

Thirty-Five Minute History of the Book of Mormon

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This succinct historical summary of the Book of Mormon is titled, rather facetiously, based upon the number of minutes required to read it at a leisurely pace. The student who takes the time to become thoroughly familiar with this outline naturally establishes for him or herself a mental framework or “sticky platform” upon which additional learning may then be placed. This platform is “sticky” because it readily accepts additions, and the additions stick—they become permanently retained in memory. This cannot be accomplished by only one reading. The outline must be read repeatedly. The end result is a highly practical, comprehensible, functional, and growing, personal library of information about the Book of Mormon.

Fully seventy-two percent of all the chapters in the Book of Mormon are mentioned in this outline. Hence, the student who becomes comfortable with it benefits also from knowing where, in the book, all of the most important events occurred.

597 BC Lehi and his family depart Jerusalem and camp in the valley of Lemuel near the coast of the Red Sea (1 Nephi 2). While there, Lehi’s sons return to Jerusalem for the brass plates of Laban (1 Nephi 3-5). And again, they return for Ishmael and his family (1 Nephi 7). Also, both Lehi (1 Nephi 8) and Nephi (1 Nephi 11-15) have visions of the tree of life and other events concerning the future of the world. Nephi’s epiphany includes a vision of the great and abominable church (1 Nephi 13-14).

The Lord delivers to the travelers the Liahona to help them find their way in the wilderness, and they depart the valley of Lemuel (1 Nephi 16). After eight years in the wilderness the group reaches the seacoast, builds a ship (1 Nephi 17), and embarks for the land of promise (1 Nephi 18).

588 BC They arrive in the western hemisphere and live initially in a coastal location, the “land of their first inheritance.” Nephi is commanded to make a set of plates, the first installment of the large plates of Nephi, and begin engraving upon them (1 Nephi 19). Nephi quotes Isaiah chapters 48-49 (1 Nephi 20-21).

Father Lehi counsels and blesses each of his sons (2 Nephi 1-4). His counsel to his son Jacob includes teachings on the atonement (2 Nephi 2). Lehi dies shortly thereafter.

580 BC Because of the threat of harm from his older brothers Laman and Lemuel, and their adherents, Nephi and his followers move inland and establish themselves in the land of Nephi. There, the “Nephites” will live for some 370 years. In the land of Nephi they build a temple “after the manner of the temple of Solomon.” Nephi is commanded to start another record of his people—a set of plates called the small plates of Nephi (2 Nephi 5).

Nephi's righteous brother Jacob delivers an important two-day sermon to the Nephites (2 Nephi 6-10). Jacob quotes Isaiah chapters 50-51 (2 Nephi 7-8). Jacob's sermon also includes teachings on the atonement (2 Nephi 9).

Nephi records Isaiah chapters 2-14 from the plates of Laban onto the small plates of Nephi (2 Nephi 12-24).

Nephi also prophesies of latter-day apostasy, the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, and the restoration of the gospel (2 Nephi 27-30). Nephi quotes Isaiah 29 (2 Nephi 27), and he also discourses on baptism (2 Nephi 31).

Nephi dies and a succession of kings reigns in his stead. Jacob takes possession of the small plates of Nephi and writes onto them his own book, the book of Jacob. Jacob denounces pride and unchastity and condemns the unauthorized practice of plural marriage (Jacob 2). He records, onto the small plates of Nephi, the prophet Zenos's allegory of the tame and wild olive tree (Jacob 5) and his own experience with the antichrist Sherem (Jacob 7).

210 BC Three hundred and seventy years have passed since Nephi moved with his people to the land of Nephi. Because of growing threats from the Lamanites, the Nephite king Mosiah leads his people out of the land of Nephi, north to the land of Zarahemla where they encounter the people of Zarahemla, the "Mulekites." The prophet Amaleki goes along and documents this migration on the small plates of Nephi (Omni 1). The land of Nephi and the lands that surround it, which the Nephites leave behind, subsequently come under Lamanite control.

200-120 BC Zeniff leads a group of Nephites back up to the Land of Nephi (200 BC) where they live in subjugation to the Lamanites for some eighty years (Mosiah 9-22). In that land, Zeniff is succeeded as king of this group by his son Noah (about 160 BC) who is succeeded by his son Limhi. Limhi and his people are eventually rescued and led back to Zarahemla in 120 BC (Mosiah 7-8, 21-22).

150 BC During the reign of the wicked king Noah, the prophet Abinadi preaches to the court of Noah and quotes Isaiah chapter 53 (Mosiah 14). Alma, a priest in the court, is converted by Abinadi's preachings. Abinadi is martyred, and Alma leads a group of believers initially to the Waters of Mormon (Mosiah 11-17). After living in the wilderness for about thirty years (Mosiah 23-24), Alma's colony finally returns to Zarahemla in 120 BC. Alma is appointed presiding high priest in Zarahemla.

160 BC In Zarahemla, Mosiah is succeeded as king by his son Benjamin. Benjamin leads his people in battle against the Lamanites, and then several years of peace follow (Words of Mormon).

124 BC Finally, King Benjamin delivers an important discourse to his people at the temple in Zarahemla (Mosiah 2-5) including counsel to them on the sin of pride and characteristics of the natural man (Mosiah 3). He then turns the office of king, including the Nephite record (both the large and small plates of Nephi), over to his son Mosiah (Mosiah 6).

100 BC In Zarahemla Alma, the son of Alma and his friends, the four sons of Mosiah rebel against the Church and seek to destroy it. They are miraculously converted (Mosiah 27).

92 BC The younger Alma is elected chief judge of the people and is appointed also to succeed his father as the presiding high priest. In his first year as chief judge, he contends with the antichrist Nehor who kills Gideon and is executed on top of the hill Manti (Alma 1). Alma also contends with the wicked Nephite dissident Amlici. Amlici leads a combined army against Alma's army. Amlici's army consists of his own wicked followers and a Lamanite army. Amlici is slain by Alma (Alma 2).

92-78 BC The four sons of Mosiah (Ammon, Aaron, Omner, and Himni), now thoroughly converted, leave on their fourteen-year mission to the Lamanites in the land of Nephi (Alma 17-26).

In the land of Nephi, Ammon, while working for the Lamanite king Lamoni, protects the king's flocks at the waters of Sebus and drives off those who attempt to steal them (Alma 17). As a result of Ammon's example and preaching, King Lamoni and his household are converted (Alma 18-19). Aaron preaches to Lamoni's father, the king over all the land, and he and his household are also converted (Alma 22). The believing Lamanites are called the Anti-Nephi-Lehies. They bury their weapons and covenant to never again make war. They are attacked by their fellow Lamanites and 1,005 are slain (Alma 24).

On their return to Zarahemla, the sons of Mosiah bring with them the Anti-Nephi-Lehies or people of Ammon (Alma 27). The children of this latter Lamanite group will become the two thousand stripling warriors. They will fight for the Nephite cause under the leadership of Alma's son Helaman and thus also become known as the sons of Helaman.

83 BC Alma gives up the job of chief judge to devote himself full time to the office of high priest (Alma 4). He preaches in Zarahemla and in the surrounding cities converting many and building up the Church. His preachings include a notable discourse on the process of spiritual growth (Alma 5).

He is rejected and persecuted in the city of Ammonihah. He teams up with Amulek and the two of them preach and build up the Church (Alma 8-15). Alma and Amulek contend with the clever and wicked lawyer Zeezrom, and Zeezrom is eventually converted (Alma 11-15). Alma's preachings to Zeezrom include a discourse on the priesthood (Alma 13).

The city of Ammonihah is destroyed by a Lamanite army (Alma 16). This army is the same that swore vengeance against the Nephites after these same Lamanites had attacked and killed 1,005 of their own people, the Anti-Nephi-Lehies in the land of Nephi.

The high priest Alma contends with the antichrist Korihor (Alma 30).

74 BC Alma, Amulek, and others preach among the Zoramites, a group of apostate Nephites (Alma 31-35). Alma's preaching includes teachings on the principle of faith (Alma 32). Amulek discourses on the infinite atonement of Christ (Alma 34).

After returning from his mission to the Zoramites, Alma counsels his sons Helaman (Alma 36-37), Shiblon (Alma 38), and Corianton (Alma 39-42). His counsel to his youngest son Corianton includes teachings on chastity and sexual sin (Alma 39); the spirit world and resurrection (Alma 40); the law of restoration (Alma 41); and atonement, justice, and mercy (Alma 42).

74-55 BC A period of war (Alma 43-62). The Nephites are led by Captain Moroni. The Nephite dissident Zerahemnah's army is defeated by Captain Moroni's army. Zerahemnah is scalped by a Nephite soldier (Alma 43-44).

Alma departs out of the land and was never heard of again. It is likely he was translated. Helaman, the son of Alma succeeds Alma as high priest of the people (Alma 45).

Moroni fears that wickedness among his people might result in the loss of their liberty and their destruction. He therefore makes a flag, by tearing his coat. On the flag, which he calls the "title of liberty," he writes, "In memory of our God, our religion and freedom, our peace, our wives, and our children." He fastens the flag onto a pole and goes out among the Nephites, urging them to covenant with God to keep his commandments that their freedoms might be preserved. Many of the Nephites make this covenant and rend their own clothing as a token of this covenant (Alma 46).

Another Nephite dissenter, Amalickiah, a large and strong man, goes over to the Lamanites, by deception and murder, he becomes the Lamanite king and marries the Lamanite queen. He leads a Lamanite army against the Nephites. Amalickiah and his army are defeated by Captain Moroni. Amalickiah is killed when Teancum steals into his camp and puts a javelin through his heart (Alma 46-51).

Captain Moroni and Teancum win an important battle over a powerful Lamanite army led by a Zoramite captain named Jacob. They decoy Jacob and his army out of their stronghold in the city of Mulek (Alma 52).

Helaman, now high priest of the people, eventually becomes also a military leader and valiantly leads the two thousand stripling warriors in battle (Alma 53, 56-58).

Captain Moroni writes to Pahoran, the chief judge in Zarahemla, asking for reinforcements. When they don't arrive, Moroni writes again and threatens to march on Zarahemla if help is not sent. Pahoran responds by informing Moroni, by letter, of the rebellions in Zarahemla (Alma 59-61). Finally Moroni and Helaman and their armies succeed in driving the Lamanites out of Nephite territory.

57 BC Moroni retires and is succeeded as commander of the armies of the Nephites by his son Moronihah. Helaman dies and the records are kept for four years by Helaman's brother Shiblon (Alma 62). The records are then given to Helaman, the son of Helaman who becomes the presiding high priest of the people (Alma 63).

52 BC The chief judge Pahoran dies and, following much contention among his sons, he is succeeded by his son Pahoran. Pahoran is murdered by Kishkumen while sitting upon the judgment seat. Kishkumen is a follower of Pahoran's brother and a leader of a secret combination which will later be led by Gadianton and named after him, the Gadianton Band (Helaman 1).

Because of dissension and disorganization in the Nephite government, the Lamanites make significant inroads militarily in the land of Zarahemla. A well-armed Lamanite army, led by a large and mighty man named Coriantumr even captures for a time the city of Zarahemla. Coriantumr is eventually defeated and slain by Moronihah and his Nephite army (Helaman 1). A brief period of peace and relative righteousness ensues.

Helaman, the son of Helaman becomes chief judge. The Gadianton band fails in its attempt to kill Helaman. Soon afterward, the Nephites again deteriorate into unrighteousness.

39 BC Helaman dies and is succeeded by his son Nephi as high priest and chief judge (Helaman 3).

As had his great grandfather Alma, Nephi eventually gives up the office of chief judge and goes out preaching with his brother Lehi among the Lamanites (Helaman 5). While in the land of Nephi, Nephi and his brother Lehi have a miraculous experience in a Lamanite prison during which they are surrounded by a wall of fire, and they converse with angels. Some eight thousand Lamanites in all are converted, and the righteousness of these converted Lamanites exceeds that of the Nephites (Helaman 5).

23 BC Wickedness flourishes among the Nephites, and the Gadianton robbers gain control of the Nephite government and appoint their own as chief judges of the people. The prophet Nephi preaches from his garden tower in Zarahemla and miraculously visualizes the murder of the chief judge Seezoram and even identifies his murderer—Seantum (Helaman 7-9).

6 BC By this time, the large part of the Nephites are in an advanced state of apostasy. The Lamanite believers far outnumber those among the Nephites. Samuel, a Lamanite prophet, preaches repentance to the Nephites in Zarahemla from the city wall (Helaman 13-16). Samuel prophesies of the signs of the Savior's birth and death.

1 AD The prophet Nephi departs out of the land, and it is likely he is translated. He is succeeded as high priest by his son Nephi. The signs heralding the birth of the Savior are given: "At the going down of the sun there was no darkness" (3 Nephi 1).

15 AD The righteous Nephites and Lamanites gather into one location to defend themselves against the Gadianton band led by Giddianhi and then Zemnariyah. For seven years they hold out against the Gadianton band, and eventually the Gadianton band is defeated. Zemnariyah is hanged from a tree, and then the tree is felled (3 Nephi 3-4). The mark of the curse, the dark skin, is removed from the Lamanite

believers so that no physical distinction remains between Nephites and Lamanites. A few years of peace and relative righteousness ensue.

30 AD The Nephites again deteriorate into unrighteousness and anarchy. The Nephite government is destroyed, and the people divide into tribes.

Nephi, the son of Nephi, is one of the great prophets of the day. He works many miracles including raising his brother Timothy from the dead after Timothy has been stoned to death.

34 AD On the fourth day of the first month of 34 AD, the signs of Christ's crucifixion are experienced. These include a mighty storm with lightning, thunder, and earthquakes. There is devastating destruction throughout the land which results in the deaths of thousands of the more wicked among the Nephites (3 Nephi 8). Following the three-hour storm, three days of darkness smother the land during which no light can be seen.

Finally the voice of Jesus Christ is heard out of the darkness by all the inhabitants of the land (3 Nephi 9-10). Jesus proclaims the extent of destruction which has occurred throughout the land, makes explicit the fact that the destruction is the result of the wickedness of the people, and invites all hearing his voice to repent and come unto him. After many hours of silence Jesus speaks again, and again he urges the survivors of the storm to live the gospel. After three days the darkness disperses.

Sometime later that same year, a multitude of some 2,500 Nephites gathers together near the temple in the city of Bountiful. As they converse concerning Jesus Christ, the voice of God the Father comes out of heaven and pierces them to the very soul. Twice they do not understand the voice, but the third time they understand the Father to proclaim: "Behold my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased, in whom I have glorified my name . . . hear ye him." They then watch as Jesus, clad in a white robe, descends out of the heavens and stands in the midst of them (3 Nephi 11).

He ministers to the people daily for three days and then visits them from time to time as needs and circumstances warrant (3 Nephi 11-28). He delivers to the Nephites a sermon similar to his Old World Sermon on the Mount (3 Nephi 12-14). He calls twelve disciples or apostles from among the Nephites including the prophet Nephi. He commands these disciples to minister unto the people.

He teaches and prophesies "great and marvelous things" to the people. He prays with them, teaches them to pray, and heals their sick. He quotes Isaiah 52 (3 Nephi 20) and Isaiah 54 (3 Nephi 22). He institutes the sacrament, quotes the prophet Malachi on tithing (Malachi 3) and the return of Elijah (Malachi 4)—(3 Nephi 24-25). He also teaches the law of consecration.

He then grants to each of the twelve Nephite disciples the foremost desire of his heart. Three elect to tarry on the earth in a translated state until the Lord's second coming. The others desire to return speedily and live with Christ in his kingdom when their ministry and lives are over (3 Nephi 28).

34-200 AD A period of peace, prosperity, and righteousness—the so-called “mini-millennium” among the people (4 Nephi). There is no distinction between those of Nephite descent and those of Lamanite lineage, and they all become “an exceedingly fair” people. Nephi dies, and the record is kept by his son Nephi. Later it will be passed along to his son Amos and then to Amos’s son Amos.

201-230 AD Prosperity leads to increasing pride and class distinction, and many begin to deny Christ. By 230 AD the people divide into two groups: the Nephites, or true believers in Jesus Christ, and the Lamanites, the non-believers.

305 AD By this date the secret combination of Gadianton has again surfaced among the Lamanites and begins to prosper among the people. Also the Nephites become proud and materialistic and are every bit as wicked as the Lamanites. Only the three translated disciples of Jesus and a few other believers remain righteous.

Amos, the son of Amos dies, and his brother Ammaron keeps the record in his stead.

320 AD Ammaron is constrained by the Holy Ghost to hide all the sacred records, that they might be brought forth in the latter days. Accordingly he buries the records in a hill called Shim (4 Nephi).

After hiding the records, Ammaron is constrained to approach a ten-year-old boy named Mormon. Ammaron instructs Mormon that when he reaches the age of twenty-four he should remove the plates of Nephi from their hiding place and engrave upon them an account of the events of the intervening years.

326 AD War begins again, and Mormon, at age fifteen is given command of the Nephite armies. The Nephites remain wicked and unrepentant and begin to lose in battle.

335 AD As commanded, when he reaches the age of twenty-four, Mormon removes the plates of Nephi from the hill Shim and records upon them a full account of the wickedness and abominations of his day (the book of Mormon).

For the next several years Mormon preaches repentance to the Nephites and intermittently leads them in battle against the Lamanites. The Nephites become a hopelessly wicked people.

380 AD Mormon begins to abridge the large plates of Nephi, engraving his abridgement onto a new set of plates, the plates of Mormon. It is possible that Mormon began this abridgment earlier than AD 380—in about AD 350 at the beginning of a ten year period of relative peace.

The war escalates, and horrible atrocities are committed by both Nephites and Lamanites. On both sides the combatants “delighted in the shedding of blood continually.”

385 AD Great final battle between Nephites and Lamanites near the hill Cumorah (Mormon 6). By this time, Mormon is old, and he knows this will be the final battle of his people. He buries all the records entrusted to him in the Hill Cumorah except for the

small plates of Nephi and the plates of Mormon which he delivers to the care of his son, Moroni. Moroni also apparently maintains access to the plates buried in Cumorah.

The Nephites are defeated in battle and nearly annihilated. Those few Nephites who escape into the country southward are hunted down by the Lamanites until they are all destroyed. Mormon is also slain.

400 AD Moroni describes his plight as the last remaining Nephite (Mormon 8) and records onto the plates of Mormon an impassioned warning to the people of our dispensation (Mormon 8-9).

400-421 AD Moroni's final period of writing. Living alone, he abridges the account of the people of Jared, the book of Ether.

In his account of the Jaredites, Moroni describes the experience of the brother of Jared who sees the finger and the body of the Lord and has a great vision of the existence of the earth, the account of which is sealed up by Moroni (Ether 3). Moroni warns of secret combinations (Ether 8) and writes a sermon on faith, hope, and charity (Ether 12). Moroni concludes his account of the Jaredites by describing the great final battle of the Jaredites wherein Coriantumr kills Shiz (Ether 15).

Moroni also writes his own book, the book of Moroni, onto the plates of Mormon. His final writings include instructions on the sacrament prayers (Moroni 4-5) and teachings from a letter written by his father Mormon on faith, hope, and charity (Moroni 7) and infant baptism (Moroni 8).

He concludes his record in about 421 AD by writing two paragraphs upon the final page of the plates of Mormon. These paragraphs now comprise the title page of our present-day Book of Mormon. He then leaves all the records buried in the hill Cumorah save for the plates of Mormon and the small plates of Nephi which he will later deliver to Joseph Smith, Jr., on September 22, 1827 in Manchester, New York.

As a final exercise for the reader and just for fun, let us track the Book of Mormon plates from King Benjamin to the prophet Moroni, mentioning each individual who takes possession of them:

1. Benjamin delivers the plates to his son Mosiah who becomes the final Nephite king (124 BC).

2. Mosiah places them in the possession of Alma's son, Alma the younger (92 BC). This Alma had been converted miraculously and later becomes the first chief judge of the people. He eventually gives up the office of chief judge to spend full time in his other office of high priest of the people.

3. Alma passes the plates along to his son, Helaman (74 BC) who valiantly leads the two thousand stripling warriors at the same time that captain Moroni is leading the Nephite army in other parts of the land.

4. The plates eventually end up in the possession of Helaman's son Helaman, but prior to that, they are held for a four-year period by the older Helaman's brother,

Shiblon (57 to 53 BC). The younger Helaman writes the large part of the book of Helaman, serves as a righteous chief judge in Zarahemla, and sees the rise of the Gadianton robbers.

5. Helaman hands the plates on to his son Nephi (39 BC) who, with his brother Lehi, preaches valiantly and converts thousands of Lamanites. At one point Nephi and his brother are protected from destruction in a Lamanite prison by a miraculous protective ring of fire. Nephi later preaches from his garden tower and miraculously predicts the murder of the chief judge Seezoram.

6. Nephi disappears mysteriously, but not before he delivers the plates to his son Nephi (1 AD), who is the prophet during the time of great wickedness between the time of the Savior's birth and the Lord's appearance at the temple in Bountiful. Nephi eventually becomes one of the Lord's twelve disciples or apostles.

7. Nephi is succeeded by his son, also named Nephi. This Nephi dies in 111 AD.

8. The record is then kept by his son Amos. Amos keeps the record for eighty-four years and dies in 194 AD.

9. Amos gives the record to his son also named Amos. This Amos dies in 305 AD.

10. Amos's brother Ammaron keeps the record in his stead. In 320 AD Ammaron is constrained by the Holy Ghost to hide all the sacred records in a hill called Shim. After hiding the records, Ammaron is inspired to approach a boy named Mormon who is ten years old at the time and command him that when he reaches the age of twenty-four, Mormon should remove from their hiding place the large plates of Nephi and take possession of them.

11. Mormon does so in 335 AD. Years later, Mormon abridges the large plates of Nephi onto another set of plates, the plates of Mormon (380 AD). Mormon is eventually slain by Lamanites in about 385 AD. Before his death he buries the large plates of Nephi in the hill Cumorah, and

12. He gives to his son Moroni the small plates of Nephi and the plates of Mormon.