironic ending to this story. He tells us of the *destruction* of ancient houses of meaning. He himself is the master wanderer, literally homeless for at least two decades after the wreckage at Cumorah. Left without companion or family or heir, and having witnessed the horrific demise of his people, he comes to a despairing realization: “Whither I go it mattereth not” (Mormon 8:4).

How can he end a book, intended to build a home, with such woeful destruction, with the utter annihilation of not one but two civilizations? He appears more like a Samson tearing down temples of corruption than a Moses building tabernacles in the wilderness of the soul. In fact, long after telling of the

desolation of the Nephites, Moroni goes back to include his father's decades-old letter in the record to reveal in graphic detail the unspeakable atrocities accompanying the Nephite fall (see Moroni 9). The letter seems out of place at the conclusion of a sacred record. Why, in a story dedicated to the building of a spiritual world, does he highlight the destruction of that world? Or does he? Examining the literary forms that Moroni employed in the Nephite record helps us to make sense of his ironic focus on death and destruction at the end of a veritable book of life.

### The Three Endings of a Book

A first impression of Moroni's narratives might be that they are a jumble of unrelated and unorganized sermons, letters, and narratives—a recitation of sacramental prayers here; a sermon on faith, hope, and charity there; an address to those who doubt miracles next to that. But an attentive analysis of the narrator's commentary reveals a meticulously orchestrated narrative strategy. Our task is to tease out its architectural intent in order to see God in the details and to better appreciate the whole narrative house.

We will begin by analyzing each of the three concluding segments that Moroni wrote in an effort to close the record. Within each discrete segment, he alternates between narrative and commentary about the narrative, between a tour of the house and an architectural commentary on that house. Thus he relates the narrative of the Nephites' destruction and then comments on it for readers (see Mormon 8–9) and uses the same approach in covering the Jaredite history (see the book of Ether). In his own book, he includes his father's sermon and letters as well as his own comments for readers (see the book of Moroni).

Although modern writers eschew this unusual strategy of narrator commentary, we will see how surprising and stunning its effect is in the hands of Moroni.

Of course, narrator commentary appears throughout the Book of Mormon, but (with the possible exception of Nephi) never so much as

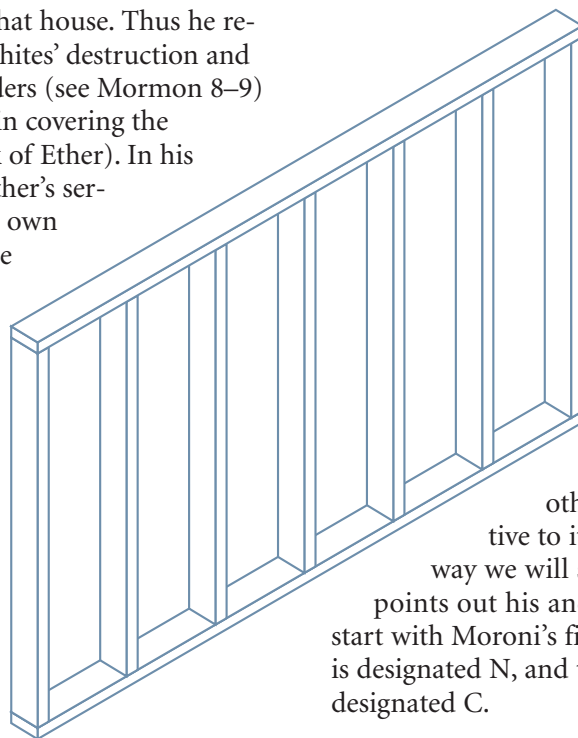
in the passages from Moroni. Most Nephite narrators, especially Mormon, add asides to explain portions of the story. Moroni also comments on particulars, but by virtue of being the one assigned to bury the whole book, he interprets the significance of the entire work in a global and final manner. For this reason, Moroni is the most visible of narrators in the Book of Mormon. He is also the most self-conscious and apologetic:

Lord, the Gentiles will mock at these things, because of our weakness in writing. . . . When we write we behold our weakness, and stumble because of the placing of our words; and I fear lest the Gentiles shall mock at our words. (Ether 12:23, 25)

And only a few [things] have I written, because of my weakness in writing. (Ether 12:40)

And I am the same who hideth up this record unto the Lord. . . . And if there be faults they be the faults of a man. (Mormon 8:14, 17)

Condemn me not because of mine imperfection, neither my father, because of his imperfection, neither them who have written before him; but rather give thanks unto God that he hath made manifest unto you our imperfections, that ye may learn to be more wise than we have been. (Mormon 9:31)



This nervous tour of the narrative house by the embarrassed builder may reveal one of the reasons why Moroni ended the record three separate times: he was trying to end well and was not entirely pleased with his efforts. The interpretive strategy in this study is to compare, in summary form, those endings with one another and then to join each narrative to its narrator commentary. In this way we will see the builder on tour as he points out his and his predecessors' work. We start with Moroni's first "final ending." The narrative is designated N, and the narrator commentary is designated C.

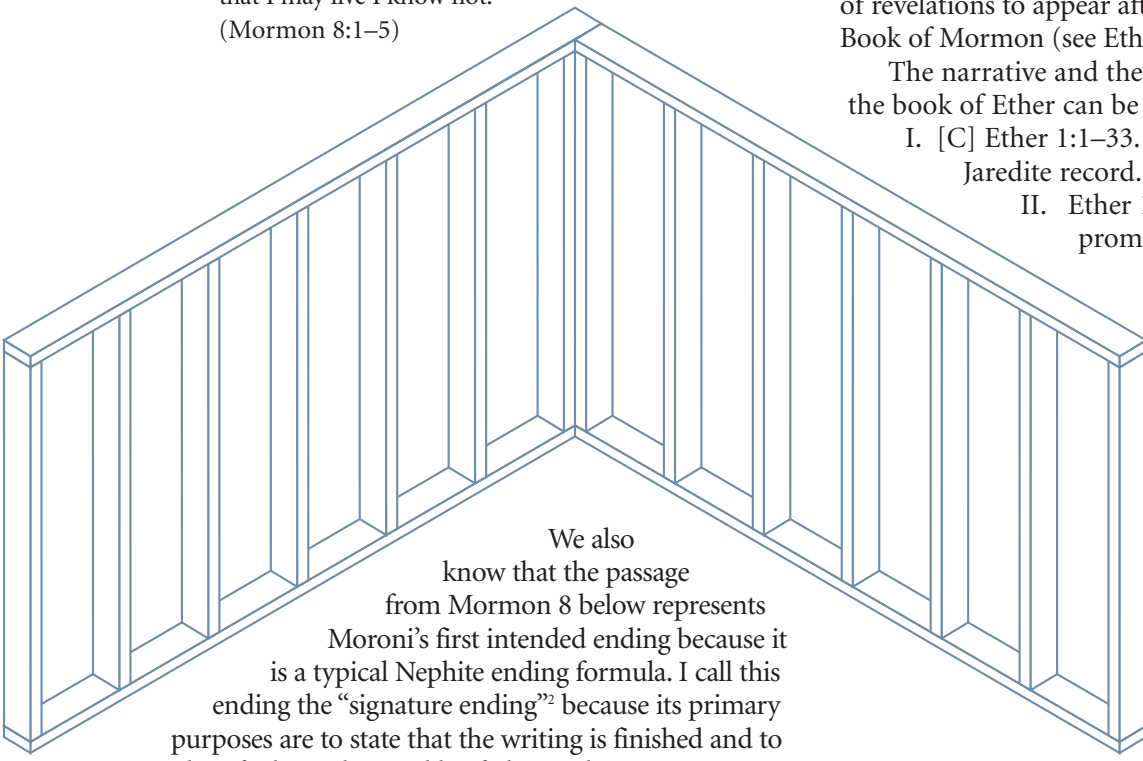
## Ending Number 1: The Signature Ending in Mormon 8–9

The literary structure of Mormon 8–9 breaks down into narration and narrator commentary as follows:

- I. [N] Mormon 8:1–13. Narrative summary of the destruction of the Nephites.
- II. [C] Mormon 8:14–9:37. Sermon to latter-day readers.

We know that Moroni intended to end his writing well before the final words in Moroni 10 because he tells us as early as in Mormon 8 that he will not write any more:

I, Moroni, do finish the record of my father, Mormon. Behold, I have but few things to write. . . . [m]y father hath made this record, and he hath written the intent thereof. And behold, I would write it also if I had room upon the plates, but I have not; and ore I have none, for I am alone. . . . And how long the Lord will suffer that I may live I know not. (Mormon 8:1–5)



We also know that the passage from Mormon 8 below represents Moroni's first intended ending because it is a typical Nephite ending formula. I call this ending the "signature ending" because its primary purposes are to state that the writing is finished and to identify the author and his father and nation:

Behold, I am Moroni; and were it possible, I would make all things known unto you. Behold, I make an end of speaking concerning this people. I am the son of Mormon, and my father was a descendant of Nephi. (Mormon 8:12b–13)

But even though Moroni has told us he is closing and has given us a closing formula, he cannot bring himself to finish. He goes on for another six pages in our edition before he finishes his first ending. Because he has told us that he wishes he could give us more information, it is not surprising that he starts writing again and concludes with a second ending after the Jaredite story.

## Ending Number 2: The Farewell Ending in Ether 12

Yet alive, Moroni somehow finds more room on the plates to build us the second wing of his narrative house. This we know as the book of Ether. He begins this book by stating that he is the translator and narrator. A variety of reasons help explain why Moroni included his abridgment of the Jaredite record in the book of Ether after he thought he had finished the Book of Mormon record, but that discussion would divert us from our purposes here. Let me simply say that the book of Ether is a confirmation of the Nephite message and is a preview of a promised book of revelations to appear after the coming forth of the Book of Mormon (see Ether 3:13–5:1).

The narrative and the narrator commentary in the book of Ether can be outlined as follows:

- I. [C] Ether 1:1–33. Introduction to the Jaredite record.
  - II. Ether 1:34–6:12. Traveling to the promised land.
    - A. [N] Ether 1:34–2:8. The assembly of Jared, his brother, and their family and friends to leave for the promised land.
    - B. [C] Ether 2:9–12. Moroni's commentary to the Gentiles about the promised land.
    - C. [N] Ether 2:13–3:16. The journey continued and Christ's appearance to the brother of Jared.
    - D. [C] Ether 3:17–18. Moroni's commentary on the significance of this visit of Christ.
    - E. [N] Ether 3:19–4:7. The story of the two stones of interpretation.
    - F. [C] Ether 4:8–5:6. Moroni's address to

- the latter-day reader regarding revelation and the Jaredite record.
- G. [N] Ether 6:1–12. The ocean portion of the journey and arrival.
- III. Ether 6:13–11:23. The reign of the kings.
- A. [N] Ether 6:13–8:18. Kings from Jared to the introduction of secret combinations.
- B. [C] Ether 8:19–8:26. Moroni’s commentary on secret combinations.
- C. [N] Ether 9:1–11:23. Kings from the introduction of secret combinations to Coriantumr.
- IV. Ether 12:1–15:34. Destruction of the Jaredites.
- A. [N] Ether 12:1–5. Ether’s warning of destruction and sermon to the Jaredites on faith and hope.
- B. [C] Ether 12:6–12:41. Moroni’s interruption of Ether’s sermon to apply it to the reader and to discuss faith, hope, and charity. His farewell ending before concluding the book of Ether narration.
- C. [N] Ether 13:1–13a. Ether’s sermon continued.
- D. [N] Ether 13:113b–15:34. The final destruction of the Jaredites.

The second formal farewell to the reader follows a different form and serves a different function than does the signature ending in Mormon 8. I will call this second type of ending the “farewell ending.” It both ends the work and wishes the reader well (“farewell”), but then warns or rejoices that the narrator will meet the reader at the final judgment. This kind of ending evokes the solemnity and profundity of the narrator’s final words, often just before death. Thus it combines a formulaic ending with either prophetic warning or joyous exhortation associated with the judgment. It is an ending also utilized by Nephi, Jacob, Enos, and Mormon.<sup>3</sup> Here is the farewell ending that concludes Nephi’s writings:

And now, my beloved brethren, all those who are of the house of Israel, and all ye ends of the earth, I speak unto you as the voice of one crying from the dust: Farewell until that great day shall come. And you that will not partake of the goodness of God, and respect the words of the Jews, and also my words, and the words which shall proceed forth out of the mouth of the Lamb of God, behold, I bid you an everlasting

farewell, for these words shall condemn you at the last day. For what I seal on earth, shall be brought against you at the judgment bar; for thus hath the Lord commanded me, and I must obey. Amen. (2 Nephi 33:13–15)

The farewell ending to a distant reader with its more sermonlike quality, its finality, is understandably found in narrator commentary. In Nephi’s case above, it immediately follows a defense of the truthfulness of his words. The outcome of the final judgment will rest, at least in part, upon how we react to the narrator’s message. I can think of no more powerful way to end a story; it evokes the mystery of ancient nobles, it evokes the power of the narrator’s dying words, and it evokes the finality of the final judgment as a meeting place and as the judgment upon readers’ reactions to those words—and the readers constitute “the house of Israel” and the “ends of the earth.”

The signature ending, on the other hand, is far more prosaic and matter-of-fact. It is generally a simple designation of authorship without preaching. For that reason it is often found in correspondence between characters within the narrative. Moroni’s second farewell, the farewell ending, however, is an address to readers, and what an address it is! It appears in the final narrator commentary section in Ether 12:38–41, just before Moroni concludes his final narrative regarding the destruction of the Jaredites:

And now I, Moroni, bid farewell unto the Gentiles, yea, and also unto my brethren whom I love, until we shall meet before the judgment-seat of Christ, where all men shall know that my garments are not spotted with your blood. . . . Amen.

Here Moroni ends his message with both a statement of love and an implied prophetic warning. However, he provides yet another final farewell ending, though, as we will see, it ends in a much different tone and has a very different purpose.

### Ending Number 3: The Final Farewell Ending in Moroni 10

After his first two attempts to conclude the record, Moroni returned to building this “house of Israel,” perhaps in part because he was dissatisfied with his efforts in writing a grand summary for his story and its accompanying narrator commentary. He may have added multiple endings simply because



he lived longer than he expected. But because he changed his entire narrative approach in the final ending, it is probable that he continued to write at least in part because he was not entirely satisfied with his first two endings. After his first formulaic ending, he added many more pages of narration and narrator commentary. Maybe this final ending provides the resolution that has evaded him in his previous endings. Moroni begins his third attempt at finality with an explanation:

I had supposed not to have written more, but I have not as yet perished. . . . Wherefore, I write a few more things, contrary to that which I had supposed: for I had supposed not to have written any more. (Moroni 1:1–4)

Moroni's final effort in his own book follows this structure:

- I. [N] Moroni 1:1–4. Introduction and narrative update.
- II. [C] Moroni 2–6. Ecclesiastical instructions for organizers of the latter-day church.
  - A. Moroni 2:1–3. Procedure for conferring the Holy Ghost.
  - B. Moroni 3:1–4. Procedure for ordaining priests and teachers.
  - C. Moroni 4:1–3. Procedure for administering the sacramental bread.
  - D. Moroni 5:1–2. Procedure for administering the sacramental wine.
  - E. Moroni 6:1–9. Procedure for administering baptism and conducting church meetings.
- III. Moroni 7–10. Sermons and letters.
  - A. [N] Moroni 7:1–48. Mormon's sermon on faith, hope, and charity.
  - B. [N] Moroni 8:1–30. Mormon's letter on infant baptism.
  - C. [N] Moroni 9:1–26. Mormon's letter describing the barbaric end of the Nephites.
  - D. [C] Moroni 10:1–34. Moroni's sermon to latter-day readers.

In this third ending something very different from the prior two endings is happening. The text consists largely of a sermon (Moroni 7) and letters directed to persons in the frame of the Nephite narrative, and with the exception of Moroni 9, the narrative is mostly doctrinal in nature even though it is not a commentary from the narrator. Also, the por-

tion that is a commentary, Moroni 10, at least at first glance, does not appear to be commentary on narrative. Why does Moroni make these changes in his narrative and commentary patterns? What does this shift in Moroni's narrative strategy indicate?

These changes in the third ending have important interpretive consequences. They indicate narrative shifts from the ancient narrative to the reader's implied narrative. Let me explain this in detail. After destroying the house of Nephi and the house of Ether in the first two endings, the book of Moroni hands us the hammer to rebuild what has been lost. The words and narrative structure become the walls in which the reader lives. Hence the commentary in the book of Moroni is *not* tied to this or that ancient story but rather to how the reader can reconstruct the Nephite and Jaredite houses. Before that, we were given a tour of the Nephite and Jaredite houses with accompanying commentary. Then, in the book of Moroni, the builder turns to us, the readers, with a set of plans and points to our lot across the street. This is now about our own home. That is what the structure in the book of Moroni accomplishes, and it explains why the narrative and commentary of this ending differ from the earlier pattern. This narrative technique shifts from providing commentary on the Nephites and Jaredites to providing commentary as tools for the reader's own implied narrative. In this fashion Moroni jumps from the ancient destruction stories to the reader's own future story. This narrative strategy explains the purpose of the irony of what can be termed a book of death (the narratives of the Jaredite and Nephite destructions) in a book of life (the Book of Mormon as a whole).

The third ending makes the reader's life an extension of the Book of Mormon. We finish the story with the tools that Moroni gives us in his third and final ending. The structural outline of the book of Moroni presented above is essentially a summary of those tools. This is what I mean when I use the term *implied narrative*—the narrative of my completion of the house of Nephi in my own age and time. Thus the commentary in the third ending is in fact commentary on the narrative; it extends the Book of Mormon narrative to the reader's own implied narrative.

So the outmoded technique of narrator commentary makes the Book of Mormon our own book, our own narrative house. Mark Twain may have seen the Book of Mormon as “chloroform in print” (a clever wordplay on the book of Ether), and literary critics



*Moroni Burying the Record*, by Clark Kelley Price

may be biased against its antiquated technique of narrator commentary, but the literary proof is in the pudding. It is no wonder that Parley P. Pratt and thousands of others have read this book through the night with joy and astonishment; the narrative technique has enabled them not only to live in the ancient narrative house but also to build their own houses of meaning.

Before dealing further with the final ending formula, let us examine the form of the letters from Mormon to his son Moroni (Moroni 8–9) in order to better grasp why this narrative plan in the third ending is so effective. These letters resemble the ancient Greek letter-writing form, especially the letter in Moroni 8.<sup>4</sup> This is the same ancient form utilized by Paul in the New Testament. The form is not an abstract theological treatise but a concrete and personal communication. Mormon's letters do contain deductive logic, scriptural arguments, and doctrine, but they are not abstract treatises. We also find in

them the very personal nature of the communication from father to son. The letters contain expressions of personal love, prayerful concern for Moroni's welfare, and joy in his faithfulness, and they encourage Moroni not to give up despite the hopelessness of the circumstances. The clear affection expressed by Mormon for his son in these decades-old letters stands in contrast to the brutality of the ending scenes of the Nephites in the final letter.

The consensus of recent scholarship on ancient letter writing argues that the presence of the writer (*parousia*) was an important part of letter writing from earliest times. Such a personal letter was intended to communicate as one would in person. The Greek letter-writing form found in the Book of Mormon contains the typical greeting, prayer for welfare, dialogue, and caring farewell that one finds common in intimate personal relationships in which one is personally present.<sup>5</sup> Mormon's letters convey his longing to be with his son and evoke for

the modern reader the presence of a long-dead father.

Following the letters and sermon of his father, Moroni gives his final farewell. In this we also find a very personal message. We have seen how both Nephi's farewell and Moroni's second farewell ending contain prophetic warnings about the final judgment. Moroni's third and final ending in Moroni 10:34 is notable and unusual for its positive, irrepressible hopefulness:

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.

On this personal note the Book of Mormon ends. Previous farewell endings have led us to expect a warning as part of the rehearsal for the meeting before the bar of God. But here Moroni anticipates only joy at the end. We will return later to the reason for the surprising pleasantness in this third and final ending.

### Reading the Three Endings

Having finished Moroni's record, we may draw some conclusions about its structure. We have seen how Moroni is the most self-conscious of the Nephite narrators. He is clearly not satisfied with his effort, and he senses its importance (hence his three attempts to end the record and his apologies for the weakness of his writing). His self-consciousness is further revealed in the fact that his commentary is usually more than an interpretation of the attached narrative. In reality, his commentary is an interpretation of the entire Book of Mormon. Clearly his primary narrative goal in his various commentaries is to relate the Book of Mormon as a whole to latter-day readers—particularly regarding the spiritual reasons for the destruction of nations. He does this in all three endings in his narrator commentary. In the first ending, after relating the events of the Nephite destruction, he states that “the sword of vengeance hangeth over you” (Mormon 8:41). In other words, the Nephite history is our history and we the readers are on the verge of destruction.

In the second ending the narrator commentary sets out one of the reasons why the Jaredite record is added. “And this [the Nephite and Jaredite records] cometh unto you, O ye Gentiles, that ye may know

the decrees of God—that ye may repent, . . . that ye may not bring down the fulness of the wrath of God upon you as the inhabitants of the land have hitherto done” (Ether 2:11). The inescapable message is that the Jaredite and Nephite destructions are historical patterns that readers risk experiencing firsthand if they do not repent.

Thus Moroni stands between the reader and the entire Book of Mormon—not only to provide a narrative house for the reader but also to shout a prophetic warning and exhortation to change. His focus in the first two endings is on destruction. Passing quickly over hundreds of years and a long string of kings, he devotes a large portion of the Jaredite record to the scene of destruction. In fact, nearly one-third of that long history of dozens of generations is devoted to the final Jaredite destruction. In other words, when we begin to interpret Moroni, we soon find that he wants the book to interpret and warn us. His first two endings focus on destruction of nations.

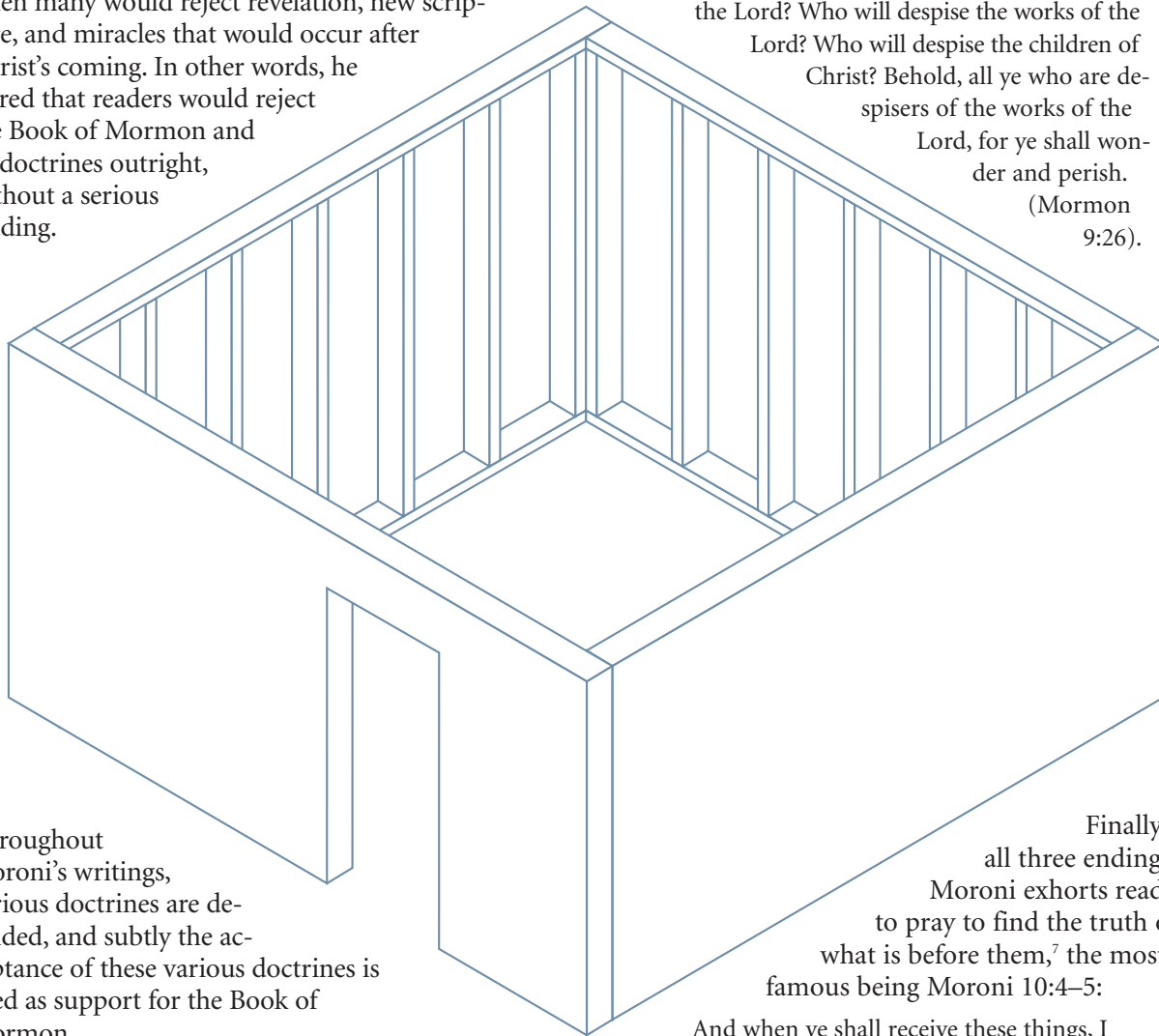
Moroni's second purpose, apparent in the seemingly random doctrinal expositions and arguments of all three endings, is to defend the Book of Mormon itself. For example, in three separate sections, Moroni either quotes Ether and Mormon or directly discusses faith, hope, and charity.<sup>6</sup> Why? At least one of the reasons is to defend the Book of Mormon's existence to skeptical latter-day readers. It is not by accident that after exhorting readers to have faith, hope, and charity—because we must believe in what we cannot see, and because a witness will not come until after a trial of our faith—Moroni despairs that those readers will mock what he is writing, that they will not have faith in what he writes, that they will not have charity. In other words, he is exhorting them to exercise faith, hope, and charity by accepting the Book of Mormon itself (see Ether 12). He prays to God that readers of the record might have charity to believe in the book despite his weakness in writing (see Ether 12:35–36). Moroni ends his book by arguing that those who have faith, hope, and charity will believe in the truth of his words in the Book of Mormon (see Moroni 10:18–29).

The same purpose lies behind Moroni's inclusion of his father's sermon on faith, hope, and charity (see Moroni 7). This sermon is addressed to believers among the Nephites but contains a defense of the Book of Mormon that Moroni aimed at latter-day readers. This sermon argues that the days of miracles

and angelic visitations have not ceased with the coming of Christ but must continue in all ages and that one must judge whatever invites to do good and to believe in Christ to be a true product of Christ. Why did Moroni include in the record this sermon with its arguments against rejecting as evil that which is of God? Because he saw the day of his readers, a time when many would reject revelation, new scripture, and miracles that would occur after Christ's coming. In other words, he feared that readers would reject the Book of Mormon and its doctrines outright, without a serious reading.

God. So when Moroni says the following with passionate repetition, he is defending the Book of Mormon itself and the latter-day work that it would spawn:

And now, behold, who can stand against the works of the Lord? Who can deny his sayings? Who will rise up against the almighty power of the Lord? Who will despise the works of the Lord? Who will despise the children of Christ? Behold, all ye who are despisers of the works of the Lord, for ye shall wonder and perish.  
(Mormon 9:26).



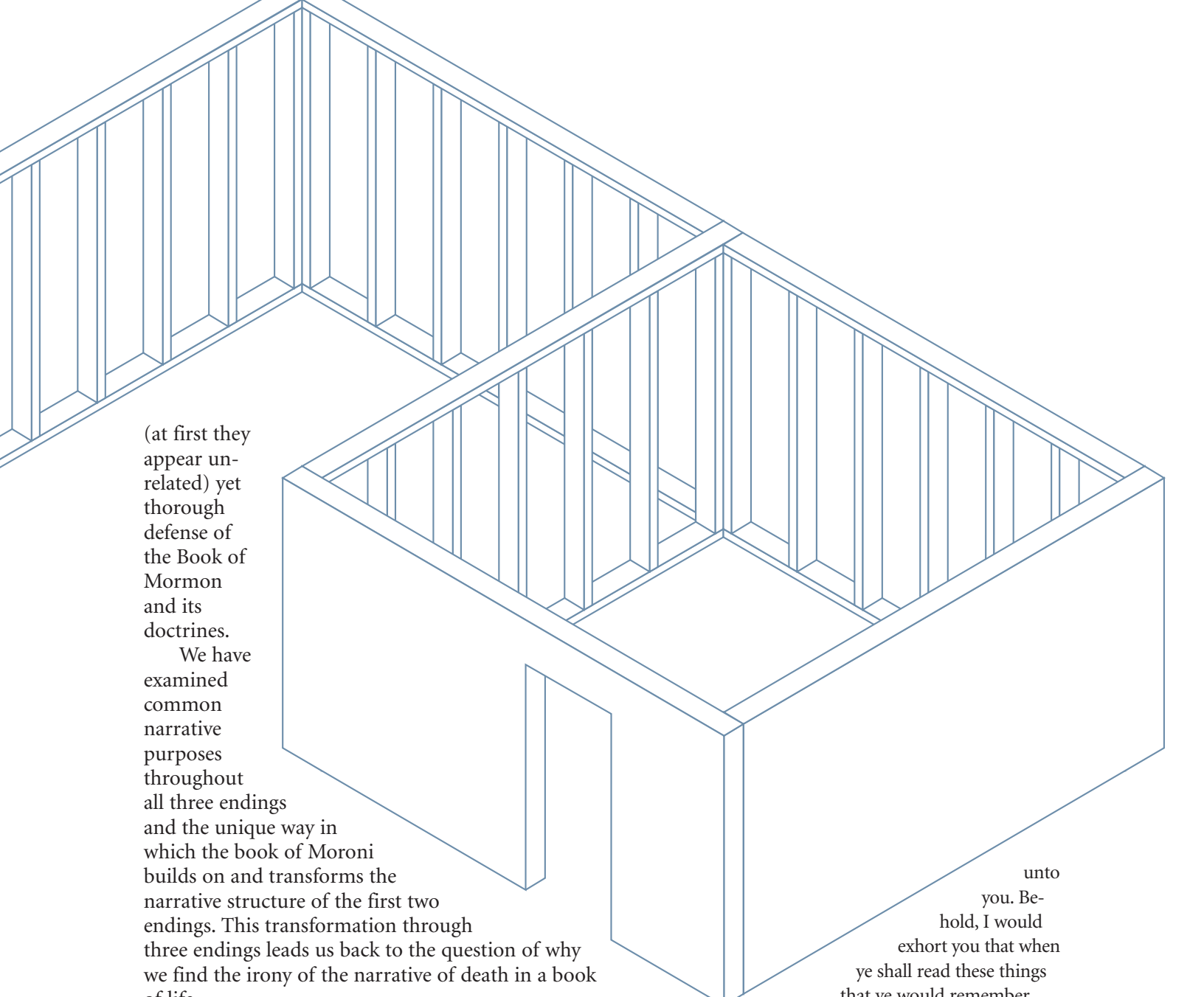
Throughout Moroni's writings, various doctrines are defended, and subtly the acceptance of these various doctrines is used as support for the Book of Mormon.

We see this same defense of the Book of Mormon in Moroni's first narrator commentary in Mormon 8–9. Here Moroni speaks to various groups among latter-day readers: those who do not believe in Christ, those who doubt current revelation, and those who reject miracles. The unifying thread in all of these random sermonettes is the Book of Mormon, which preaches of Christ, proclaims revelation in every age, and predicts its own coming forth through the miraculous power of

Finally, in all three endings Moroni exhorts readers to pray to find the truth of what is before them,<sup>7</sup> the most famous being Moroni 10:4–5:

And when ye shall receive these things, I would exhort you that ye would ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true. . . . And by the power of the Holy Ghost ye may know the truth of all things.

In summary, Moroni's two grand organizing principles throughout all three endings are (1) to apply the Nephite and Jaredite stories (especially the destructions of those two nations) to latter-day readers; and (2) to include a variety of doctrinal, logical, and scriptural arguments that are a subtle



(at first they appear unrelated) yet thorough defense of the Book of Mormon and its doctrines.

We have examined common narrative purposes throughout all three endings and the unique way in which the book of Moroni builds on and transforms the narrative structure of the first two endings. This transformation through three endings leads us back to the question of why we find the irony of the narrative of death in a book of life.

After ending the Nephite record twice with tales of distressing annihilation, Moroni ends a final time with a message of hope—a set of instructions on how to put the house of meaning back together. The three endings can be summarized, in order of appearance in the record, as past destruction 1 (the Nephites), past destruction 2 (the Jaredites), and future restoration. Following the “building instructions” on how to ordain, baptize, administer the sacrament, and so forth, Moroni’s final farewell in Moroni 10 ends with a sermon based on a series of hopeful exhortations for that future restoration:

Now I, Moroni, . . . seal up these records, after I have spoken a few words by way of exhortation

unto  
you. Be-  
hold, I would  
exhort you that when  
ye shall read these things  
. . . that ye would remember

how merciful the Lord hath been  
unto the children of men. . . . I would exhort you that ye would ask God . . . if these things are not true. . . . I would exhort you that ye deny not the power of God. . . . And again, I exhort you, my brethren, that ye deny not the gifts of God. . . . And I would exhort you, my beloved brethren, that ye remember that every good gift cometh of Christ. And I would exhort you, my beloved brethren, that ye remember that he is the same yesterday, today, and forever. . . . And I exhort you to remember these things. . . . And again I would exhort you that ye would come unto Christ, and lay hold upon every good gift. . . . And awake, and arise from the dust, O Jerusalem; yea,

and put on thy beautiful garments, O daughter of Zion; and strengthen thy stakes and enlarge thy borders forever. . . . And now I bid unto all, farewell. (Moroni 10:1–4, 7–8, 18–19, 27, 30–31, 34; compare Isaiah 52:1–2; 54:2)

The power of these final words comes in the strength of Moroni's repetitious exhortations, especially his paraphrasing of Isaiah about restoring the ancient walls and enlarging the tent of the holy city. In the Book of Mormon this restoration is understood on a literal level to mean the return of Jews and others to their promised lands in the latter days. It is also understood here and elsewhere in the Book of Mormon on a spiritual level to refer to the restoration of the gospel in the latter days.<sup>8</sup> From the torture rack of two national destructions, Moroni sees into the future and exhorts modern readers to embrace that spiritual restoration. But he, like many great martyrs in all ages, is not destroyed; somehow his enemies can never reach him. Even though everything he loves in life is dead or dying, there is some foundation rock in him that cannot be toppled by the winds of chaos.

Faith in Christ is a sustaining theme throughout the Book of Mormon. Christ is the answer to the existential limits of life facing all people. Certainly faith in Christ is the answer to the limits facing Moroni (the loss of all cultural meaning and context and the painful realities of loneliness and impending death). He tells of the sustaining power of this faith in his second ending:

And now I, Moroni, bid farewell unto the Gentiles . . . until we shall meet before the judgment-seat of Christ. . . . And then shall ye know that I have seen Jesus, and that he hath talked with me face to face, and that he told me in plain humility, even as a man telleth another in mine own language, concerning these things. (Ether 12:38–39)

Besides this faith, two other things sustain Moroni after the utter destruction of his people—memory and hope. The memory is the presence of a father long dead, and the hope is the presence of latter-day readers who will set up the spiritual house again. Earlier we noted Mormon's fatherly compassion in his letters and sermon and Moroni's cheer at the thought of meeting readers at God's bar (see

Moroni 10). So memory and hope are not just mental images or principles for Moroni, but come to him in the form of living realities that sustain him—living in the presence of those not present (as we have seen in the literary function of letters). That is why Moroni, in the face of doom, is never cynical; his spiritual home somehow survived, unseen and quietly within him, to pass on to us.

But the presence goes both ways. More than a voice from the dust, Moroni is a presence from the dust. If salvation is a dramatic narrative event, then it is best represented by a story and by presence within that story as we read it. Salvation is more than an abstract future concept—it is living, dramatic, and sacred presence. As we read and experience Moroni, the elixirs of death become God's apothecary for life as we drink in the presence of the lonely survivor.

Quietly in this story that ends with utter destruction, there is an inner building of a spiritual home based on the presence from faith, the presence from memory, and the presence from hope. Moroni is a type. This holy wanderer on the border of life and death, on the boundary of meaning and meaninglessness, passes a note to us regarding the collapse of our own house on the top of our own final Cumorah. We think we are reading of the fall of Moroni's world when we are only reading of what can happen in our own world if we disregard his salvific call to "come unto Christ" (Moroni 10:32).

Although our houses may fall before they can be rebuilt on sure foundations, Moroni's house never falls. His narratives of the twin Cumorahs of Nephite and Jaredite destruction are eclipsed by his wonderfully joyous blueprint of salvation in his third and final attempt to end effectively the book that would become the keystone of the latter-day restoration.

The story of Moroni is the story of lonely survival. He finished his work decades after his friends were gone and his world was destroyed. His survival through memory and hope offers a model as we wander in the wilderness alone, after our own Cumorah, hoping to find some presence in a narrative home. And at some point, we will find a new stone box, the house of death, in which we (like the golden plates of Moroni) will find rest. ■

**Moroni: The Final Voice**

Mark D. Thomas

1. Quoted in Sam Keen, *To a Dancing God* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), 82–83.
2. There are variations on this ending formula throughout the Book of Mormon. For example, see Alma 54:14; 54:23–24; 58:41; 60:36; 3 Nephi 3:10; 5:19–26.
3. See 2 Nephi 33:13–15; Jacob 7:27; Enos 1:26–27; Mormon 7. Jacob 7:27 does not explicitly discuss the judgment but alludes to it with the words *farewell* and *adieu* (literally, “until God”). Although they do not strictly use an ending formula, 1 Nephi 22:29–31 and Mormon 3:17–22 each end a section of narrator commentary with comments similar to a farewell ending—a kind of minifarewell. In addition to Moroni’s farewell and signature endings, there are other, prosaic endings that simply state the facts of transition of narrators and narration. The ending to the Words of Mormon is such an example.
4. In these letters, Mormon frequently uses the phrase “and now . . .,” which is typical for ancient Hebrew letters. This feature can be found in the earliest known texts of Hebrew letters as well as in the Hebrew Bible itself. See David Noel Freedman et al., eds., *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), s.v. “Letters.” Aside from that feature, the formal features of Mormon’s letters seem to be roughly patterned after the Greek letter form used by the apostle Paul. Stowers has identified five ancient Hebrew greetings. Four of the five refer to Yahweh, and the fifth is a greeting to the recipient and his or her household. None of these formal elements are found in the greetings in Mormon’s letters. His letters do, however, mention “grace” as a greeting, as the prayers for the recipient, and as subject matter (compare 1 Corinthians 13:1–13 to Moroni 7:21–48), thereby resembling the Pauline letters and the Greek form that Paul followed. Also see John L. White, *Light from Ancient Letters* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986); William G. Doty, *Letters in Primitive Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1973); and Stanley K. Stowers, *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986).
5. For a discussion of presence in the Greek letter writing form,

see Robert W. Funk, *Parables and Presence* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 81–110.

6. See Ether 12:1–41; Moroni 7:1–48; 8:14–17; 10:18–29. In Moroni 8:14–17 the clear reference to faith, hope, and charity is to prove the impropriety of infant baptism. In the other passages cited above, the three virtues are cited in part to defend the Book of Mormon.
7. See Mormon 9:21; Ether 4:7–16; Moroni 10:4–5. In Ether 4 the reader's ability to obtain revelation is compared to the revelations of the brother of Jared in preceding passages. The entire journey of the brother of Jared in those passages is based on a series of six prayers that are answered by revelation. It is clearly an exemplary tale demonstrating the correlation of prayer and revelation.
8. For the Nephite interpretation of Isaiah 52:1–2 and 54:2, see the reading and interpretation by Jacob in 2 Nephi 6–11 and by Jesus in 3 Nephi 20–23. These passages from Isaiah are interpreted to refer first and literally to the gathering of Israel; second, literally to the gathering of all nations to their land of inheritance; and finally, spiritually to the restoration of the lost gospel of Jesus Christ in the latter days. The context of the passage from Moroni 10 suggests

that Moroni interpreted the restoration in the spiritual sense of coming unto Christ and accepting the Book of Mormon. This is the restoration that Moroni is suggesting as the final message of hope.