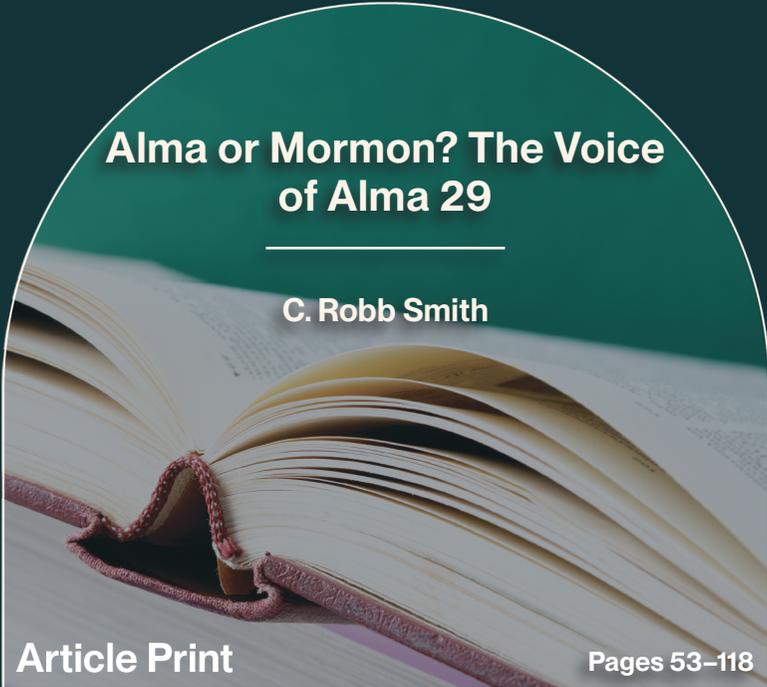


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Alma or Mormon? The Voice of Alma 29

C. Robb Smith

Abstract: *For more than a century, Alma 29 has been read as a direct quotation from the prophet Alma. Yet, unlike every other extended quotation in Mormon's record, this passage lacks attribution, framing, or transition. This anomaly has gone largely unnoticed because of a chapter break, added in 1879, that masks the continuity of Mormon's voice from Alma 28 into chapter 29. This paper challenges the traditional attribution and argues that Alma 29 is more likely Mormon's editorial reflection than Alma's psalm. While the study focuses on Alma 1–29, the editorial patterns it identifies—Mormon's consistent use of speaker attribution, narrative framing, and formal introductions to quoted speech—hold true across his entire abridgment. Alma 29, if understood as Alma's psalm, would stand out as the sole exception, with no introduction to mark a change in speaker. Close attention to verb tense usage, narrative posture, and thematic continuity with Alma 28, together with the prophetic vocabulary Mormon uses elsewhere, suggests that these words reflect Mormon's own meditation. Attributing Alma 29 to Mormon reframes the chapter as the theological culmination of his editorial design. Mormon situates his record within a prophetic chain stretching from Joseph in Egypt, through Nephi, to his own day. His repeated use of "my brethren" reflects covenant kinship rather than contemporaneity, and his testimony of a "holy calling" reveals a prophet who, even in an age of societal collapse, experienced his own quiet triumph in saving souls.*

Within the tradition of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, it is well-known that the words *O, That I were an angel,*

found in the Book of Mormon, were spoken by the prophet Alma.¹ This assumption has shaped interpretation for over a century, reinforced by chapter headings that identify Alma as the speaker.

What is less well-known is that the text itself does not name Alma. That detail is easily missed, having been obscured by a chapter break added in 1879, which divided Mormon's original fifteenth chapter into three shorter ones.² Our current chapter 28 ends with Mormon's editorial reflections on the events he has just abridged, and chapter 29 begins in what most assume to be Alma's voice. When read without that break, as in the original dictation, Mormon's reflection continues without interruption through the end of chapter 29. What seems like Alma's soliloquy is more naturally read as Mormon's extended commentary — his interpretation of the stories he has just preserved and their meaning for a latter-day audience.

This paper challenges the traditional assumption that Alma is the speaker and argues instead that the words of Alma 29 are more likely Mormon's. When the chapter is heard in his voice, it takes on new meaning, gaining interpretive relevance and prophetic significance. It becomes not merely Alma's soliloquy, but Mormon's meditation — a reflection that reveals how he situated his record in the prophetic chain, how he identified with his likely literal ancestors (Alma and the sons of Mosiah), as covenant kin, and how Mormon found quiet triumph in his ministry, even in a time of widespread apostasy.

Rethinking Attribution: Alma or Mormon?

So, why do we think it is Alma speaking in chapter 29? Book of Mormon scholar Grant Hardy notes some of the reasons:

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1. In this paper, any references to *Alma*, without subscript, are to Alma₂, son of Alma₁. In instances where there could be potential confusion, subscripts are used.
 2. The current chapters of the Book of Mormon are the result of changes made in 1879 by Orson Pratt. Evidence from the original manuscript clearly shows that Joseph Smith indicated chapters while dictating the text. See Royal Skousen, "Critical Methodology and the Text of the Book of Mormon," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6, no. 1 (1994): 137, scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1206&context=msr. To reduce any potential confusion, I use Mormon's original chapters in my analysis and Roman numerals when referring to them. Chapter numbers in Arabic numerals are from the current chapter structure for the Book of Mormon. Thus, "Alma 29" is a reference to our current chaptering, while Alma III is a reference to Mormon's original chapter 3.

The present tense of v. 10, the refrain of "remember[ing] the captivity of my fathers" in v. 11, and the reference to "the success of my brethren, who have been up to the land of Nephi" in v. 14 all point to Alma₂, rather than Mormon₂, as the author of this passage.³

In other words, we attribute the chapter to Alma because it sounds like Alma. The tense, tone, and phrasing seem to reflect his voice much better than Mormon's. And there is a century of interpretive tradition reinforcing this impression, coupled with the absence of any formal challenge. However, when we step back and consider how Mormon frames quotations elsewhere in his record, Alma 29 stands out as a striking exception. Unlike every other quotation he included in his work, Mormon does not introduce, attribute, or formally transition to this one. That omission is significant, and it invites us to reconsider what has long been taken for granted.

This lack of attribution goes unnoticed due to the chapter break added in 1879 which allows readers to easily switch from Mormon's voice into what appears to be Alma's. Chapter 29 thus reads like another quotation from Alma, similar to others nearby. Yet unlike every other instance of quoted speech in Mormon's record, it lacks a clear introduction or explicit editorial transition. In fact, it is the only instance in Mormon's entire record where he fails to frame or identify a quotation—making it an unmistakable anomaly in an otherwise consistent editorial pattern.⁴

Given how careful and consistent Mormon is in introducing quotations, assigning the words of Alma 29 to Alma based solely on indirect internal evidence warrants serious reconsideration. This kind of evidence relies on inference and interpretation and is therefore inherently subjective and susceptible to bias. Reasonable readers could justifiably reach different conclusions. The singular nature of the missing attribution all but demands an explanation: A lost introductory line,

3. Grant Hardy, ed., *The Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ, Maxwell Institute Study Edition* (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, Brigham Young University [BYU], 2018), 317.

4. Wayne A. Larsen and Alvin C. Rencher, "Who Wrote the Book of Mormon? An Analysis of Wordprints," in *Book of Mormon Authorship: New Light on Ancient Origins*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds and Charles D. Tate (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, BYU, 1982), 185, archive.org/details/bookofmormonauth00reyn/page/184/mode/2up. Larsen and Rencher observe: "From the context of Alma 29 it is clear that Alma is writing, yet Mormon does not identify this as a quotation. This is the only instance we found of this nature."

perhaps, somehow accidentally omitted from the plates or lost during the translation process, thus making it an example of the “mistakes of men” that Moroni warned about.⁵ If Alma 29 is indeed a quotation, then some kind of explanation seems necessary, given the pronounced nature of the anomaly.

I first noticed this issue while reading Royal Skousen’s *Earliest Text* edition of the Book of Mormon, which restores the original chapter divisions that Joseph Smith indicated during dictation.⁶ Reading those verses without the modern chapter break between Alma 28 and 29, I was startled to find Mormon appearing to say those familiar words himself. It took a moment to realize that the speaker had shifted to Alma, somewhere, unmarked and unannounced. The abrupt transition from Mormon’s editorial reflections to what seemed like Alma was so unusual that it prompted me to begin marking every quotation and tracking how Mormon transitions between speakers elsewhere. As I studied his editorial patterns more closely, I was struck by how consistently and deliberately he introduces quotations throughout his work, with Alma 29 being the one notable exception.

Along the way, I also began to notice how often Mormon steps out of the narrative to speak to his reader, to explain an editorial decision, clarify a theological point, or reflect on the meaning of the events he recounts. These personal remarks, like quotations, are typically written in the first-person present tense. After multiple close readings focused on who is speaking, I concluded that it is always Mormon narrating the story. His account comes to us in his voice and from his perspective.

Even though I “hear” Mormon’s voice in his account, I recognize that others may hear things differently. Because he abridged the work of earlier prophets, some readers may sometimes perceive the voice of the original author. Mormon’s abridged account would not be a quotation in the formal sense, even if it preserves elements of the original author’s voice. (This distinction is explored further in this paper.) Over time, I began to consider the possibility that Alma 29 might not be a quotation, especially once I realized how well it works as a continuation

5. “And now, if there are faults, they are the mistakes of men” (Book of Mormon Title Page; see also Mormon 8:17). Thus, a hypothetical lost line could have been as simple as the one used to introduce Ammon’s words to end Mormon’s original fourteenth chapter: “these are the words of Ammon to his brethren, which say thus . . .” (Alma 26:1).

6. *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text*, ed. Royal Skousen (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

of the comments Mormon begins before the added break. That would make Alma 29 one of twenty-two times that Mormon ends a chapter speaking directly to his reader in this way, and one of eight times he does it in extended editorial comments, as can be seen in Alma 29.⁷

Another reason for reconsidering the authorship of Alma 29, is its strong correspondence with the material in the chapters that precede it. The connection is so tight that it seems to require one of the following explanations:

- Mormon selected what to include in those preceding chapters, shaping it based on a quotation from Alma which he intended to use at the end, but then uncharacteristically failed to introduce that quotation.
- Mormon created that same narrative block of material and then stepped back after concluding it, in order to reflect on the narratives he had included.

The second explanation aligns more naturally with both the pattern of Mormon's editorial comments, and with the absence of any attribution to Alma.

Given this lack of explicit attribution, it seems that the burden of proof should fall on modern readers to make a sufficiently compelling case before assigning the chapter to Alma. Yet, no such formal argument has been put forth, and more than a century of tradition has now reversed this expectation. Alma's authorship is taken for granted and alternative readings must bear the burden of proof and justify themselves against this default assumption.

A compelling case can be made for Mormon as the speaker in Alma 29, which I present in the pages that follow. My aim is to show that when the words are heard in Mormon's voice, their meaning changes in important and revealing ways, reinforcing the idea that the Book of Mormon was written specifically for our time as both a witness and a warning. They also give additional insight into the man who wrote/

7. The extended comments in Alma 28:8–29:17 are preceded by, "And thus ended the fifteenth year" (Alma 28:7). The other original chapters that end with extended comments are Helaman 12:1–26 (following Helaman 11:38 which says, "And thus ended the eighty and fifth year"); 3 Nephi 5:8–26 (following 3 Nephi 5:7 which says, "And thus had twenty-five years passed away"); and this pattern is also found in 3 Nephi 10:14–19; 26:6–13; 28:17–29:9; Mormon 5:8–24; 7:1–10. The chapters that end with shorter comments are Mosiah 27:36–37; 28:19–20; Alma 3:25–27; 6:8; 8:30–32; 9:34; 11:46; 22:35; 35:16; Helaman 2:12–14; 6:40; 3 Nephi 7:24–26; 30:1–2; and 4 Nephi 1:49.

compiled the book and invite us to view him, and the circumstances in which he wrote, in a different light.

Mormon's Editorial Voice and Narrative Design

Understanding how Mormon structured and narrated the book of Alma is essential to evaluating the authorship of chapter 29. His role as editor, abridger, and commentator shaped how we receive the material, and his voice is always present. By tracing his editorial patterns and narrative transitions in Alma 1–28, we can determine whether chapter 29 fits Mormon's voice or breaks from his usual methods.

I begin with a brief review of the material leading up to chapter 29 using Mormon's original chapter divisions. I pay particular attention to Mormon's editorial remarks, especially those that open or close his chapters. They show that Mormon actively selected, organized, and shaped the content we now have. The way he presents narrative material provides important evidence that much of the account comes to us in his voice. This review provides a necessary foundation for the detailed analysis of Alma 29, which will follow. I will also discuss the abridging process and suggest that Mormon copied large portions of Alma's original narrative, while adapting it to his own voice and reshaping the material to suit his editorial purposes. I further argue that any material he changed in this way should be attributed to him and heard in his voice, regardless of whether it was copied.

I will also analyze Alma 29 while emphasizing its reflective nature and the many ways it connects to the material in the chapters that precede it. I present indirect evidence that points to Mormon as the speaker and reinterpret that which has traditionally been seen to point to Alma, showing that it also aligns with Mormon's voice and context. I will show that while the words of Alma 29 do fit Alma, they also fit Mormon. And because Mormon is the default narrator and does not attribute the words to Alma, the most reasonable conclusion is that the words are those of Mormon.

Mormon's editorial framework: A review of Alma 1–28

Mormon begins the book of Alma with a heading that appears just before Alma 1 (Alma I):

The account of Alma, who was the son of Alma, the first and chief judge over the people of Nephi, and also the high priest over the Church. An account of the reign of the judges, and

the wars and contentions among the people. And also an account of a war between the Nephites and the Lamanites, *according to the record of Alma*, the first and chief judge.

Note that Mormon indicates he is including "the account of Alma" and specifies that it is "according to the record of Alma." This description applies to the first forty-four chapters in current Book of Mormon editions, concluding with Mormon's statement: "And thus ended the record of Alma, which was written on the plates of Nephi" (Alma 44:24).⁸

Mormon's next heading, which appears before Alma 45 (Alma XXI), introduces a new source for what follows: "The account of the people of Nephi . . . according to the record of Helaman," thereby marking a clear editorial boundary. Mormon identifies his source at the beginning and the end of his "account of Alma," and he reiterates that attribution five additional times within the account.⁹

My focus here, though, is the first portion of these forty-four chapters, comprising Alma 1–28 (Alma I–XV). Mormon organizes his first fifteen chapters of Alma into three well-defined narrative units. The first is a chapter recounting Alma's encounters with Nehor and Amlici (Alma I). The second tells the story of Alma preaching among the Nephites (Alma II–XI). The third shares the story of the sons of Mosiah preaching among the Lamanites (Alma XII–XV). Mormon deliberately organized the first fifteen years of the reign of the judges into these three narrative units, and they present the concurrent stories of Alma and the sons of Mosiah in a clear, purposeful sequence!¹⁰

8. The book of Alma contains the accounts of Alma, Helaman, and Shiblon. King Mosiah gave the plates of Nephi to Alma (Mosiah 28:20), who gave them to Helaman (Alma 50:38), who gave them to Shiblon (Alma 63:1), who gave them to Helaman son of Helaman (Alma 63:11). Mormon ends the book with: "And thus ended the account of Alma, and Helaman his son, and also Shiblon who was his son" (Alma 63:17).

9. Mormon cites his source again before quoting Alma's preaching in Zarahemla and Gideon (Alma 5:2; heading to Alma 7); before quoting Alma and Amulek's preaching in Ammonihah (heading before Alma 9); before his "account of the sons of Mosiah" (heading before Alma 17); and before including Alma's commandments to his sons in Alma 36–42 (Alma 35:16). While it is possible that Mormon drew from other sources, he never mentions any. Rather, he consistently says and exclusively cites the plates of Nephi as his only source, like he did here with his "account of Alma" (Alma 44:24). See Words of Mormon 1:5, 9; Alma 44:24; Helaman 2:14; 3 Nephi 5:10; 26:7, 11; Mormon 6:6.

10. See Appendix B for a fuller presentation of how Mormon organized Alma's source material into six narrative units.

- **Narrative Unit 1:** Alma I; Alma 1–3 (Alma’s conflict with Nehor and Amlici)
- **Narrative Unit 2:** Alma II–XI; Alma 4–16 (Alma’s preaching to the Nephites)
- **Narrative Unit 3:** Alma XII–XV; Alma 17–29 (Sons of Mosiah preaching to the Lamanites)

In Alma I (Alma 1–3), Mormon begins his first narrative unit by recounting Alma’s conflict with Nehor and Amlici. In this chapter, Mormon consistently refers to Alma in the third person, thereby establishing himself as the narrator. The story is presented in Mormon’s voice, not Alma’s, reflecting Mormon’s perspective and editorial control. Near the end of the chapter, Mormon describes how the Amlicites marked themselves to be distinguished from other Nephites, and notes that the Lamanites already differed. This leads to an explanation of the curse placed upon them, followed by interpretive comments. Mormon writes: “Now **we will return** again to the Amlicites, for they also had a mark set upon them. . . . Thus the word of God **is** fulfilled, for these **are** the words which he saith to Nephi” (Alma 3:13–14).¹¹ He then quotes God’s words and continues:

Now the Amlicites knew not that they were fulfilling the words of God when they began to mark themselves in their foreheads . . . Now *I would that ye should see* that they brought upon themselves the curse. And even so doth every man that is cursed bring upon himself his own condemnation. (Alma 3:18–19)

Mormon frequently inserts explanatory and interpretive commentary into his narrative like this. When he does, it is in his present editorial time and therefore written in the present tense.¹² This is especially relevant because Alma 29 is also written in the present tense. Recognizing that Mormon uses the present tense in his editorial comments is crucial to hearing Alma 29 in his voice.

Mormon continues the story for a few more verses before ending his first chapter in this manner:

Now, all these things were done, yea, all these *wars and*

11. The current edition reads *said*, while the original dictation was *saith*. Royal Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon*, six parts (Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies [FARMS], 2004–2009), 1639.

12. See Appendix A for a full list of Mormon’s headings and editorial comments.

contentions were commenced and ended in the fifth year of the *reign of the judges*. And in one year were thousands and tens of thousands of souls sent to the eternal world, that they might reap their rewards according to their works, whether they were good or whether they were bad, to 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 who he **listeth** to obey, and this according to the words of the spirit of prophecy; therefore, let it **be** according to the truth. And thus ended the fifth year of the reign of the judges.*" (Alma 3:25–27)¹³

Mormon summarizes the destruction caused by war and contention and again uses the present tense while offering a spiritual key for understanding it. He blends the historical facts of his story with theological reflection and introduces a major theme that he develops more fully in later chapters—that agency, sin, and repentance shape the destinies of both individuals and communities. This chapter's ending also links verbally and thematically to Mormon's opening heading of the book of Alma, which describes it as "an account of the *reign of the judges* and the *wars and contentions among the people*, and also an account of a *war between the Nephites and the Lamanites*."

Mormon thus ends the chapter with a clear structural marker—a physical chapter break at the end of a year of the reign of the judges—and with clear literary ties between the chapter's introduction and conclusion. Together these literary and structural features delineate the chapter as a discrete narrative unit. Mormon employs these same devices to construct each of the three narrative units introduced earlier.

Mormon's second chapter (Alma II; Alma 4) begins his second narrative unit and continues Alma's story to the point where he relinquishes the judgment seat to preach full time. In this chapter, Mormon consistently refers to Alma in the third person, thus reinforcing that the account comes to us from Mormon's perspective and in his voice. Although he is working from Alma's record, he is not yet directly quoting him.

However, Mormon's heading before Alma III (Alma 5), signals that

13. The current edition reads *endeth*, while the original dictation was *ended*. Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants*, 1648.

he is about to begin quoting Alma directly, writing: “The words which Alma, the High Priest according to the holy order of God, delivered to the people in their cities and villages throughout the land.” The chapter then begins:

Now, it came to pass that Alma began to deliver the word of God unto the people, first in the land of Zarahemla and from thence throughout all the land. And these **are** the words which he spake to the people in the church which was established in the city of Zarahemla, *according to his own record*, saying: I, Alma, having been consecrated . . . (Alma 5:1–3)

Mormon sets the stage for the quotation, introduces it using the present tense, and again cites his source. He then hands the voice over to Alma for the remainder of the chapter.

So far, we have seen examples of how Mormon inserts editorial comments into his abridged account and how he introduces an extended quotation. As we continue, we will examine more examples of Mormon utilizing these same approaches, and will begin to focus more on whose voice we are hearing in Mormon’s abridged account, especially when he adapts or summarizes material without quoting it directly.

Distinguishing the editorial voice: Quotation or abridgment?

Mormon’s editorial choices raise a critical question for understanding authorship: when he adapts or summarizes material from earlier authors, whose voice are we hearing? While some narrative passages may originate with Alma, Mormon does not present them as quotations, but rather adapts them into his own third-person voice. Passages adapted like this then become part of Mormon’s account and should be heard in his voice, regardless of whether they originated with Alma. Mormon also presents other passages as quotations, preserving Alma’s first-person voice. Clarifying this distinction helps us interpret what Mormon meant to be a quotation and what he meant to be heard in his own voice.

Moroni refers to the Book of Mormon as “an abridgment of the record of the people of Nephi.”¹⁴ Mormon also calls it “an abridge-

14. *The Book of Mormon*, Title Page. The Introduction describes it as “written by many ancient prophets” whose words “were quoted and abridged by a prophet-historian named Mormon.” The Brief Explanation About The Book

ment” or a “small abridgment” and repeatedly reminds us that it is “not the full account,” not even “a hundredth part.”¹⁵ Since we do not have his source materials, we cannot know exactly how he abridged it. We do not know how closely he followed those source materials, what he chose to omit, or how he edited the material that he chose to include.

In Alma VII (Alma 9), Mormon quotes Alma narrating his own story. This gives us a glimpse of the original narrative material.¹⁶ Based on how similar that chapter is to the ones Mormon narrates, it seems likely that he copied significant portions of Alma’s narrative, while changing the voice from first- to third-person. Still, even if Mormon adapted Alma’s words into his own narrative voice in this way, doing so effectively converts Alma’s words into his own. Anything Mormon paraphrased, summarized or otherwise adapted into his own third-person voice should be attributed to him and heard in his voice, even if it originated with Alma. Such material still requires attribution—which Mormon does at both the beginning and end of his “account of Alma,” when he states that it is “according to the record of Alma”—but it should not be considered a quotation. When Mormon inserts an actual quotation, he explicitly indicates the transition as he did to begin Alma 5 (Alma III), does again before Alma 7 and 9 (Alma V and VII), and then consistently throughout the rest of his abridgment.

Mormon begins Alma IV (Alma 6) with: “And now it came to pass that after Alma had made an end of speaking unto the people of the church which was established in the city of Zarahemla . . .” (Alma 6:1), showing that he is also explicit in marking the end of his direct quotations from Alma, with only one exception that we will consider below. Mormon then continues narrating the story in his own voice and ends chapter 6 with, “And *Alma* went and began to declare the word of God . . . which had been spoken by *his* fathers, and according to the spirit of prophecy which was in *him* . . . and the holy order by which *he* was called. *And thus, it is written. Amen*” (Alma 6:8). What is Mormon referring to at the end of this verse, again using the present tense, as being

of Mormon explains that the plates of Mormon are “an abridgment by Mormon from the large plates of Nephi, with many commentaries.”

15. Mormon describes his work as “*an abridgment*” (Words of Mormon 1:3; Mormon 5:9; see especially 3 Nephi 5:8–18). Mormon repeatedly explains that he could not record the full account or “hundredth part” of events (Words of Mormon 1:5; Mosiah 1:8; 8:1; 12:8; 29:33; Alma 8:1; 9:34; 11:46; 13:31; 30:17; Helaman 3:14; 8:3; 14:1; 3 Nephi 5:8; 26:6–12; Mormon 2:18; 5:9).
16. Even though Mormon may have made edits to this chapter as well, to what extent is unknown.

written? If he means what he just narrated about Alma in the third person, then it is an example of the point I am making. The original could have been written by Alma in the first person about himself, which would change the wording to: “And *I* went and began to declare the word of God . . . which had been spoken by *my* fathers, and according to the spirit of prophecy which was in *me* . . . and the holy order by which *I* was called.” Mormon’s change from first to third person makes these words his own, and no longer Alma’s. Mormon could have quoted Alma and let him speak for himself in the first person — as he does in a chapter considered below, but instead he chose to change Alma’s words into his own voice.¹⁷

Mormon begins Alma V (Alma 7) with a heading that introduces the quotation it contains and again cites his source: “*The words of Alma* which he delivered to the people in Gideon, *according to his own record.*” After quoting Alma for the entire chapter, Mormon opens Alma VI (Alma 8) by writing: “And now, it came to pass that Alma returned from the land of Gideon, after having taught the people of Gideon many things which *cannot be written* . . .” (Alma 8:1). Mormon ends the quotation just as clearly as he introduced it, while also informing the reader (again using the present tense) of his editorial decision not to include everything Alma taught. This assumes that the qualifier *cannot* refers to Mormon’s own selection criteria, not to some other restriction on sharing Alma’s teachings.

Without drawing attention to every such occurrence, the pattern is sufficiently clear — Mormon used the present tense (his current time) when he stepped outside his narrative in order to speak to his readers. While his editorial comments may include other verb tenses appropriate to the context, they are always anchored in the present, marking Mormon’s position as a narrator of events that occurred before his time, while also addressing a future audience. This pattern appears to hold true not only throughout his record of Alma, but throughout his entire abridged account.¹⁸

Mormon continues Alma’s story in Alma VI (Alma 8) describing Alma’s success in Melek, but choosing not to quote any of Alma’s

17. This remains hypothetical, since Mormon’s sources are unavailable. Another possibility is that Mormon adapted Alma’s words spoken in Zarahemla (Alma 5:47–49). In either case, Alma’s original words were re-presented in Mormon’s narratorial voice.

18. See Appendix A for a list of Mormon’s editorial comments. The vast majority are written in the present tense.

preaching there. Nor does he choose to provide details about or quote from Alma's preaching in other cities. Whatever the criteria were for inclusion in or exclusion from his account, it was Mormon who chose. He is also the one who determined how to organize, edit, and present the material, all to serve his literary, rhetorical, and prophetic purposes.¹⁹ I believe that Mormon was true to his original sources while also taking some creative liberties along the way. We simply do not know what he did while abridging the original accounts to produce his own account that we now have because we do not possess the plates of Nephi. All we have is what Mormon gave us, and what he gave us reflects his own perspective and is written in his own voice, unless he explicitly signals otherwise. He ends Alma VI with the Lord's command to Alma to take Amulek and preach again in Ammonihah and briefly previews what will follow.

The heading before Alma VII (Alma 9) sets the stage for quotations from both Alma and Amulek, further previews their upcoming story, and again cites the source for his account:

The words of Alma, and also the words of Amulek, which were declared unto the people who were in the land of Ammonihah. And also, they are cast into prison and delivered by the miraculous power of God which was in them, according to the record of Alma.

The chapter then begins: "And again, I, Alma, having been commanded of God . . ." (Alma 9:1). This is the chapter referred to earlier wherein Alma narrates his own story, the only instance in this material in which Mormon adopts this approach.²⁰ The chapter and the quotation it contains both end with the only unclear transition I have been able to find: "And it came to pass that Amulek went and stood forth and began to preach unto them also. And now, the words of Amulek *are not all written; nevertheless, a part of his words are written in this book*" (Alma 9:34). That it is Mormon resuming as narrator, rather than

19. Mormon notes seven churches in the land of Zarahemla (see Mosiah 25:23). Alma's preaching in Melek and Sidom is mentioned but not quoted (see Alma 8:3–6; 15:12–14).

20. Mormon also does this one time in Mosiah 9, the only other chapter in Mormon's abridged material that is narrated by the original author, in this case Zeniff. Mormon does, however, also insert a letter from Helaman to Moroni wherein he recounts certain events (found in Alma XXVI; Alma 56–58). Interestingly, Mormon inserted a clarifying editorial comment into it (see Alma 56:52).

a continuation of quoting Alma, is made clear in the next chapter as Mormon refers to Alma again in the third person and then ends that chapter also explaining that he is not including all of Amulek's words.

Alma VIII (Alma 10–11) begins Amulek's preaching, which Mormon had already previewed and sourced in the heading before Alma VII (Alma 9). Alma 10:1 begins: "Now, these are the words which Amulek preached unto the people who were in the land of Ammonihah, saying . . ." The quotation thus introduced ends a few verses later with: "And now, when Amulek had spoken these words . . ." (Alma 10:12). Mormon continues narrating around additional quotations from Amulek and others, while again referring to Alma in the third person before ending with: "Now, when Amulek had finished these words the people began again to be astonished, and also Zeezrom began to tremble. And thus ended the words of Amulek, or *this is all that I have written*" (Alma 11:46; end of Alma VIII). Mormon is telling his readers that he is not including everything Amulek said, as he also mentioned at the end of his previous chapter (see Alma 9:34). This means that the material is abridged, and that Mormon is narrating this chapter, referring to Alma in the third person (see Alma 10:31; 11:20).

Mormon continues narrating Alma's story in Alma IX (Alma 12–13:9), always referring to him in the third person and always clearly marking the beginnings and endings of quotations. For example: "Now, the words that Alma spake unto Zeezrom were heard by the people round about . . . and he spake on this wise . . ." (Alma 12:2), which was followed by: "Now, when Alma had spoken these words . . ." (Alma 12:7). Later, Mormon records: "And now, Alma began to expound these things unto him, saying . . ." (Alma 12:9); later: "Now, it came to pass that when Alma had made an end of speaking these words . . ." (Alma 12:19); and finally: "Now Alma said unto him . . ." (Alma 12:22). Alma IX ends in the middle of this quotation, taking us to our current Alma 13:9.

Then, in Alma X (Alma 13:10–15:19), Mormon continues that quotation until: "And now it came to pass that when Alma had said these words unto them, he stretched forth his hand unto them and cried with a mighty voice, saying . . ." (Alma 13:21). It continues after this second interruption until: "And Alma spake many more words unto the people which *are not written in this book*" (Alma 13:31). Even though Mormon abridged the words of Alma and Amulek in these chapters, they are still quotations, because he presented them as such, explicitly introducing them and preserving their original first-person voice.

Mormon continues narrating the story in Alma XI (Alma 16). It is

the final chapter of Mormon’s second narrative unit, concluding with: “. . . and thus ended the fourteenth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi” (Alma 16:21). This second narrative unit differs from the first and third units in that Mormon’s introduction and conclusion that bookend it—which are also linked through thematic content and verbal repetition—are chapters rather than paragraphs. The opening chapter (Alma II; Alma 4) begins the unit by describing a thriving Church that soon declines due to pride and wickedness, prompting Alma to relinquish the judgment seat to preach full time. The closing chapter of this unit (Alma XI; Alma 16) depicts the situation after his ministry in which—even though Ammonihah is destroyed—the Church is broadly reestablished, victory is gained over the adversary, and the Lord pours out his Spirit and blessings upon the people.

Also, in the opening chapter *inequality* is mentioned twice: first as a source of the contention among the people, and then as the cause of the sorrow that prompts Alma to give up the judgment seat (Alma 4:12, 15).²¹ The closing chapter then specifically mentions the absence of inequality as the Church is reestablished (Alma 16:16). Mormon uses this rare word one more time in a “thus we see” statement just before the added break creating Alma 29, thereby linking that review statement to the opening and closing chapters of this narrative unit (Alma 28:13). This accounts for four out of only six times *inequality* appears in the entire Book of Mormon.²² Additionally, in the opening chapter “envyings and strifes and malice . . .” are listed as contributing factors to the Church’s decline (Alma 4:9). In the closing chapter, Mormon states that the Church was reestablished by Alma and others preaching “against . . . envyings and strifes and malice . . .” (Alma 16:15, 18). Mormon does not use this word combination anywhere else.²³ By repeating this uncommon vocabulary and thematically framing the spiritual condition of the people and the Church both before and after Alma’s preaching, Mormon effectively links these two chapters to serve as the introduction and conclusion to his second narrative unit, our Alma 4-16.

21. The current edition reads *inequality*, while the original dictation was *unequality*. Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants*, 1659, 1943.

22. The other two uses are by King Mosiah (Mosiah 29:32) and Mormon (3 Nephi 6:14).

23. Nephi also used it (2 Nephi 26:21); as did Samuel the Lamanite (Helaman 13:22) and Moroni (Mormon 8:36).

Mormon begins his third narrative unit with a heading before Alma XII (Alma 17–20), introducing it and again citing his source:

An account of the sons of Mosiah, who rejected their rights to the kingdom for the word of God, and went up to the land of Nephi to preach to the Lamanites; their sufferings and deliverance — according to the record of Alma.

Mormon starts the unit describing their reunion with Alma after being gone fourteen years among the Lamanites (Alma 17:1–2). By referring to Alma in the third person, Mormon establishes that he — Mormon — is also narrating this story and not directly quoting his source material. He then moves back in time fourteen years to tell the story of Ammon and King Lamoni for the remainder of Alma XII (Alma 17–20). Mormon jumps back in time again to tell the story of Aaron and of Lamoni’s father in Alma XIII (Alma 21–22) and then continues telling a combined story of the sons of Mosiah and their labors in Alma XIV (Alma 23–26).

In his third narrative unit (Alma XII–XV; Alma 17–29), Mormon steps out of the narrative several times to speak to his audience in the present tense and explain or reflect on something.²⁴ We also find three inconsistencies that merit attention. Grant Hardy explains: “There are expressions such as ‘at this day’ (Alma 25:9) and ‘down to the present time’ (Alma 18:38; 23:5) that might best be understood as Mormon following his source very closely.”²⁵ These phrases, out of place if written in Mormon’s time, show Mormon copying directly from his source material. Given that we already assume Mormon was adapting existing narrative into his own voice, it is not surprising that some inconsistencies like this are found, expressions that could have been modified that slipped through unchanged.

Still, the presence of these minor inconsistencies raises an important question: When narrative material is copied, albeit with occasional edits, should it be treated as a quotation and thus heard in the voice of the original author? This question becomes especially relevant in this narrative unit about the sons of Mosiah, since Alma only appears in it twice, once at the beginning (Alma 17:1–2) and again near the end (Alma 27:16–25).

If Mormon’s editorial changes are limited primarily to these framing

24. See Appendix A for a list of Mormon’s editorial comments.

25. Grant Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader’s Guide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 308.

passages (along with a geographic aside in Alma 22:27–35 that was not necessary in Alma's day) and the rest of the account remains largely unchanged, how should we understand the narrative voice? Is it Alma's, Mormon's, or some combination of the two? And if it is a mixture, does that obligate the reader to discern where the voice shifts and how each part should be heard?

Book of Mormon scholar Brant Gardner believes that the narrative voice is a mixture, and therefore that it obligates the reader to discern.²⁶ He sees the heading before Alma XII (Alma 17) as introducing a quotation, even though Alma is referred to in the third person both at the outset and again later in the unit. Gardner acknowledges that Mormon modified the narrative and inserted his own material, but maintains that the bulk of it was copied from Alma's record. Therefore, in Gardner's view, there is no need for a formal introduction to Alma 29 (half-way through Alma XV), because Alma has been speaking all along. Gardner understands the narrative as a blend in which Alma remains the dominant voice with occasional selective contributions from Mormon. This requires readers to speculate about where the voice shifts and to decide how each portion should be heard.

I respectfully disagree. Mormon does not merely condense his source material while preserving Alma's voice; rather, he deliberately transforms it into his own voice. When he does quote Alma, he records it in first-person and allows Alma to speak for himself, as he does in Alma VII (Alma 9). Even when a quotation is abridged, Mormon still considers it a quotation and introduces it as such.²⁷ In modern writing, we would expect quotation marks or similar indicators, and in Mormon's record we consistently see introductory phrases or framing language. By contrast, when he does not present his abridged material as a quotation, it follows that it is not a quotation, even though we know it is based on an earlier source and perhaps even copied directly from it.

This distinction is crucial in understanding Alma 29. Mormon does

26. Brant A. Gardner, "Labor Diligently to Write: The Ancient Making of a Modern Scripture, Chapters 14 & 15," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 35 (2020): 301–10, interpreterfoundation.org/journal/labor-diligently-to-write-the-ancient-making-of-a-modern-scripture-6/#sub-14o. Grant Hardy also considered this possibility but ultimately rejected it. Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 308.

27. Mormon abridged each of these sermons but still introduced them as quotations: Alma's sermon in Gideon (Alma 8:1); Amulek's preaching in Ammonihah (Alma 9:34; 11:46); and Alma's preaching in Ammonihah (Alma 13:31).

attribute his source for his “account of the sons of Mosiah” in the heading before Alma XII (Alma 17), but he does not introduce the following narrative as a quotation. He then shifts Alma’s voice from first to third person in the account and makes other editorial changes. Without an explicit introduction identifying the passage as a quotation—as he does consistently elsewhere—we cannot classify it as one. Even if much of the content was drawn from Alma’s record, the form in which we receive it is Mormon’s. It is a redacted narrative based on a source, not a direct quotation from it. It still requires attribution, which Mormon gives, just like he does at the beginning and end of his “account of Alma,” but it is not a quotation. If it were he would have introduced it as such and left Alma’s words in the first-person.

Mormon ends Alma XIV (Alma 23–26) with a quotation from Ammon, introduced simply: “And now, these are the words of Ammon to his brethren which say thus” (Alma 26:1). This brief introduction shows that Mormon was willing to begin a significant quotation with minimal framing, which allows for the theoretical possibility that a similar line introducing a quotation may have once preceded Alma 29, but was lost. However, this hypothetical lost-line explanation, as well as Gardner’s claim that the entire unit is a quotation, both become moot if the words of Alma 29 fit Mormon. Because Mormon is the default voice in this material, if the words fit Mormon, then the most natural explanation for the absence of attribution is that they are his—he is not quoting Alma.

Reconsidering the quotation paradigm

Having reviewed Mormon’s narrative design and editorial patterns, we are now in a position to reconsider the supposed quotation. While most readers assume that it begins at Alma 29:1, three scholars who have considered this issue place its beginning at a change in verb tense seven verses earlier.²⁸ This section explores that possibility, arguing that the shift in tense signals a return to Mormon’s editorial voice, rather than the start of a quotation.

Alma XV (Alma 27–29) ends Mormon’s third narrative unit and completes the larger three-unit block (Alma I–XV; Alma 1–29) that recounts the events of the first fifteen years of the reign of the judges. In this chapter, Mormon continues the story of the sons of Mosiah as they flee with their converts, reunite (again) with Alma, and settle back

28. John Tvedtnes, Grant Hardy, and Brant Gardner. I engage with and cite their works in detail below.

among the Nephites. He then writes: “And now, it came to pass that after the people of Ammon were established in the land of Jershon . . .” (Alma 28:1). He will repeat this phrase, and some other details, to begin his next chapter and next narrative unit about Korihor and the Zoramites (Alma XVI; Alma 30:1–2). This is an example of resumptive repetition, a literary technique found in both the Hebrew Bible and the Book of Mormon. This technique, when a narrative is interrupted for a digression, repeats a phrase from the departure point to signal the return to the original storyline. Mormon interrupts his narrative here with thirty verses still remaining (Alma 28:2–29:17) — six in the past tense followed by twenty-four in the present tense — before he ends the chapter and resumes his interrupted storyline to begin his next chapter with the repeated line.

The story Mormon is interrupting is this: the contention stirred up by Nehor and Amlici leads Alma to relinquish the judgment seat to preach full-time among the Nephites. Meanwhile, the sons of Mosiah are preaching among the Lamanites. These storylines have converged and now culminate in a tremendous battle; one Mormon describes as the worst to that time among the Nephites, resulting in so many dead that they are not numbered (Alma 28:1–3; resumed in 30:1–2). He then ends his abridged narrative with the following verses, the last ones written in the past tense:

And now this was a time that there was a great *mourning* and *lamentation* heard throughout all the land, among all the people of Nephi — Yea, the *cry of widows mourning* for their husbands, and also of *fathers mourning* for their sons, and the daughter for the brother, yea, the brother for the father; and thus the *cry of mourning* was heard among all of them, *mourning* for their kindred who had been slain. And now surely this was a *sorrowful day*; yea, a time of *solemnity*, and a time of much fasting and prayer. And thus ended the fifteenth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi. (Alma 28:4–7)²⁹

Mormon ends his narrative block of the first fifteen years with this scene of profound national grief, and the words, “Surely this was a sorrowful day.” He identifies the mourners — widows, husbands, fathers,

29. The current edition reads *endeth*, while the original dictation was *ended*. Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants*, 2188.

sons, sisters, and brothers.³⁰ It is a litany of sorrow, an echo of wailing. These are not the words of a detached historian. They come from Mormon, a man well acquainted with war and its toll on families — one who had surely ministered to many new widows with eyes glazed in anguish, held children in shock from loss, and knelt beside parents undone by grief.

This also applies, in a lesser degree, to Alma, whose original description of these things is what Mormon abridged for the version of the record that we received. But this is not Alma speaking, for Mormon does not present it as a quotation. It is Mormon's voice we are hearing. He is describing this sorrowful scene for his latter-day audience, being moved upon enough to pause and confess from his own heart: "Surely this was a sorrowful day, yea, a time of solemnity, and a time of much fasting and prayer" (Alma 28:6).

At this point, Mormon shifts to the present tense to conclude his third narrative unit and begin reflecting on the stories he included from the first fifteen years of the reign of judges. While most Latter-day Saints see the quotation beginning at the added chapter break in seven more verses (in Alma 29:1), John Tvedtnes, Grant Hardy, and Brant Gardner have all concluded that the quotation begins at this change in tense. John Tvedtnes explains: "It is likely that Mormon began the quote from Alma's record in Alma 28:8–9, where we have a prefacelike colophon (both verses begin with the words 'and this is the account') referring to the previous section abridged by Mormon." After citing a few more verses, Tvedtnes adds: "These statements in present rather than past tense, imply that the writer was Alma, not Mormon."³¹

The present tense itself should no longer be an issue, because we know that Mormon also consistently used it in his editorial remarks. It is also important to clarify that Tvedtnes is not arguing that it is Alma speaking in Alma 29; he is arguing that Alma's words were inspired by the angel's visit to him in his youth. He is only pointing out that Mormon likely began quoting Alma earlier than we have traditionally assumed, as there is no logical break between this part of the Alma 28 text and Alma 29. Tvedtnes also offers reasons why the author is Alma, but they are brief and incidental and are not the focus of his essay.

30. Mormon mentions fathers twice, first as mourning, then as being mourned.

31. John A. Tvedtnes, "The Voice of an Angel," in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited: The Evidence for Ancient Origins*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1997), 320, archive.org/details/bookofmormonauth0000unse_pt12/page/320/mode/2up.

They are the same that Grant Hardy gives in footnotes in his *Book of Mormon Reader's and Study Edition*; reasons that, as far as I can tell, have never been formally challenged.³²

After more than a century of interpretive tradition, Alma's voice in this passage has become axiomatic, such that few scholars feel the need to articulate—let alone defend—the attribution. Gardner's response to an early version of this paper reflects that assumption rather than offering a developed argument for Alma's authorship:

All of the internal evidence points to Alma₂ as the author of those verses. . . . Smith spends the rest of his paper exploring how Mormon might be behind the phrases that appear to so clearly depend upon Alma₂'s experiences.³³

This is representative of the prevailing assumption rather than a defense of it, and therefore does not engage the question of authorship at the level of argument.

In what follows, we will examine that internal evidence with fresh eyes and a new perspective. We will start our examination, however, seven verses before the chapter break for Alma 29, because that is where the consensus of Book of Mormon scholars who have considered this question place its true beginning.

Themes, Echoes, and Editorial Intent

To consider whether or not we are hearing Mormon's voice, we must first understand the context in which he wrote. He was a man who sorrowed for the wickedness of his people—a man who had spent his life recording their wickedness as he witnessed the slow collapse of his nation. He wrote of himself: "And wo is me because of their wickedness, for my heart has been filled with **sorrow** because of their wickedness all my days" (Mormon 2:19). And again:

I had led them, notwithstanding their wickedness, I had led them many times to battle, and had loved them, according to the love of God which was in me, with all my heart; and *my soul had been poured out in prayer unto my God all the day*

32. Grant Hardy, ed., *The Book of Mormon: A Reader's Edition* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 332; Hardy, *Maxwell Institute Study Edition*, 316; Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 308.

33. Gardner, "Labor Diligently to Write," 308.

long for them; nevertheless, it was **without faith**, because of the hardness of their hearts. (Mormon 3:12)

And finally: “I was **without hope**, for I knew the judgments of the Lord which should come upon them; for they repented not of their iniquities . . .” (Mormon 5:2).

When Mormon was likely writing the passage we are about to examine, he was in his early seventies, either retreating north with his people to Cumorah, or already there preparing for what would be their final battle.³⁴ He describes the sorrow of that gathering in haunting terms:

we did again take to flight, and those whose flight was swifter than the Lamanites’ did escape, and those whose flight did not exceed the Lamanites’ were swept down and destroyed. And now behold, I, Mormon, do not desire to **harrow up** the souls of men in casting before them such an awful scene of blood and carnage as was laid before mine eyes . . . 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. . . . For I know that such will **sorrow** for the calamity of the house of Israel; yea, they will **sorrow** for the destruction of this people; they will **sorrow** that this people had not repented. (Mormon 5:7–11)

The voice we are now trying to hear is that of an aging prophet who sorrowed deeply for the wickedness of his beloved people, who had lost faith and hope that they would repent, and knew they were about to be destroyed. He was a man unable to fully describe the “awful scene of blood and carnage” he witnessed, not only because of the commandment he had received, but also out of concern for the sorrow of his reader.³⁵ I say *trying* to hear because the context in which we perceive a writer inevitably shapes how we interpret their words.

34. This is how I read Mormon 6:5–6.

35. In a letter to Moroni, Mormon gives only a glimpse of what he witnessed (Moroni 9:7–9): torture, rape, women and children deliberately starved and fed the flesh of their husbands and fathers, and other forms of war cannibalism. The atrocities appear systematic, not isolated. The depravity exceeded what Mormon dared, or was allowed, to put in his record. When he speaks of “*blood and carnage*,” it appears he is deliberately withholding the full horror.

Tone, meaning, and even authorship are always filtered through the lens of expectation. In the case of Alma 29, that expectation has been shaped by over a century of tradition and by the quiet, implicit authority of a chapter heading, making it especially difficult to hear an alternative. But that is precisely why, in this case, we must question the instinct to hear only what we already believe. What follows is best approached as a deliberate re-hearing of the passage—one that tests how interpretive expectations shape perceptions of voice.

Rather than present and weigh indirect evidence pointing to either Alma or Mormon, I have instead laid a foundational claim: Mormon is the default voice in the account we have received. My central premise is that his abridgment comes to us in his voice, unless he explicitly indicates otherwise—and in the case of Alma 29, he does not. He offers no attribution to Alma and no introduction of a quotation. This omission is significant. As demonstrated earlier, Mormon is remarkably consistent in introducing and attributing quotations. This is true not only in the chapters examined here but throughout his entire record. If the words that follow can also be heard in Mormon's voice, then that is how we should hear them. There is no need to postulate a missing line of text or explain away the lack of attribution, for it simply is not a quotation.

I say *also be heard* in Mormon's voice because I freely acknowledge that the passage sounds like Alma. I heard it that way my entire life and, at first, it was difficult for me to hear it differently. But, once I became aware of the anomaly and began examining the issue more closely, another possibility emerged. My goal in the balance of this paper is to explore that possibility further and show that the words can also be heard as Mormon's. They also fit as his own reflection on the material he has just abridged. There is nothing in them that disqualifies him as the speaker or requires that they be Alma's words.

Hearing Mormon's voice in Alma 29

This section offers a close reading of Alma 28:8–29:17 as Mormon's editorial reflection, showing how the language, structure, and emotional tone align with his voice and narrative context. If the content also fits naturally with his perspective and concerns, there is no need to assume a change in speaker.

After ending his narrative block of material written in the past tense, Mormon shifts to the present tense to first conclude his third narrative unit about the sons of Mosiah:

And this **is** the *account of Ammon and his brethren*, their

journeyings in the land of Nephi, their **sufferings** in the land, their **sorrows**, and their **afflictions**, and their **incomprehensible joy**, and the reception and **safety** of the brethren in the land of Jershon. And now may the Lord, the Redeemer of all men, bless their souls forever. (Alma 28:8)

This conclusion echoes language from the unit’s introduction found in the heading before Alma 17 (Alma XII), framing it just like the other two narrative units Mormon created: “An account of the sons of Mosiah . . . their **sufferings** and **deliverance**, according to the record of Alma.”

This is the first verse that John Tvedtnes saw as a “prefacelike colophon,” introducing the quotation from Alma. Rather than a preface marking the start of a quotation, I submit that it serves as a summary conclusion to the story of the sons of Mosiah and a benediction invoking the Lord’s blessing upon them. At the same time, it looks backward and forward—bridging the narrative that just concluded with the retrospective review that follows.

The next verse performs a similar dual function, but on a larger scale: “And this **is** *the account of the wars and contentions among the Nephites, and also the wars between the Nephites and the Lamanites; and the fifteenth year of the reign of the judges is ended*” (Alma 28:9). This verse concludes the broader narrative block containing all three units, while also echoing Mormon’s heading that introduced the book of Alma: “*An account of the reign of the judges and the wars and contentions among the people, and also an account of a war between the Nephites and the Lamanites . . .*”—the same heading to which the conclusion of his first narrative unit linked. In doing so, it frames the entire block and signals the beginning of Mormon’s editorial review of it.

The tense change does not signal a shift to Alma’s voice; instead, it marks a transition to Mormon’s editorial perspective as he steps out of the narrative to reflect on it—just as he does elsewhere in his record. Notably, he ends the fifteenth year of the reign of judges twice: first using the past tense to close the historical narrative (Alma 28:7), and then again in a present-perfect form—“is ended”—to emphasize from his editorial vantage that the year has just concluded (Alma 28:9). In so doing, Mormon signals that he is no longer narrating events as they unfold, but deliberately pausing to engage directly with what he has just presented, revisiting it from his authorial perspective to interpret and shape its meaning for his latter-day audience.

Mormon begins this reflective review with: "And *from the first year to the fifteenth has brought to pass* the destruction of many thousand lives, yea, it *has brought to pass* an awful scene of bloodshed" (Alma 28:10). Because the first battle he mentions occurred in the fifth year, by saying, "from the first year," Mormon shows that he is referencing the beginning of his "account of Alma." The use of the present perfect "has brought to pass" shows that he considers all the events from years one through fifteen as contributing to and culminating in this current tragedy. The destruction and bloodshed in the stories Mormon told are not merely part of the past; they led to this current editorial moment and remain part of the present as he reflects on the block of material he created to recount them.

As Mormon continues in the present tense, he keeps that destruction and sorrow vivid — not just for himself, but for us as well:

And the bodies of many thousands are laid low in the earth, while the bodies of many thousands are *moldering* in heaps upon the face of the earth, yea, and many thousands are mourning for the loss of their kindred, because they have reason to fear, according to the promises of the Lord, that they are consigned to a state of endless wo. While many thousands of others truly mourn for the loss of their kindred, yet they rejoice and exult in the hope, and even know, according to the promises of the Lord, that they are raised to dwell at the right hand of God in a state of never-ending happiness. (Alma 28:11–12).³⁶

The present tense keeps this scene and its emotional impact immediate, contrasting despair with hope in the face of mass death. In so doing, Mormon reinforces his central theme: agency, repentance, and faith determine eternal outcomes. He teaches that the sorrow or joy in death reflects the choices made in life. The present tense also makes it sound like Alma is speaking, even though these verses have not traditionally been included in the quotation. Rather than Alma speaking, these are Mormon's reflections on the sorrowful close of the narrative arc he has just shaped as he draws out its spiritual implications and eternal significance.

What he does here closely resembles what he does after the destruction of his own people — the only other time the word *molder* (or *moldering*) is found in the Book of Mormon. After the Nephite's

36. See Appendix C for a discussion of "state of never-ending happiness."

last battle, Mormon describes the dead as “left by the hands of those who slew them to *molder* upon the land . . .” (Mormon 6:15), and a few verses later laments:

ye are gone and my sorrows cannot bring your return. And the day soon cometh that your mortal must put on immortality, and these bodies which are now *moldering* in corruption must soon become incorruptible bodies; and then ye must stand before the judgment-seat of Christ, to be judged according to your works; and if it so be that ye are righteous, then are ye blessed with your fathers who have gone before you. O that ye had repented before this great destruction had come upon you. But behold, ye are gone, and the Father, yea, the Eternal Father of heaven, knoweth your state; and he doeth with you according to his justice and mercy. (Mormon 6:20–22)

The emotional resonance between these two scenes is unmistakable. The destruction Mormon describes in his abridged narrative echoes, and also anticipates, the devastation he personally witnessed. That earlier account, though historical, must have stirred fresh sorrow as he recorded it, sorrow shaped by memory and experience. Elsewhere he writes: “my sorrow did return unto me again, and I saw that the day of grace was passed with them, both temporally and spiritually; for I saw thousands of them hewn down in open rebellion against their God and heaped up as dung upon the face of the land” (Mormon 2:15). Perhaps as he was recording the past tragedy from Alma’s day, he was experiencing similar ones in his own. I believe that the emotion aroused by the scene he just described — hinted at in his reflection that “surely this was a sorrowful day” — stirred something more than memory. It awakened a longing, a heartfelt wish he will express in a very personal way in the words that soon follow.

Before those words, however, Mormon offers three “thus we see” statements. He often uses this phrase, or a variation of it, to draw moral or theological conclusions from the stories he presents.³⁷ The first is especially forceful, linking spiritual inequality not only to circum-

37. The phrase *thus we see* (or *we see, can behold, plainly discern*, etc.) was used a total of twenty-seven times by Mormon to call attention to something in his abridged material (see Alma 19:23, 36; 24:19, 27, 30; 28:13–14; 29:8; 30:60; 46:8–10; 50:19, 21; Helaman 3:27–29; 6:34–36, 40; 12:1–3; 15:5). It was also used two times by Nephi (1 Nephi 16:29; 17:3), once by Ammon (Alma 26:37) and twice by Moroni (Ether 2:9; 14:25) as they comment on their material. It was

stance, but to sin and the devil's deceit: "And thus we see how great the inequality of man *is* because of sin and transgression, and the power of the devil, which comes by the cunning plans which he hath devised to ensnare the hearts of men" (Alma 28:13). The word *inequality* recalls the opening and closing chapters of the second narrative unit previously discussed.³⁸ The word *cunning* ties this observation to the characterization of Amlici (Alma 2:1–2), and later to the lawyers in Ammonihah who employed "cunning devices" in their attempt to entrap Alma and Amulek (Alma 10:13–15). Using the present-tense verbs *is* and *comes*, alongside the present-perfect *he hath devised*, emphasizes that inequality, sin, and temptation are not just historical conditions, but ongoing, active realities. The devil's schemes, devised long ago, still remain operative in Mormon's day, and in our own.

The second "thus we see" shifts from observation to exhortation: "And thus we see the great call of diligence of men to labor in the vineyards of the Lord" (Alma 28:14). This statement refers directly to the preceding narratives of Alma and the sons of Mosiah, who labored in the Lord's vineyard throughout their stories. Mormon presents their missionary journeys, sacrifices, and struggles as examples of faith and diligence.

The third statement expresses a universal gospel truth, one that has echoed throughout this narrative. It articulates a recurring contrast, a thematic thread tying together multiple earlier passages: the consequences of sin versus repentance. Mormon first introduced this in the conclusion to his first chapter (Alma 3:26), echoed it through Alma's words in Zarahemla and in Ammonihah (Alma 9:28–29), and reaffirmed it as he reflected on the moldering bodies of the dead: "And thus we see the great reason of **sorrow**, and also of rejoicing; **sorrow** because of death and destruction among men, and joy because of the light of Christ unto life" (Alma 28:14). Mormon will return to this theme one more time (Alma 29:4–5).

This is how our current Alma 28 ends, with Mormon reflecting on the sorrow and rejoicing that mark the spiritual consequences of mortality, the accumulated meaning of everything he has included in his account of Alma, reaching all the way back to the beginning. These verses deepen Mormon's editorial voice and prepare the way for the

also used in this way by Alma in Ammonihah (Alma 12:22, 24), in his letter to Shiblon (37:26), and in his letter to Corianton (42:3, 4, 7, 14).

38. Earlier uses are in Alma 4:12, 15; 16:16. This is the fourth use in this material, out of six total in the Book of Mormon.

reflections that follow in Alma 29. There is no explicit shift in speaker, only a continuation of Mormon's words.

The emotional weight of the destruction he described, and the salvation he held up alongside it, creates the context for what follows. It is in this spirit of mourning and reflection that Mormon expresses one of the most poignant desires found in the Book of Mormon. These words, traditionally attributed to Alma, when heard in this context, resonate just as powerfully in Mormon's voice, as he moves from reflection to yearning without pause or introduction, and expresses his deep, heartfelt desire:

O that I were an angel and could have the wish of mine heart, that I might go forth and speak with the trump of God, with a voice to shake the earth, and cry repentance unto every people! Yea, I would declare unto every soul, as with the voice of thunder, repentance and the plan of redemption, that they should repent and come unto our God, that there might not be more **sorrow** upon all the face of the earth. (Alma 29:1–2).³⁹

If Mormon sorrowed for the wickedness of his people and longed for their repentance — if he grieved for the sorrow of those in his narrative, and for those he was witnessing in his own day — then this is the desire we would expect him to express. It continues the emotional and spiritual trajectory already established in the verses leading here, flowing directly from his final past-tense observation: “And now surely this was a **sorrowful** day . . .” (Alma 28:6), and continuing the theme of his last “thus we see” reflection: “And thus we see the great reason of **sorrow**, . . . **sorrow** because of death and destruction among men . . .” (Alma 28:14). Mormon's feelings are not abstract. His wish is to speak with such divine power that it drives sorrow from the earth through universal repentance. And, as we shall see, his longing is not only to end sorrow, but also to save his people from the destruction looming over them.

John Tvedtnes connects these words to Alma's story, writing: “It was the angel's ‘voice of thunder, which caused the earth to shake,’ that later prompted Alma to desire to be ‘an angel.’”⁴⁰ That reading fits Alma, but it also fits Mormon. Alma's experience could just as easily

39. See Appendix C for a discussion of *O that I were an angel, trump of God, voice to shake the earth, voice of thunder, and plan of redemption*.

40. Tvedtnes, “Voice of an Angel,” 314.

have stirred the same desire in Mormon. Mormon recorded that angelic visitation in his book of Mosiah, and in Alma 29 he is reflecting on some of its consequences. Because of the angel’s voice of thunder, Alma and the sons of Mosiah repented and escaped personal destruction (see Alma 26:17–20). They then became instruments in God’s hands to save the Church and bring thousands of Lamanites into its fold. These miraculous stories — so formative to the early Church — were surely told and retold in Nephite families to build faith in their children, perhaps even to a young Mormon hundreds of years later, and then by him to a young Moroni. These are stories of their ancestors who repented and became angels of mercy to help stave off destruction of others. They surely shaped Mormon’s spiritual imagination. Is it any wonder, then, that he might long to be among those who, as he puts it, “were treated as though they were angels sent from God to save them from everlasting destruction” (Alma 27:4).

The longing expressed in Alma 29 is not the beginning of something new, but the continuation of Mormon’s review as he now weaves his personal reflections back into the material he has just abridged. Far from stepping aside to quote Alma, Mormon will remain fully in his editorial voice, returning again and again to the stories from the first fifteen years, as he surveys the larger moral arc of that narrative, drawing out the lessons that have impacted his own life, while hoping they will also impact ours.

Intertextual echoes: Alma or Mormon?

Tvedtnes sees additional parallels to Alma in these words, writing:

One might argue that Alma was not necessarily thinking about his conversion experience. . . . There is further evidence, however, that Alma had his own experience with the angel in mind. It lies in Alma’s reference to other aspects of the angel’s visit.⁴¹

Tvedtnes is referring to what the angel commanded Alma to do in Mosiah 27, and other allusions to that experience in the Alma 29 verses that follow. As we review that further evidence, to be fair we

41. Tvedtnes, “Voice of an Angel,” 314–15. See also S. Kent Brown, “Alma’s Conversion: Reminiscences in His Sermons,” in *The Book of Mormon: Alma, The Testimony of the Word*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, BYU, 1992), 149, rsc.byu.edu/book-mormon-alma-testimony-word/almas-conversion-reminiscences-his-sermons.

must remember that Tvedtnes was not arguing for Alma’s authorship of Alma 29 — again, that was already assumed. He was arguing that Alma’s words were inspired by the memory of the angel’s visit. On that point I agree — because it also applies to Mormon.

The angel’s visit profoundly shaped Alma’s life, ministry, and teachings, which in turn profoundly shaped the development of the Church Mormon belonged to. As one of the Church’s high priests, Alma urged its members to do what the angel had commanded him to do. Mormon also would have strived to live by those teachings of Alma. We do the same today after reading Alma’s words in Mormon’s book, though we are much further removed from Alma’s time. So, even though I no longer believe it is Alma speaking, I still see echoes of the angel’s visit in Alma 29 — both in how that experience shaped Alma’s teachings, which Mormon is now reflecting on, and in how the legacy of those teachings transformed the religious tradition that Mormon inherited, and thus Mormon himself. That legacy — echoed and preserved in Mormon’s voice — helps give these words their enduring power.

Alma 29 continues:

But behold, I am a man, and do sin in my wish; for I ought to be content with the things which the Lord hath allotted unto me. I ought not to harrow up in my desires, the firm decree of a just God, for I know that he granteth unto men according to their desire, whether it be unto death or unto life; yea, I know that he alloteth unto men, yea, decreeth unto them decrees which are unalterable, according to their wills, whether they be unto salvation or unto destruction. . . . he that knoweth good and evil, to him it is given according to his desires, whether he desireth good or evil, life or death, joy or remorse of conscience. Now, seeing that I know these things, why should I desire more than to perform the work to which I have been called? (Alma 29:3–6)⁴²

Here, Mormon restates his central theme one last time — that God grants to each person according to their desires, for better or worse. This time, it becomes more personal, offering a glimpse into a struggle in Mormon’s heart, for he also states that his wish is a sin, and that he “ought not to harrow up in [his] desires, the firm decree of a just God.”

Tvedtnes sees the “firm decree” mentioned here as a reference to the divine judgments Alma was forced to face when the angel

42. See Appendix C for a discussion of the phrase *harrow up*.

appeared, noting that “harrow up” also appears in Alma 36, writing: “Similar wording is found in [Alma 29], making it clear that he was thinking about his earlier experience with the angel.”⁴³ This may be an example of confirmation bias. Tvedtnes assumes that Alma is speaking, and his use of the same phrase elsewhere confirms that belief—similar to how the use of the word *molder* confirms mine. Intertextual links like these, though interesting, cannot be evidence for authorship, because they are inherently inconclusive. Even in the case of *molder*—where Mormon’s later use is the only other use and it occurs in a nearly identical context—it still does not prove he is the speaker. Parallels like this may enrich our understanding of the text, but they cannot determine authorship and can just as easily mislead when read through the lens of prior assumptions.

Although Alma uses “harrow up” in Alma 36, he employs it quite differently, which could possibly mislead one into misreading its meaning in Alma 29. In its original agricultural sense, a *harrow* is a farming implement used to break up and tear through soil, to prepare it for planting. Metaphorically, *to harrow up* someone’s mind or soul means to tear it up, to distress it, or to inflict sharp mental or emotional anguish—as in Alma 36: “I was harrowed up to the greatest degree and racked with all my sins” (Alma 36:12). But in Alma 29—“to harrow up the firm decree of a just God”—it carries a different meaning. Here it refers to agitating or unsettling something that ought to remain settled; a firm decree from God.

This meaning fits perfectly in the context of Mormon speaking, for “the firm decree of a just God” refers to something specific that the Lord said to him: “Because this people repented not after I had delivered them, behold, they shall be cut off from the face of the earth” (Mormon 3:15). After hearing this decree, Mormon stepped back from leading his people and became an idle witness to their downfall. One can almost feel the inner conflict he must have experienced each time he poured out his soul in prayer for them—as though he “ought not to harrow up” what a just God had already decreed. These words in Alma 29 express the sorrow of a man knowing he cannot unsettle what God has already settled.

The same awareness that he “ought not” press against God’s justice surfaces in a letter Mormon wrote his son: “I cannot recommend them [the Nephites] unto God lest he should smite me” (Moroni 9:21).

43. Tvedtnes, “Voice of an Angel,” 318.

It recalls the feelings of his ancestor Nephi, who saw the destruction of his people in vision and lamented: “O the pain and the anguish of my soul for the loss of the slain of my people! For I, Nephi, have seen it, and it well-nigh consumeth me before the presence of the Lord; but I must cry unto my God: **Thy ways are just**” (2 Nephi 26:7). Like Nephi, Mormon grieved knowing his people’s destruction was certain. Yet, knowing a just God “granteth unto men according to their desire, whether it be unto death or unto life” (Alma 29:4), Mormon chastened himself — condemning even his longing to change God’s decree as a sinful desire.

Mormon understood that his people had collectively sealed their own fate through their willful rebellion. As he wrote to Moroni:

I fear lest the Spirit hath ceased striving with them; and in this part of the land they are also seeking to put down all power and authority which cometh from God; and they are denying the Holy Ghost. And after rejecting so great a knowledge, my son, they must perish soon, unto the fulfilling of the prophecies which were spoken by the prophets, as well as the words of our Savior himself. (Moroni 8:28–29)

Elsewhere he recorded that “the day of grace was passed with [the Nephites], both temporally and spiritually” (Mormon 2:15) and “the Spirit of the Lord hath already ceased to strive with [them]” (Mormon 5:16). In that light, Mormon’s quiet confession in Alma 29, “I do sin in my wish,” reflects not only his sorrow, but his submission to what he knew that divine justice required. Wishing to provoke repentance and overturn a decree spoken to him personally may have felt like a breach of trust — or even disobedience.

The phrase *firm decree* in Alma 29:4 stands out. Why use the adjective *firm*? Is there such a thing as a decree from the Lord that is not firm? The word choice is deliberate. The only other time these words appear together in the Book of Mormon is in Alma’s warning to Ammonihah: “. . . has not the Lord expressly promised and firmly decreed, that if ye will rebel against him that ye shall utterly be destroyed from off the face of the earth?” (Alma 9:24). By repeating Alma’s unique word combination from chapter 9, Mormon aligns the fate of his own people with that of the people of Ammonihah — a city that rejected Alma’s witness and warning and sealed its own destruction through rebellion and refusal to repent.

This intertextual link serves one of Mormon’s broader literary

purposes: to use historical destruction as a typological warning to latter-day Gentiles. Throughout his work he presents the downfall of the Jaredites, the people of Ammonihah, and the Nephites not merely as history, but as prophecy — types and shadows of what awaits those in the last days who likewise reject the Lord. Moroni makes this warning unmistakable:

And this cometh unto you, O ye Gentiles, *that ye may know the decrees of God* — that ye may repent and not continue in your iniquities until the fulness come, 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)

Intertextual links like this could also be seen as evidence for Alma being the voice in Alma 29. Indeed, they are a major reason Alma's voice has long been assumed in this chapter. The reasoning goes: since Alma used similar language elsewhere, he must be speaking here as well. But this reasoning remains speculative; it relies on inference and is therefore vulnerable to confirmation bias, as the earlier examples of "harrow up" and "molder" illustrate. The speaker we assume unavoidably shapes the meaning we perceive. On the other hand, what is conclusive is the lack of explicit attribution by Mormon. If the words can reasonably be heard in Mormon's voice, as I argue that they can, then that is how we should hear them. To do otherwise privileges tradition over text and expectation over evidence, thus overlooking the deeper editorial purpose at work in the text.

Mormon's Literary and Rhetorical Purposes

Having clarified how intertextual echoes should be weighed, we can now examine what Mormon does with them. Another of his literary objectives — closely related to the one just discussed — is to teach the Law of the Harvest: that every person will reap a reward according to his or her works. In Ammonihah, Alma taught: "And now, for this cause, that ye may not be destroyed, the Lord hath sent his angel to visit many of his people, declaring unto them that they must go forth and cry mightily unto this people, saying: Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is nigh at hand" (Alma 9:25). He then adds:

Therefore, prepare ye the way of the Lord, for the time is at hand that all men shall reap a reward of their works, according to that which they have been — if they have been righteous they shall reap the salvation of their souls, according

to the power and deliverance of Jesus Christ; and if they have been evil they shall reap the damnation of their souls, according to the power and captivity of the devil. Now behold, this is the voice of the angel, crying unto the people. (Alma 9:28–29)

Mormon uses Alma's words from chapter 9 to teach his latter-day audience that divine justice is ultimately tied to human desire and behavior; that reward is not arbitrary but harvested according to one's will and works. This is a major theme throughout his first three narrative blocks — one Mormon emphasizes by restating it three times in his editorial review.

Another of Mormon's editorial aims is to teach about the role of angels in God's plan. Mormon includes Alma's teaching that the Lord sends angels to declare repentance so that people might avoid destruction (Alma 9:25, 29). Amulek, who also saw an angel, likewise explained that God uses angels to cry repentance and warn of coming judgments (Alma 10:20–21). Then Alma taught that in the beginning God sent angels to reveal himself to mankind and to teach the plan of redemption (Alma 12:29–30), and that angels declare repentance and the day of salvation to all nations (Alma 13:21–26). The angelic visitation that led to the repentance of Alma and the sons of Mosiah is recalled multiple times (Alma 17:2; 21:5; 26:17–20), and the sons of Mosiah were regarded as angels by those they helped save from destruction (Alma 27:4). Through what he includes, Mormon teaches that angels proclaim the gospel, call people to repentance, and help save them from destruction — the very roles the Book of Mormon itself fulfills. Thus, when he expresses his longing to be an angel and speak with the trump of God to all the ends of the earth, Mormon is not merely voicing a personal desire.⁴⁴ He is intentionally aligning himself with that angelic pattern and reinforcing the divine purpose of his book.⁴⁵

44. "Trump of God" is only found one time in the Book of Mormon, and only three other times elsewhere. Seeing it as an idiom referring to the Book of Mormon adds figurative meaning to them all. (See 1 Thessalonians 4:16; Doctrine and Covenants 43:18; 88:92.)

45. Angels and trumpets are already inseparably connected with the Book of Mormon. The angel Moroni delivered the gold plates to Joseph Smith on 22 September 1827, an Israelite Holy Day called the Feast of the Trumpets. The very day the Book of Mormon came forth from the dust, Jews around the world were blowing trumpets and praying that God would still remember His exiled people. The trumpet blast symbolizes new revelation, announces the final harvest, and calls the house of Israel to repent and gather in preparation for the

Mormon's ability to layer additional meaning into his words through structure, repetition, and intertextual links is still unfamiliar to many. Grant Hardy was one of the first scholars I noticed highlighting this literary intentionality. In 2010 he wrote:

In light of Mormon's artistic structuring of his account with deliberate editing, parallel narratives, and specific verbal connections, Latter-day Saints may want to rethink their long-held assumption that the circumstances of Mormon's life forced him to write hurriedly. The intentionality implicit in the literary aspects of his history suggest . . . he did not compose as he engraved, but rather transmitted to the plates a text previously written and carefully revised.⁴⁶

Noel Reynolds expands on this idea, showing that Mormon inherited and worked within a Nephite scribal tradition rooted in an advanced literary heritage developed among the Hebrews over centuries and reaching its peak around the time Lehi fled Jerusalem.⁴⁷ Nephi, trained in Hebrew rhetoric or the "learning of the Jews" (1 Nephi 1:2), clearly employed those rhetorical patterns in his writing, and that training was preserved and passed down through the Nephite recordkeepers all the way to Mormon. Not only was Mormon an experienced writer and inspired seer, but he was also well-educated in literary techniques and rhetorical devices. He knew how to layer meaning into his words. More than that, he knew his book would go forth to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people in the last days to restore the gospel of Jesus Christ and gather scattered Israel. He understood that his

coming of the Lord. Lenet Hadley Read, "Joseph Smith's Receipt of the Plates and the Israelite Feast of Trumpets," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 2, no. 2 (July 1993): 110–20.

Mormon's book acts as a trumpet in that it literally does these same things, as explained to the Nephites by the resurrected Christ (3 Nephi 16, 20–21; cf. 3 Nephi 29:1). The angel Moroni stands atop many Latter-day Saint temples around the world with a trumpet pressed to his lips, and sometimes even gold plates under his arm. The weathervane for the original Nauvoo temple depicted an angel in flight holding an open book overhead with one hand, and a trumpet pressed to his lips with the other.

46. Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 111.

47. Noel B. Reynolds, "The Last Nephite Scribes," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 53 (2022): 95–138, interpreterfoundation.org/journal/the-last-nephite-scribes/; and Noel B. Reynolds, "Lehi and Nephi as Trained Manassite Scribes," *Interpreter* 50 (2022): 161–216, interpreterfoundation.org/journal/lehi-and-nephi-as-trained-manassite-scribes/.

record would fulfill the prophecies and promises given to his ancestors, extending back through Lehi and Nephi to Joseph in Egypt.

As we continue in Alma 29, we find another subtle example of Mormon’s literary artistry as he layers additional meaning into his words through anaphoric parallelism.⁴⁸ Twice he asks: “Why should I desire . . . ?” The first concludes: “more than to perform the work to which I have been called” (Alma 29:6); the second, which immediately follows, ends with: “that I were an angel, that I could speak unto all the ends of the earth?” (Alma 29:7). Mormon thus links “the work to which [he has] been called” with the very thing he longs for—to speak with divine authority to all nations. When this layered meaning rises to the surface, his desire aligns perfectly with his role as author of the Book of Mormon—a voice destined to go forth to “all the ends of the earth.”

As he continues, Mormon connects his longing and prophetic role even more explicitly to the record he is crafting: “For behold, the Lord doth grant unto all nations, of their own nation and tongue, to teach **his word**, yea, **in wisdom**, all that he **seeth fit** that they should have. Therefore we see that the Lord doth counsel **in wisdom** according to that which is just and true” (Alma 29:8).⁴⁹ Read in Mormon’s voice rather than Alma’s, this can be seen less as a general observation and more as a self-referential prophetic statement, shaped with editorial intentionality. On this reading, his desire to cry repentance to all nations is realized through the very record in which he voices that desire: the book itself functions as the instrument by which the Lord grants his word to “all nations . . . in wisdom, all that he *seeth* fit that they should have.” The Book of Mormon has now reached hundreds of millions of readers in scores of languages. This is not just poetic irony—it is poetic prophecy being fulfilled before our eyes.

Mormon strengthens this connection by shaping his words into parallel and chiasmic balance, hallmarks of Hebrew rhetoric. The entire segment from “O that I were an angel . . .” (Alma 29:1) to “the Lord doth grant unto all nations . . .” (Alma 29:8) falls into a carefully connected symmetry:

A1. O that I were an **angel** . . . **wish** . . . *cry repentance to every people.*

A2. Declare repentance and plan of redemption unto every soul.

48. Anaphoric parallelism is repetition at the beginning of parallel structures for rhetorical effect.

49. The current edition reads *counsel in wisdom*, while the original dictation was *counsel in his wisdom*. Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants*, 2205–6. See Appendix C for a discussion of this phrase.

- B. But behold, I am a man, and do sin in my wish,
for I ought to be content with the things the Lord hath allotted unto me.
- C. I ought not to harrow up in my desires the firm decree of a just God.
1. For I know he grants according to desire, whether death/life.
 2. Yea, I know he allots/decrees according to wills whether salvation/
destruction.
 3. Yea, I know he gives according to desires whether good/evil, life/
death . . .
- B'. Now, seeing that I know these things,
*Why should I desire more than to perform the work to which I have been
called?*
- A1'. Why should I **desire** that I were an **angel**, that I could *speak unto all the ends
of earth?*
- A2'. The Lord doth grant to all nations . . . to teach his word . . . all that he seeth
fit that they should have.

The outer A-lines pair yearning with provision: 1. Mormon's wish/desire to be an angel and cry repentance/speak to all the ends of the earth; with 2. the declaring of repentance and the plan of redemption unto every soul in parallel with a reference to his record—The Lord doth grant . . . his word . . . in wisdom, all that he seeth fit that they should have. The B-lines disclose an inner reckoning with divine allotment, or the work he was called to do. At the center the C-lines repeat "I know," declaring the law of the harvest—that God grants according to desire, which is central to Mormon's editorial concerns. Such literary symmetry suggests more than spontaneous reflection; it is Mormon's deliberate prophetic meditation, shaped with clear editorial intentionality. Yearning, confession, and knowledge are bound together in a pattern that points beyond Mormon's personal longing to the larger fulfillment realized through the record he is crafting. The structure itself becomes a witness that the Book of Mormon would serve as the angelic voice by which the Lord grants his word to the nations—declaring repentance and the plan of redemption unto every soul.

Mormon reinforces that the last line (Alma 29:8) is specifically referring to the record he is creating by echoing the Lord's words given to Joseph in Egypt about the record of his seed: "And the words which [Joseph Smith] shall write shall be *the words* which are *expedient in my wisdom should go forth*. . . . And they shall cry from the dust, yea, even repentance unto their brethren" (2 Nephi 3:19–20). Even though the only verbal overlap is the phrase "in [God's] wisdom," the conceptual link is strong: both prophecies describe the Lord prudently

granting his word in measured portion as He deems “expedient,” or “all that he seeth fit that they should have.”

The link between these two prophecies is strengthened when considered beside the Lord’s instructions to a future Joseph Smith that were given to Nephi centuries earlier: “Touch not the things which are sealed, for I will *bring them forth* in mine own due time . . . [*when*] I shall see fit in mine own wisdom to reveal all things unto the children of men” (2 Nephi 27:21–22). Nephi verbally links his words to the prophecy of Joseph of Egypt with “bring them forth” and “in mine own wisdom.” Then, by repeating “see fit” and “in wisdom,” Mormon links his words to Nephi’s prophecy, and therefore back to Joseph’s again by association. All three passages essentially describe an editorial constraint placed by the Lord upon prophets — that revelation is to be measured out according to divine wisdom and limited to what is expedient. Nephi thus extends Joseph’s prophecy, and Mormon in turn aligns his words, and his record, with both, linking Alma 29:8 securely within a prophetic chain.

Mormon further demonstrates the constraint in 3 Nephi 26, wherein he explains that his record only contains the “lesser part” of what Jesus taught the Nephites — “which is expedient that they should have first, to try their faith” — and adds: “I was about to write them all . . . but the Lord forbade it, saying: I will try the faith of my people. Therefore I, Mormon, do write the things which have been commanded me of the Lord” (3 Nephi 26:9, 11–12). This passage not only illustrates the editorial constraint placed upon Mormon by the Lord — limiting what he may include — but also conceptually gathers the prophecies of Joseph of Egypt, Nephi, and Mormon into a single frame — revelation given, measured, and timed, all by divine wisdom. It also provides a strong verbal link back to Joseph through the distinctive word *expedient* reinforcing all the other links at once.

The editorial constraint imposed on Mormon by the Lord is an example of the principle first articulated by the Lord to Joseph, extended in His words to Nephi, and then echoed by Mormon with: “the Lord doth grant . . . his word, yea, in wisdom, all that he seeth fit that they should have; therefore we see that the Lord doth counsel in wisdom according to that which is just and true” (Alma 29:8).⁵⁰

Mormon reinforces this principle again in later passages. In 3 Nephi 29:1 he prophesies: “When the Lord shall see *fit, in his wisdom*, that

50. The current edition reads *counsel in wisdom*, while the original dictation was *counsel in his wisdom*. Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants*, 2205–6.

these sayings shall come unto the Gentiles according to his word, then ye may know that the covenant . . . is already beginning to be fulfilled." Likewise, in Mormon 5:12–14 he explains: "They shall *come forth* according to the commandment of the Lord, when he shall see *fit, in his wisdom*. And behold, they shall go unto the unbelieving of the Jews; and for this intent shall they go . . ." ⁵¹ These verses verbally link to Alma 29:8, while reaffirming the same conceptual framework of measured and timely revelation, thereby strengthening the entire chain and reiterating the principle first given to Joseph, extended through Nephi, echoed in Alma 29:8, and demonstrated in the editorial constraint that the Lord placed on Mormon.

This pattern of using similar phrasing—"go/bring/come forth," "expedient," "sees fit," and "in his (my, mine own) wisdom" is neither abstract nor incidental. It deliberately echoes the language of the Lord and earlier prophets, forming a prophetic chain that binds Mormon's editorial voice to theirs. Through this verbal repetition Mormon reinforces that the Book of Mormon participates in a divinely guided sequence of revelation, each link strengthening the others and collectively affirming that the hand of the Lord is intimately involved in not only its content, but also in the timing and manner of its coming forth.

Just as this sequence of phrases binds Joseph, Nephi, and Mormon into one chain of measured revelation, another recurring phrase and its associated imagery create a parallel chain of prophecy: the promise that the record would "cry from the dust" (2 Nephi 3:20). This too originates in the Lord's promise to Joseph of Egypt about the record of his seed. Isaiah adds a link (Isaiah 29:4); Nephi another as he aligns his prophecy with both Isaiah and Joseph (2 Nephi 26:16; 33:13); and Moroni contributes a final one (Mormon 8:23). Each prophet echoes Joseph's prophecy by invoking this distinctive imagery and language, explicitly aligning his own voice with what came before. Nephi and Moroni both affirm that their words are not only prophecy, but also fulfillment. Joseph initiated the chain, Isaiah and Nephi strengthened it, and Moroni brought it to completion—each link strengthens the next until the Book of Mormon itself stands as the promised voice from the dust, a prophetic witness and warning to the nations.

Mormon did not add a new link to the "cry from the dust" chain,

51. After quoting Malachi to the Nephites, Jesus said: "These scriptures, which ye had not with you, the Father commanded that I should give unto you; for it was *wisdom in him* that they should be given unto future generations" (3 Nephi 26:2).

though he recognized this prophecy would be fulfilled in his record. With that recognition in place, his words that follow—“I know that which the Lord hath commanded me, and I glory in it” (Alma 29:9)—can now be heard in a different light: a declaration not of personal achievement but of divine commission.

Mormon glories in his divine commission

Knowing that Mormon is specifically referring to the record he is crafting casts new light on what follows: “I do not *glory* of myself, but I *glory* in that which the Lord hath commanded me; yea, and this is my *glory*, that perhaps I may be an *instrument in the hands of God to bring some soul to repentance*; and this is my *joy*” (Alma 29:9).⁵² So far in this chapter, Mormon has referred to, “the things which the Lord hath allotted unto me” (v. 3), “the work to which I have been called” (v. 6), and now, twice, “that which the Lord hath commanded me” (v. 9). As Mormon speaking, these expressions explicitly converge on his divinely appointed task of creating the Book of Mormon. He knew the destiny of his record and embraced it with sacred humility. This perspective now prepares us to recognize something even more striking in the resonance between Mormon’s voice and the words of Ammon that he quoted earlier.

Mormon’s hope that he (and his book) might become “an instrument in the hands of God to bring some soul to repentance” (Alma 29:9) echoes Ammon’s earlier rejoicing that he and his brothers had been “instruments in the hands of God to bring about this great work” (Alma 26:3; restated in 26:15). Ammon also declared: “let us glory, yea, we will glory in the Lord. . . . Behold, who can glory too much in the Lord?” (Alma 26:16). His joy sprang from both mercy received as well as souls saved—a joy only the penitent can fully know. The passage follows the same rhetorical arc found in Ammon’s testimony in Alma 26: first, instrument in the Lord’s hands to accomplish His work; second, no glory in self but only in God; third, joy so full that words fail. In Alma 26, work, glory, and joy are joined into a deliberate three-part sequence and Mormon echoes this same patterned progression to give voice to what he felt in his own calling. Ammon also testified that it is given to the penitent “to bring thousands of souls to repentance” (Alma 26:22), and described the hope that he and his brothers felt, “that perhaps we might save some few of their souls” (Alma 26:26), and how they

52. See Appendix C for a discussion of “instrument in the hands of God.”

had "suffered all manner of afflictions . . . that perhaps we might be the means of saving some soul" (Alma 26:30). Mormon's hope in his sorrow, and his words about glory and joy, perfectly recall Ammon's as he reflects on the destiny of his book.

John Tvedtnes said of Ammon's words: "[They] are so very similar to Alma's poetic utterance that it is likely that one of the two passages is dependent on the other, explainable by the fact that it was Alma who wrote both accounts in his record."⁵³ I agree with the observation, but not the attribution. Rather than Alma, it is Mormon who poetically intertwines his words with Ammon's in language, tone, and theme. Tvedtnes also suggests that "Alma's wish to speak with the voice of an angel was prompted by the success of his friends, the sons of Mosiah."⁵⁴ That insight also equally applies to Mormon, who could have felt the same desire, having just finished telling their story. Indeed, every phrase thought to reflect Alma's experience can just as well reflect Mormon's admiration for it.

Alma's influence on the Church, the Nephite nation, and on Mormon himself cannot be overstated. *The Encyclopedia of Mormonism* observes: "Few individuals have had greater influence upon a civilization than Alma₂, son of Alma₁. He was a key figure in the rise of the Nephite Church and republic, serving as the first chief judge in Zarahemla, commander-in-chief of the Nephite army, and high priest."⁵⁵ Nor should we overlook the legacy of Alma₁, who was the first to declare words later echoed in Alma 29. He stated, "after much tribulation, the Lord did hear my cries, and did answer my prayers, and has made me an instrument in his hands in bringing so many of you to a knowledge of his truth. Nevertheless, in this I do not glory, for I am unworthy to glory of myself" (Mosiah 23:10–11). The recurrence of these words in Alma 29:9 should be heard as spiritual echoes, not contradictions.

Likewise, Joseph Smith's phrasing in revelations, letters, and sermons has entered Latter-day Saint vernacular. For example, *stand in holy places; ensign to the nations; marvelous work and a wonder; let virtue garnish thy thoughts unceasingly; great and marvelous work; the worth of souls is great in the sight of God; the glory of God is*

53. Tvedtnes, "Voice of an Angel," 319.

54. Tvedtnes, "Voice of an Angel," 319.

55. Robert L. Millet, "Alma₂," *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 33, archive.org/details/encyclopediaofmo01ludl/page/32/mode/2up.

intelligence; we cannot be saved without them; line upon line, precept upon precept. These are not merely echoes of earlier scripture—they became Joseph Smith’s idiom, preserved in revelation and perpetuated through prophetic citation. In the same way, by weaving the words of Ammon and both Almas into his own, Mormon recalls their teachings, honors their legacy, and shapes their language and stories into his own latter-day witness.

Alma 29 continues: “And behold, when I see many of *my brethren* truly penitent, and coming to the Lord their God, then is my soul filled with joy . . .” (Alma 29:10). Grant Hardy cited the tense of this verse as pointing to Alma.⁵⁶ Tense itself should no longer be an issue. More than that, however, is the phrase “my brethren” which makes the verse sound like a reference to contemporaries, reinforcing the perception of Alma as speaker. That reading makes sense—but this is where the reader must stretch to hear Mormon’s voice. Would Mormon see the early missionaries in his story as his brethren, just as we look back on the early Saints in our dispensation as our brothers and sisters? Hearing these words in Mormon’s voice requires a shift in perspective, but it is not an unreasonable one. Indeed, “my brethren” will recur several more times in Alma 29, and each instance will reinforce that Mormon’s usage reflects covenant kinship, not chronological proximity.

The work of Noel Reynolds highlights studies of how Israelite covenant culture was inextricably tied to kinship—a pattern also demonstrated in the Book of Mormon.⁵⁷ In Hebrew thought, covenant relationships were not merely legal agreements but familial bonds rooted in *hesed*—steadfast, loyal love expressed through faithful action. *Hesed* defines the mutual obligations that unite covenant partners, binding them together as kin. Paul Kalluveetil observes that “a covenant implies an adoption into the household, an extension of kinship, the making of a brother.”⁵⁸ When Mormon calls earlier prophets and

56. Hardy, *Maxwell Institute Study Edition*, 317.

57. “Drawing on the writings of several of these minor prophets and Job, Glueck goes on to argue that ‘*hesed*, which formerly existed only between those who stood in a fundamentally close relationship toward one another, undergoes considerable expansion in meaning. Every man becomes every other man’s brother, *hesed* becomes the mutual or reciprocal relationship of all men toward each other and toward God.” Noel B. Reynolds, “Biblical *Hesed* and Nephite Covenant Culture,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 60, no. 4 (2021): 7.

58. Paul Kalluveetil, *Declaration and Covenant: A Comprehensive Review of Covenant Formulae from the Old Testament and the Ancient Near East* (Rome:

missionaries “my brethren,” he is invoking this same covenant kinship. His brotherhood with Alma, Amulek, and the sons of Mosiah does not depend on time or place, but on shared covenant loyalty and purpose. Through this language of *hesed*, Mormon locates himself within their redemptive fellowship, joining his ministry and his record to theirs, as part of one enduring covenant family.

This covenantal usage was common in Nephite rhetoric. Ammon applied it three times in a single verse, to three distinct groups—his actual brethren and close friends, the Nephites of Zarahemla, and the Lamanites who hadn’t been their “brethren” in any ordinary sense for generations:

Now do ye remember, **my brethren**, that we said unto **our brethren** in the land of Zarahemla, we go up to the land of Nephi, to preach unto **our brethren**, the Lamanites, and they laughed us to scorn?” (Alma 26:23)

Most significantly, both Mormon and Moroni addressed their latter-day readers as “my brethren” (see Words of Mormon 1:6, 8; Ether 12:38; Moroni 1:4; 10:1, 8). Others—including Jacob, Enos, Jarom, King Benjamin, and Gideon—used the term in referring to the Lamanites, reinforcing its covenantal rather than chronological sense (see Jacob 3:5; Enos 1:11; Jarom 1:2; Mosiah 1:5; Mosiah 22:3). Limhi also applied it to Nephites he had never met (see Mosiah 7:14–15). In this rhetorical tradition, *brethren* denotes covenant kinship rather than temporal or chronological proximity. Thus, when Mormon calls Alma and the sons of Mosiah “my brethren,” he is speaking the language of *hesed*—the loyal love of covenant fellowship—and claiming them as fellow laborers in the cause of Christ.

Mormon continues: “then do I remember what the Lord has done for me, yea, even that he hath heard my prayer; yea, then do I remember his merciful arm which he extended toward me” (Alma 29:10). These words answer a question Alma asked the Saints in Zarahemla: “Have ye sufficiently retained in remembrance his mercy and long suffering?” (Alma 5:6). In that same sermon, Alma pleaded: “repent, repent . . . he sendeth an invitation unto all men, for the arms of mercy

Biblical Institute Press, 1982), 204–5. Cited by Noel B. Reynolds, “Covenant Language in Biblical Religions and the Book of Mormon,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 61, no. 2 (2022), 157, byustudies.byu.edu/article/covenant-language-in-biblical-religions-and-the-book-of-mormon.

are extended towards them . . .” (Alma 5:32–33).⁵⁹ The phrase *he hath heard my prayer* in Alma 29:10 recalls the words of Alma₁, quoted earlier: “the Lord did hear my cries, and did answer my prayers” — words which themselves echo the prayer of Zenos, preserved on the plates of brass, that was cited by Alma₂ to the Zoramites (see Alma 33:4–5). This language was likely part of the shared covenant tradition that shaped Nephite preaching, and Mormon would have known it well. In employing it here, Mormon is reflecting with reverence on the story and legacy of both Almas, appropriating their words of remembrance as the natural idiom for his own meditation.

Mormon continues:

Yea, and I also *remember* the *captivity of my fathers*; for I surely do know that the Lord did *deliver* them *out of bondage*, and by this did establish his church; yea, the Lord God, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, did *deliver* them *out of bondage*. Yea, I have *always remembered the captivity of my fathers . . .*” (Alma 29:11–12)

Hardy also saw this “refrain” as evidence for Alma.⁶⁰ It was indeed central to Alma’s preaching, as well as to his father’s, who first exhorted “all those that had been *delivered out of bondage*, that they should *remember* that it was the Lord that did deliver them” (Mosiah 25:16). The angel reiterated the same to Alma₂ (Mosiah 27:16), who then taught it to the Saints in Zarahemla and later to his own sons (Alma 5:6; 36:2, 29). This refrain clearly became a hallmark of Nephite preaching, and Mormon presents it here as part of that heritage. When he says that he has “always remembered the captivity of my fathers” he signals both his obedience to prophetic counsel and his reverence for Alma’s example. As editor, he is not erasing Alma’s words, but reviewing them with appreciation and carrying them forward as part of his own meditation for his latter-day readers.

In Alma 29:11, Mormon said that “the Lord did deliver them out of bondage, and by this did establish his church.” As he continues, he adds: “Yea, and that same God did establish his church among them” (Alma 29:13). This also ties to Alma’s teachings in Zarahemla that his father “began to establish a church in the land which was in

59. Mormon uses “*merciful arm*,” and Alma uses “*arms of mercy*.” It seems like a common expression, as it was also used by Jacob (Jacob 6:5), Abinadi and King Mosiah (Mosiah 16:12; 29:13), and the Lord (3 Nephi 9:10).

60. Hardy, *Maxwell Institute Study Edition*, 317.

the borders of Nephi," and then, after being delivered from captivity, his father "began to establish the church of God throughout this land also" (Alma 5:3, 5). Mormon knew this story well, for his own name came from the place where that Church was first established. He recorded that deliverance in the book of Mosiah, the story of redemption at the Waters of Mormon (see Mosiah 18). For him, that story carried the same covenant weight that the latter-day Restoration does for us today — the founding moment of the Church he belonged to. He then told how that Church — now headquartered in Zarahemla — began to falter but was renewed through the labors of Alma₂ and the sons of Mosiah. By preserving these stories of founding and renewal in his record, Mormon was keeping alive the memory that those early prophets had commanded the people to always remember.

As he reflected on what he had written, saying, "I have always remembered the captivity of my fathers" (Alma 29:12), his statement becomes not only editorial but personal — a witness of covenant faithfulness rooted in reverence for the origins of the Church. The historian who wrote, "the place of Mormon, the waters of Mormon, the forest of Mormon, how beautiful are they to the eyes of them who there came to the knowledge of their Redeemer" (Mosiah 18:30) bore witness that the God who redeemed his fathers had also established his Church among them. Those memories were sacred and Mormon preserved them in a record that he knew would soon be the only thing left to bear witness of them and to remember them — a record destined to come forth in the last days to show the remnant of the House of Israel what great things the Lord has done for their fathers (see Book of Mormon, Title Page).

By grounding his testimony in the covenant story of his fathers, Mormon prepared to turn from what God once did for them to what the Lord was now doing for him. He affirmed that the same God who established the Church, "hath called me by a holy calling, to preach the word unto this people, and hath given me much success, in the which my joy is full" (Alma 29:13). The phrase *holy calling* appears seven times in the Book of Mormon — six times concentrated in six verses as Alma taught in Ammonihah about priesthood opportunity and responsibility (Alma 13:3–8), and now again here. Mormon deliberately repeats Alma's words to link his own calling to Alma's. He also uses the present-perfect tense — "hath called" and "hath given" — to emphasize that this calling remains active and ongoing in his life. He affirms this elsewhere in nearly identical terms:

And behold, I am called Mormon, being called after the land of Mormon, the land in which Alma did establish the church among the people, yea, the first church which was established among them after their transgression. Behold, I am a disciple of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. *I have been called of him to declare his word among his people, that they might have everlasting life.* (3 Nephi 5:12–13).

At first glance, the claim to have had “much success” preaching seems inconsistent with the portrait Mormon paints of his day—a time of pervasive wickedness and apostasy. Yet this apparent mismatch invites closer scrutiny. Mormon’s record emphasizes devastation and decline, but Moroni adds details that complicate the picture. Taken together, they suggest that the Nephite Church persisted longer, and with more vitality, than Mormon’s abbreviated account might lead us to conclude. In this light, the affirmation in Alma 29 of “much success” does not disqualify Mormon, instead it requires we look at his ministry in a new light.

Mormon’s ministry: A quiet triumph in a time of apostasy

Alma 29:13 poses a serious challenge to hearing Alma 29 in Mormon’s voice, because the speaker says that the Lord has given him “much success” preaching and a fullness of joy. This language seems incompatible with how Mormon describes his day. John Tvedtnes saw this verse as strong evidence for Alma’s authorship, concluding: “Mormon, unlike the author of these words, had no success preaching.”⁶¹ That conclusion reflects the bleak tone of Mormon’s own account—a time when “there were none that were righteous save it were the disciples of Jesus” (4 Nephi 1:46), when “the Holy Ghost did not come upon any,” and when Mormon was “forbidden to preach unto them” (Mormon 1:14, 17). Even after a later divine commission to preach, he lamented that “it was in vain,” for the people “did harden their hearts against the Lord their God” (Mormon 3:3).

Taken at face value, this seems to rule Mormon out. Because the author of Alma 29 experienced “much success,” either it is not Mormon or his brief summaries only reflect part of a more complex reality. Moroni’s record indicates that such a reality did exist, and that even in a time of general apostasy, Mormon could have experienced success in preaching and joy in that success.

61. Tvedtnes, “Voice of an Angel,” 320.

Moroni’s record begins with instructions on ordaining priests and teachers and on the proper administration of the sacrament (Moroni 3–5). He then describes how new members were only baptized after showing repentance and willingness to take upon themselves the name of Christ, how the Church met together often to fast and pray, and how their meetings were conducted “after the manner of the workings of the Spirit” (Moroni 6:4–9). What follows below suggests that Moroni is describing a Church he is personally familiar with, one still alive and functioning during his lifetime. Together they show Mormon’s day as more spiritually abundant than his terse narrative allows.

Next, Moroni includes a sermon his father delivered “as he taught them in the synagogue” (Moroni 7). In it, Mormon addresses those, “that are of the church, that are the peaceable followers of Christ” (Moroni 7:3). He asks them: “have miracles ceased?” and answers: “Nay. Neither have angels ceased to minister unto the children of men” (Moroni 7:29). A few verses later he broadens the question: “. . . has the day of miracles ceased? Or have angels ceased to appear unto the children of men? Or has he withheld the power of the Holy Ghost from them?” Again, his response is emphatic: “Nay; For it is by faith that miracles are wrought; and it is by faith that angels appear and minister unto men . . . if these things have ceased, then has faith ceased also.” He concludes by affirming their faith: “I judge better things of you, for I judge that ye have faith in Christ because of your meekness; for if ye have not faith in him then ye are not fit to be numbered among the people of his church” (Moroni 7:35–39). These words point to a faithful remnant—peaceable followers of Christ, still experiencing miracles, the power of the Holy Ghost, and the ministering of angels.

Second, Moroni includes a letter from Mormon in which he rejoices at his son’s call to the ministry (Moroni 8). It appears that Mormon did not extend that priesthood call himself, which means there were others with legitimate priesthood authority and the keys of the Church were still active. It was a Church under strain, as seen in the baptizing of little children and Moroni’s description of forced excommunications (Moroni 6:7). Yet Mormon’s counsel presumes real opportunity, as he urges his son to “teach repentance and baptism unto those who are accountable” and to exhort parents to “repent and be baptized” (Moroni 8:10). Such instructions imply that people were receptive, able to repent and be baptized, and eligible for salvation. Mormon also laments that “in this part of the land they are also seeking to put down all power and authority which cometh from God; and they are denying

the Holy Ghost” (Moroni 8:28). His words imply that such power and authority still remained, that the Holy Ghost was still striving with them and could be rejected, and that conditions varied by region.

Third, in another letter to Moroni, Mormon expresses despair at the wickedness of his people (Moroni 9). Yet he reports that he is still “laboring with them continually” and must “speak the word of God with sharpness” to get their attention (Moroni 9:4). He exhorts his son: “notwithstanding their hardness, let us labor diligently; for if we should cease to labor, we should be brought under condemnation,” and he voices frustration that he is “but a man” and cannot speak and act more forcefully (Moroni 9:6, 18). These statements confirm that both Mormon and Moroni were laboring diligently, striving to magnify their holy callings even in desperate times.

Taken together, these additional details suggest that Mormon’s day was not as uniformly apostate as his own narrative may imply.⁶² A functioning Church was still administering saving ordinances. The gospel was still being preached diligently by authorized priesthood holders. People were still repenting, being baptized, enjoying the companionship of the Holy Ghost, and experiencing miracles and the ministering of angels. Mormon’s despairing claims — “there were none that were righteous,” that the “Holy Ghost did not come upon any,” and that his preaching “was in vain” — appear to describe local or temporary conditions, not the entire Nephite world across his whole ministry.

This fuller picture invites us to see Mormon’s ministry not as a failure, but as a quiet triumph. He could not save his nation from destruction as Alma once had, but he did help save individuals. He may not have converted thousands like the sons of Mosiah, but he saved enough to feel joy and a sense of success in his calling. In a time of near-total collapse, even a few repentant hearts were a sacred victory. Success is always relative: a missionary in Denmark today may see only a handful of converts, while one in the 1840s baptized hundreds, yet both can rejoice in their labors. As the Lord reminds us, “Remember the worth of souls is great in the sight of God; . . . and if it so be that you should labor all your days in crying repentance unto this people, and bring,

62. Joseph M. Spencer, “On the Dating of Moroni 8–9,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 22 (2016): 145–46, interpreterfoundation.org/journal/on-the-dating-of-moroni-8-9. He states that Mormon “shaped the narrative he produced regarding the time in which he lived” for literary concerns. Further, “it was for transparently theological reasons that Mormon portrayed his people as tragically beyond the pale—as if he never met a righteous soul or one with Christian commitment during the course of his days.”

save it be one soul unto me, how great shall be your joy" (Doctrine and Covenants 18:10, 15).

What at first seemed incompatible with Mormon—the claim of “much success” (Alma 29:13)—now reads as a reminder that even amid collapse, real joy may be found in saving souls. Perhaps knowing his readers understood that he had experienced missionary success—as reflected in Alma 29—gave Mormon the freedom to express with full honesty the sorrow he felt as he recorded his people’s destruction. That knowledge allowed him to paint a bleak picture, without fearing that his audience would misunderstand. His despair was real, but so was his joy. In sharing both, Mormon bears witness not only to the fall of his nation, but also to the redemptive hope still available to individuals within it.

Hearing Mormon’s joy in Alma 29

The understanding that Mormon had success in preaching and felt joy in that success changes how we hear the remainder of Alma 29. If we assume he had no success, it becomes impossible to hear these words in his voice. Once that assumption is set aside, it feels natural to hear Mormon rejoicing as he reflects on the success of the sons of Mosiah:

But I do not joy in my own success alone, but my joy is more full because of the success of my brethren, who *have been up* to the land of Nephi. Behold, they *have labored* exceedingly, and *have brought* forth much fruit; and how great shall be their reward! (Alma 29:14-15)

The present-perfect tense—*have been*, *have labored*, *have brought*—makes it sound like Alma is talking about his contemporaries. Still, this tense is equally fitting from Mormon’s editorial perspective. The missionary work of the sons of Mosiah was complete, but the fruits of their labors endured in memory, in testimony, in Mormon’s book, and in the joy Mormon felt as he recorded their story.

That joy is not only retrospective but also anticipatory. Mormon sees their “reward” as still ahead—eternal, not merely historical. Missionary joy has been a constant theme throughout the narrative units Mormon is reviewing, and so far in this review he has expressed joy that his book might “bring some soul to repentance” (Alma 29:9); joy at seeing (in his mind’s eye) many of his “brethren truly penitent, and coming to the Lord” (Alma 29:10), and joy in his own missionary

success (Alma 29:13). He now expresses joy in the “much fruit” his brethren’s ministry produced and in the future eternal reward they would yet receive.⁶³ Their story embodies the law of the harvest—a principle Mormon has carefully threaded throughout his narrative.⁶⁴ Mormon not only rejoices in the fruit of their ministry, but also, by subtle allusion, anticipates the harvest his record will one day bring.

Both Tvedtnes and Hardy cite Alma 29:14 as supporting an Alma reading, and Tvedtnes adds: “The words are hardly fitting for Mormon, in whose days the ‘land of Nephi’ probably had only historical meaning.”⁶⁵ Still, Mormon uses the phrase “land of Nephi” fifty-four times in his abridgement—eighteen of them in his third narrative unit about the sons of Mosiah. He uses the exact phrase, “up to the land of Nephi,” eight times, three of them in the same unit.⁶⁶ Far from being foreign to Mormon, he consistently associates the phrase with them. When he introduces their journey, he says they asked to “go up to the land of Nephi” and pleaded “that they might go up to the land of Nephi” (Mosiah 28:1, 5). At the beginning of Alma XII (Alma 17), Mormon prefaces his account of their story as, “An account of the sons of Mosiah, which . . . went up to the land of Nephi.” As he narrates their departure, he adds: “they departed into the wilderness . . . to go up to the land of Nephi” (Alma 17:8). Because Mormon repeatedly uses this phrase in connection with their mission, it seems natural that he would employ it again here. Even though this verse does sound like Alma, the words fit Mormon just as well.

With that objection set aside, we can now hear the climax of the sequence described earlier. Both Ammon (Alma 26) and Mormon (Alma 29) had traced the same path—first acknowledging themselves as instruments in God’s hands, then refusing to glory in self but

63. Joy or rejoicing is found thirty-nine times in the first fifteen chapters of Alma. Six times by Alma (7:4–5, 17, 26), nine times by Alma and the sons of Mosiah (17:2; 27:17–19), four times by Ammon (19:6, 13, 14, 30), four times by Aaron (21:21; 22:8, 15), once by the sons of Mosiah (“rejoice exceedingly,” 25:17), fourteen times by Ammon (26:1, 4, 11, 13, 16, 30, 35–37), “incomprehensible joy” (28:8), and seven times in this review (28:14; 29:9, 10, 13–16).

64. Ammon also explicitly used this imagery in Alma 26:5–7.

65. Tvedtnes, “Voice of an Angel,” 320; Hardy, *Maxwell Institute Study Edition*, 317.

66. Land of Nephi: Words of Mormon 1:13; Mosiah 7:6–7; 19:15, 19, 22, 24; 20:7; 21:21, 26; 23:35–38; 28:1, 5; 29:3; Introduction to Alma 17; Alma 17:8; 18:9; 20:1–2; 22:1, 28, 32, 34; 24:20; 25:13; 27:1, 14, 20; 28:8; 29:14; 46:29; 47:1, 20; 49:10, 25; 50:8, 11; Helaman 4:12; 5:20. *Up to the land of Nephi*: Mosiah 20:7; 28:1, 5; 29:3; Introduction to Alma 17; Alma 17:8; 24:20; 29:14; 47:1.

giving all the glory to God. The final step is joy so overwhelming that language fails. Mormon reaches that point when he says: "Now, when I think of the success of these my brethren my soul is carried away, even to the separation of it from the body, as it were, so great is my joy" (Alma 29:16).

This verbal overflow recalls Ammon's own climax: "Behold, who can glory too much in the Lord? . . . Behold, I say unto you, I cannot say the smallest part which I feel" (Alma 26:16). Both Mormon and Ammon confess that their joy has outstripped their words. Mormon's phrasing also recalls the two occasions when Ammon's joy physically overcame him (see Alma 19:11; 27:17). His use of "my brethren" in Alma 29:16 and, again, in verse 17 reflects his sense of covenant kinship rather than contemporaneity. As Mormon expresses his joy, he casts it from the same mold, consciously reflecting the covenant joy that Ammon voiced generations earlier, thus binding their testimonies together.

Mormon then concludes his meditation with a final petition:

And now may God grant unto these, my brethren, that they may sit down in the kingdom of God; yea, and also all those who are the fruit of their labors that they may go no more out, but that they may praise him forever. And may God grant that it may be done according to my words, even as I have spoken. Amen. (Alma 29:17)⁶⁷

This benediction not only recalls the blessing that closed Mormon's third narrative unit—"And now may the Lord, the Redeemer of all men, bless their souls forever" (Alma 28:8)—but also gathers into a single prayer the harvest imagery that runs throughout this unit. His phrase "the fruit of their labors" ties directly back to his earlier conclusion: "Thus we see the great call of diligence of men to labor in the vineyards of the Lord" (Alma 28:14), followed by his contrast between sorrow for the dead with rejoicing in the light of Christ. There Mormon distilled the law of the harvest as the principle of mortality itself: every soul reaps according to desire—life or death, joy or remorse. In Alma 29:17 he applies that principle to the sons of Mosiah and their converts, rejoicing that their labors produced fruit with eternal reward. At the same time, the phrase points forward: Mormon's book, too, was sown with the hope of a last-days harvest.

By this point, it should feel natural to hear this final prayer as Mormon's—a prayer for his brethren in the gospel, for the

67. See Appendix C for a discussion of "go no more out."

missionaries whose stories he had just preserved, and for the many souls they brought to Christ. This petition completes a unified literary and spiritual arc, flowing without interruption from its invocation in Alma 28:8 through the “thus we see” reflections in 28:14, to the concluding “Amen” in 29:17. It testifies not only of missionary success and enduring brotherhood, but also of eternal reward and joy that reaches beyond the grave. Read in this light, Alma 29 is both personal and purposeful: a meditation rooted in covenant kinship, framed by prophetic echoes, marked by the law of the harvest, and suffused with the quiet triumph of saving souls even amid national collapse. In this way, Mormon’s record fulfills his yearning. Through it he became an “instrument in the hands of God,” his book the “trump of God” sounding from the dust—crying repentance to every nation and gathering fruit for the final harvest.

Conclusion: History into Prophecy, Memory into Warning, Record into Plea

The portrait that emerges in this reading of Alma 29 is of Mormon standing at the precipice of his people’s destruction, reflecting on the stories of his ancestors who did what he could not—turn back the tide of wickedness and preserve their people from destruction. His reflections align with his calling, his sorrow, and his prophetic purpose. He longs to cry repentance with the voice of thunder—a righteous desire to save souls and relieve sorrow through repentance—the same longing that shapes his final testimony. These are not just literary parallels; they disclose the consistent voice of a prophet who spoke in the idiom of his covenant kin, echoed earlier prophecies, and bore witness that even in collapse he found joy ministering to the one.

When Mormon was in his early fifties, after preaching in vain for ten years, the Lord decreed: “because this people repented not . . . behold, they shall be cut off from the face of the earth” (Mormon 3:15). After this, Mormon laid down his sword and became a witness, recording his people’s downfall. Two decades later, after engraving that decree on plates he would soon pass to Moroni, he turned from past narration to present address to plainly state his purpose for writing:

For this cause I write unto you, that ye may know that ye must all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ . . . to be judged of your works, whether they be good or evil; And also that ye may believe the gospel of Jesus Christ, which ye shall

have among you; . . . And I would that I could persuade all ye ends of the earth to repent and prepare to stand before the judgment-seat of Christ. (Mormon 3:20–22)

This is the same longing that is voiced in Alma 29: "O that I were an angel, and could . . . speak with the trump of God, . . . and cry repentance unto every people!" (Alma 29:1). His desire was fulfilled through the book he produced—the instrument God now uses to teach His word to all nations and gather Israel for the final harvest. Mormon's voice joins a prophetic chain stretching from Joseph of Egypt through Lehi and Nephi to Moroni. Their collective voice crying from the dust invites: Repent, and come unto Christ.

Recognizing Alma 29 as Mormon's words does not diminish Alma but only deepens our understanding of Mormon—the prophet who gave us the keystone of our religion. These verses are more than a psalm of longing, they are the deliberate meditation in which Mormon situates his record within a prophetic chain, demonstrates covenant kinship with Alma and the sons of Mosiah, and testifies of the "holy calling" that, even in an age of decline, brought him joy saving souls. Alma 29 thus reflects a quiet triumph in a time of apostasy—a chapter that reveals Mormon's voice as personal, purposeful, and profoundly covenantal. In Alma 29, history becomes prophecy, memory becomes warning, and record becomes plea—Mormon's voice rising from the dust to call all nations to repentance.

Appendix A: Mormon's Editorial Comments and Book and Chapter Headings

Extended editorial comments

Editorial comments are used by Mormon to explain editorial decisions, supply contextual information, and actively shape how the reader understands the narrative he has selected and arranged. These comments do not merely clarify sources or chronology; they frequently pause the narrative to assess outcomes, highlight recurring patterns, and reflect on the significance of the material as a whole. This section lists extended editorial comments—those longer than five verses—while the following section catalogs shorter interventions of the same kind.

Words of Mormon 1:1–11 “And now I, Mormon, being about to deliver up the record . . .”

eleven verses about the small plates; comments on abridgment from large plates of Nephi.

Alma 11:3–19 “And the judge received for his wages according to his time . . .”

seventeen verses describing the Nephite monetary system, according to their reckoning.

Alma 22:27–34 “. . . the king sent a proclamation throughout all the land . . .”

eight verses describing Lamanite and Nephite geography.

Alma 23:6–15 “And as sure as the Lord liveth, so sure as many as believed . . .”

ten verses describing the faith of the Lamanite converts and listing them.

Alma 24:26–30 “. . . we have no reason to doubt but what they were saved . . . thus we can plainly discern . . .”

five verses about righteous Lamanite martyrs and wicked apostate Nephites.

Alma 28:8–29:17 “O that I were an angel and could have the wish of mine heart . . .”

twenty-four verses reviewing and interacting with his material. *The reason for this paper.*

Alma 48:11–21 “And Moroni was a strong and a mighty man . . .”

eleven verses about Moroni and how Nephites were taught to defend themselves.

Alma 50:19–23 “And thus we see how merciful and just are all the dealings of the Lord . . .”

five verses about how the Lord blesses the righteous.

Helaman 12:1–26 “And thus we can behold how false, and also the unsteadiness . . .”

twenty-six verses reviewing and interacting with his material.

3 Nephi 5:8–26 “And there had many things transpired which, in the eyes of some, would be . . .”

eighteen verses about himself and his record.

3 Nephi 10:14–19 “And now, whoso readeth, let him understand . . .”

five verses reviewing prophecies fulfilled at Christ’s death and previewing His visit.

3 Nephi 26:6–13 "And now there cannot be written in this book even a hundredth part . . ."

seven verses about an exchange with Jesus regarding what to include in his record.

3 Nephi 28:17–29:9 "And now, whether they were mortal or immortal . . ."

thirty-four verses about the Three Nephites and his record.

Mormon 3:17–22 "Therefore I write unto you, Gentiles, and also unto you, house of Israel . . ."

six verses speaking to the Gentiles and House of Israel about his record and its purpose.

Mormon 5:8–24 "And now behold, I, Mormon do not desire to harrow up . . ."

seventeen verses about his record and prophesying about the Lamanites and Gentiles.

Mormon 7:1–10 "And now, behold, I would speak somewhat unto the remnant . . ."

ten verses speaking to the House of Israel and exhorting them to come unto Christ.

Editorial comments that explain editorial decisions and add information

Mosiah 1:8 "Many more things . . . are not written in this book."

Mosiah 8:1 "He spake many things unto them and only a few of them have I written in this book . . ."

Mosiah 12:8 "And many things did Abinadi prophesy against this people."

Mosiah 18:8 "Behold, here are the waters of Mormon (for thus were they called) . . ."

Mosiah 21:35 "An account of their baptism shall be given hereafter."

Mosiah 27:11 "As I said unto you, as they were going about rebelling against God . . ."

Mosiah 28:9 "I shall give an account of their proceedings hereafter."

Mosiah 28:19 "This account shall be written hereafter . . . it is expedient that all people should know . . ."

Mosiah 28:20 "And now, as I said unto you, that after king Mosiah had done these things . . ."

Alma 3:13 "Now we will return again to the Amlicites, for they also had a mark . . ."

Alma 5:1–2 “These are the words which he spake . . . according to his own record . . .”

Alma 6:3 “I mean those which were lifted up in the pride of their hearts . . .”

Alma 6:8 “Alma went and began to declare the word of God . . . And thus it is written. Amen.”

Alma 8:1 “. . . taught the people of Gideon many things which cannot be written . . .”

Alma 8:30–32 “And Alma went forth, and also Amulek, among the people . . .”

Alma 9:34 “And now the words of Amulek are not all written, nevertheless a part of his words are written . . .”

Alma 10:1 “Now these are the words which Amulek preached unto the people . . .”

Alma 11:46 “And thus ended the words of Amulek, or this is all that I have written.”

Alma 13:31 “And Alma spake many more words unto the people, which are not written in this book.”

Alma 15:18 “Now as I said, Alma having seen all these things, therefore he took Amulek . . .”

Alma 17:5 “Now these are the circumstances which attended them in their journeyings . . .”

Alma 18:23 “Yea, I will believe all thy words. And thus he was caught with guile.”

Alma 22:1 “We will return to the account of Aaron and his brethren . . .”

Alma 22:30 “The land which had been peopled and been destroyed, of whose bones we have spoken . . .”

Alma 22:35 “And now I, after having said this, return again to the account of Ammon . . .”

Alma 31:7 “These are the names of those who went with him among the Zoramites . . .”

Alma 32:4 “There came a great multitude unto him, who were those of whom we have been speaking . . .”

Alma 35:13 “An account shall be given of their wars hereafter.”

Alma 35:16 “We have an account of his commandments . . . according to his own record.”

Alma 43:2–3 "Now we shall say no more concerning their preaching . . .
And now I return to an account . . ."

Alma 46:41–47:1 ". . . as we must needs suppose. Now we will return in
our record . . ."

Alma 49:3 "I say unto you, yea, that it was in part rebuilt . . ."

Alma 51:10 "We shall see that his promise which he made was rash;
nevertheless . . ."

Alma 56:52–53 "Thus were the Lamanites pursuing them with great
vigor when Helaman . . ."

Helaman 2:12–14 "More . . . shall be spoken hereafter . . . ye shall see . . .
I do not mean . . ."

Helaman 3:17 "And now I return again to mine account; therefore what I
have spoken . . ."

Helaman 8:3 "Many things did Nephi speak which cannot be written . . ."

Helaman 14:1 "Samuel, the Lamanite, did prophesy a great many more
things which cannot be written."

3 Nephi 7:1 "Now behold, I will show unto you that they did not establish
a king . . ."

Editorial comments with evaluative commentary

Mosiah 1:16–17 ". . . ball or director, which led . . . every one according to
the heed and diligence . . ."

Mosiah 18:30 ". . . of Mormon, how beautiful are they . . . they shall sing
to his praise forever."

Mosiah 21:4 "Yea, all this was done that the word of the Lord might be
fulfilled."

Mosiah 23:21–24 "Nevertheless the Lord seeth fit to chasten . . . I will
show . . . brought into bondage . . . he did deliver them . . ."

Mosiah 27:36–37 "Thus they were instruments in the hands of God . . .
how blessed are they!"

Alma 3:14–19 "Thus the word of God is fulfilled . . . I would that ye should
see . . ."

Alma 3:25–27 "For every man receiveth wages of him . . . let it be
according to the truth."

Alma 6:5 "Now I would that ye should understand that the word of God
was liberal unto all . . ."

Alma 8:30–32 "Now, this was done that the Lord might show forth his
power in them."

Alma 16:15–17 “. . . might not be hardened . . . not be unbelieving, and go on to destruction . . .”

Alma 19:23 “Now we see that Ammon could not be slain . . . Mosiah trusted him unto the Lord.”

Alma 19:36 “We see that his arm is extended to all people who will repent and believe on his name.”

Alma 24:19 “And thus we see that, when these Lamanites were brought to believe and to know . . .”

Alma 24:22 “We know that they are blessed, for they have gone to dwell with their God.”

Alma 25:9–12 “They are hunted at this day by the Lamanites . . . now this is what he meant . . .”

Alma 30:60 “And thus we see the end of him . . . and thus we see that the devil . . .”

Alma 45:18–19 “. . . as to his death or burial we know not of. Behold, this we know . . .”

Alma 46:8–10 “Thus we see how quick the children of men do forget . . . we also see . . .”

Alma 53:10–12 “I have somewhat to say concerning the people of Ammon . . . for this cause they were brought down . . .”

Alma 63:8 “We suppose that they were drowned . . . whither she did go we know not.”

Helaman 3:27–30 “Thus we may see that the Lord is merciful . . . we see that whosoever will may lay hold . . .”

Helaman 4:11–13 “Now this great loss . . . would not have happened . . . they were left in their own strength . . .”

Helaman 6:34–36, 40 “Thus we see . . . And thus we see . . . And thus we see . . . And thus we see . . .”

3 Nephi 7:24 “Now I would have you to remember also, that there were none . . .”

3 Nephi 30:1–2 “Hearken, O ye Gentiles, and hear the words of Jesus Christ . . .”

4 Nephi 1:23 “And now I, Mormon, would that ye should know . . .”

4 Nephi 1:49 “And thus is the end of the record of Ammaron.”

Mormon 2:19 “. . . nevertheless, I know that I shall be lifted up at the last day.”

Mormon 3:13 "And thrice have I delivered them out of the hands of their enemies . . ."

Mormon 4:5 "But, behold, the judgments of God . . . and it is by the wicked that the wicked are punished . . ."

Mormon 4:11 "And it is impossible for the tongue to describe, or for man to write . . ."

Book and chapter headings

All headings include reference to both the original Book of Mormon book names and chapters, as well as to the book names and chapters used since 1879. The text, capitalization, and punctuation of all headings are from the original edition of the Book of Mormon.

Nephi I; Nephi 1 (Book heading.) "The First Book of Nephi. His Reign and Ministry."

Nephi I; 2 Nephi 1 (Book heading.) "An account of the death of Lehi. Nephi's brethren rebelleth against him. The Lord warns Nephi to depart into the wilderness, &c. His journeyings in the wilderness, &c."

Jacob I; Jacob 1 (Book heading.) "The Book of Jacob. The brother of Nephi. The words of his preaching unto his brethren. He confoundeth a man who seeketh to overthrow the doctrine of Christ. A few words concerning the history of the people of Nephi."

Enos (No book heading.)

Jarom (No book heading.)

Omni (No book heading.)

Words of Mormon (No book heading.)

Mosiah (No book heading; possibly lost with 116 pages.)

Mosiah VI; Mosiah 9 "The Record of Zeniff. An account of his people, from the time they left the land of Zarahemla, until the time that they were delivered out of the hands of the Lamanites."

Mosiah XI; Mosiah 23 "An account of Alma and the people of the Lord, which was driven into the wilderness by the people of king Noah."

Alma I; Alma 1 (Book heading.) "The Book of Alma, the Son of Alma. The account of Alma, who was the son of Alma the First, and Chief Judge over the people of Nephi, and also the High Priest over the Church. An account of the reign of the Judges, and the wars and contentions among the people. And also an account of a war between the Nephites and the Lamanites, according to the record of Alma the First, and Chief Judge."

Alma III; Alma 5 “The words which Alma, the High Priest, according to the holy order of God, delivered to the people in their cities and villages throughout the land.”

Alma V; Alma 7 “The words of Alma which he delivered to the people in Gideon, according to his own record.”

Alma VII; Alma 9 “The words of Alma, and also the words of Amulek, which was declared unto the people which was in the land of Ammonihah. And also they are cast into prison, and delivered by the miraculous power of God which was in them, according to the record of Alma.”

Alma XII; Alma 17 “An account of the sons of Mosiah, which rejected their rights to the kingdom, for the word of God, and went up to the land of Nephi, to preach to the Lamanites. — Their sufferings and deliverance, according to the record of Alma.”

Alma XIII; Alma 21 “An account of the preaching of Aaron and Muloki, and their brethren, to the Lamanites.”

Alma XVII; Alma 36 “The Commandments of Alma, to his son Helaman.”

Alma XVIII; Alma 38 “The Commandments of Alma, to his son Shiblon.”

Alma XIX; Alma 39 “The Commandments of Alma, to his son Corianton.”

Alma XXI; Alma 45 “The account of the people of Nephi, and their wars and dissensions, in the days of Helaman, according to the record of Helaman, which he kept in his days.”

Helaman I; Helaman 1 (Book heading.) “An account of the Nephites. Their wars and contentions, and their dissensions. And also the prophecies of many Holy Prophets, before the coming of Christ, according to the records of Helaman, which was the son of Helaman, and also according to the records of his sons, even down to the coming of Christ. And also many of the Lamanites are converted. An account of their conversion. An account of the righteousness of the Lamanites, and the wickedness and abominations of the Nephites, according to the record of Helaman and his sons, even down to the coming of Christ, which is called the Book of Helaman, &c.”

Helaman III; Helaman 7 “The Prophecy of Nephi, the son of Helaman. God threatens the people of Nephi, that he will visit them in his anger, to their utter destruction, except they repent of their wickedness. God smiteth the people of Nephi with pestilence; they repent and turn unto him. Samuel, a Lamanite, prophesies unto the Nephites.”

Helaman V; Helaman 13 “The prophecy of Samuel, the Lamanite, to the Nephites.”

Nephi I; 3 Nephi 1 (Book heading.) “The Book of Nephi, the son of Nephi, which was the son of Helaman. And Helaman was the son of Helaman, which was the son of Alma, which was the son of Alma, being a descendant of Nephi, which was the son of Lehi, which came out of Jerusalem in the first year of the reign of Zedekiah, the king of Judah.”

Nephi V; 3 Nephi 11 “Jesus Christ sheweth himself unto the people of Nephi, as the multitude were gathered together in the land Bountiful, and did minister unto them; and on this wise did he shew himself unto them.”

Nephi I; 4 Nephi 1 (Book heading.) “The Book of Nephi, which is the son of Nephi, one of the disciples of Jesus Christ. An account of the people of Nephi, according to his Record.”

Mormon (No book heading.)

Moroni (No book heading.)

Moroni IX; Moroni 9 “The second epistle of Mormon to his son Moroni.” (This heading would have been added by Moroni, not by Mormon.)

Appendix B: Proposed Structure for Mormon’s Original Chapters (I–XX) of Alma (1–44)

Mormon divided the material he took from Alma’s original record into six well-defined narrative units.⁶⁸ This material accounts for twenty chapters of Alma in the original edition of the Book of Mormon. These twenty chapters were reorganized into forty-four chapters by Orson Pratt in 1879—the chapter organization used in current editions of the Book of Mormon. Mormon organized his material with clear literary intent, though the details of that intent lie beyond the scope of this paper.

Narrative Unit 1: Alma’s conflict with Nehor and Amlici

- Mormon’s chapter I

68. My structure differs slightly from those proposed by others in that it follows Mormon’s original chapter divisions more closely. See Joseph M. Spencer, “The Structure of the Book of Alma,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 26, no. 1 (2017); see also Grant Hardy, “Nurturing Faith: Literary Patterning in the Book of Alma,” in *Give Ear to My Words: Text and Context of Alma 36–42*, ed. Kerry M. Hull, Nicholas J. Frederick, and Hank R. Smith (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, BYU, 2019).

- Modern chapters 1–3
- Concludes with “And thus ended the fifth year . . .” (Alma 3:27)

Narrative Unit 2: Alma’s preaching to the Nephites

- Mormon’s chapters II–XI
- Modern chapters 4–16
- Concludes with “Thus ended the fourteenth year . . .” (Alma 16:21)

Narrative Unit 3: Sons of Mosiah preaching to the Lamanites

- Mormon’s chapters XII–XV
- Modern chapters 17–29
- Concludes with “And thus ended the fifteenth year . . .” (Alma 28:7)

The narrative verb tense then shifts from past to present, as Mormon concludes the third narrative unit (Alma 28:8). He then concludes his larger fifteen-chapter block of material (Alma 28:9) and starts to reflect on the first three units with: “And from the first year to the fifteenth has brought to pass . . .” (Alma 28:10). His reflective review continues through the end of Alma XV; Alma 29.

Narrative Unit 4: Alma’s Encounters with Korihor and the Zoramites

- Mormon’s chapter XVI
- Modern chapters 30–35
- Concludes with “And thus ended the seventeenth year . . .” (Alma 35:12)

Narrative Unit 5: Alma’s Commandments to His Sons

- Mormon’s chapters XVII–XIX
- Modern chapters 36–42
- Concludes with “And now I return to an account of the wars . . .” (Alma 43:3)

Narrative Unit 6: Captain Moroni’s Battle with Zerahemnah

- Mormon’s chapter XX
- Modern chapters 43–44

- Concludes with “And thus ended the eighteenth year . . . and thus ended the record of Alma . . .” (Alma 44:24)

Appendix C: Alma-Linked Language in Alma 28–29

The following phrases, found between Alma 28:8 and 29:17, are linked to Alma but were not discussed in the body of this paper. Because Mormon is abridging material originally written by Alma, and incorporating extended quotations from him, it is expected that phrases used by Alma would appear. The key question is whether such use requires Alma as the identified author of Alma 29, or whether it may reflect Mormon’s editorial voice.

State of endless wo (Alma 28:11) is very similar to the phrase “state of endless misery and woe” used by Alma in Ammonihah (Alma 9:11). King Benjamin employed a similar phrase “state of misery and endless torment” (Mosiah 2:39). Nephi, the son of Helaman, used two similar phrases, “gulf of misery and endless woe” and “everlasting misery and endless woe” (Helaman 5:12; 7:16). Mormon used “state of endless misery” in other extended editorial comments (Helaman 12:26).

State of never-ending happiness (Alma 28:12) is only found here and in King Benjamin’s address (Mosiah 2:41). “State of happiness” is used several times by Alma (Alma 40:12, 15, 21), and once by Mormon (Mormon 7:7). Both Mormon and Alma likely drew on the language of King Benjamin’s address.

O that I were an angel (Alma 29:1) is perhaps the most iconic phrase associated with Alma. This phrase resonates closely with his personal conversion experience as recorded by Mormon (Mosiah 27:10–12) and by Alma (Alma 36:6–7). While Alma’s influence here is evident, if Mormon was reflecting on Alma’s legacy or drawing from Alma’s personal writings, this language could easily be appropriated without requiring Alma as the speaker.

Trump of God (Alma 29:1) is unique within the Book of Mormon and appears only three other times across all of scripture: once by Paul (1 Thessalonians 4:16) and twice in Latter-day revelation (Doctrine and Covenants 43:18; 88:92), all in eschatological contexts. If read figuratively — as the record of Joseph sounding in the last days — its use in Alma 29 aligns well with Mormon’s prophetic role and voice.

Voice to shake the earth (Alma 29:1) is only found here. But the idea of the earth shaking, as well as the phrase **voice of thunder** (Alma 29:2), are first used by Nephi₁ as he chastised his brothers (1 Nephi 17:45), then by either King Mosiah or Alma₁ recording the details of the

angels' visits to their sons (on the plates of Nephi), which was then used by Mormon in his abridged version (Mosiah 27:11, 15, 18). Alma also used them to tell his angelic conversion story to his sons (Alma 36:7; 38:7).

Plan of redemption (Alma 29:2) is used seven times by Alma in Ammonihah (Alma 12:25, 26, 30, 32) and, later, another five times (Alma 34:16, 31; 39:18; 42:11, 13). It is possible he originated the expression. It is also found three times in the story of the sons of Mosiah (Alma 17:16; 18:39; 22:13). It likely became part of the Church's common language — as phrases like *plan of salvation* or *plan of happiness* are today. Mormon's use is consistent with the diffusion of Alma's theological vocabulary through the Nephite Church and record.

Harrow up (Alma 29:4) was first used by Jacob preaching to the Nephites (2 Nephi 9:47). Mormon used it twice in regard to Zeezrom (Alma 14:6; 15:3). Ammon used it as he rejoiced (Alma 26:6). Alma used it three times while relating his angelic experience to Helaman (Alma 36:12). Alma used it again when counseling Corianton (Alma 39:7). And finally, Mormon used it when speaking to his readers in his present editorial time (Mormon 5:8), the same type of present editorial time used in Alma 29.

Counsel in wisdom (Alma 29:8) is a special use. Even though the current edition of the Book of Mormon says, "counsel in wisdom," Royal Skousen has shown the original was "counsel in his wisdom."⁶⁹ The words "counsel" and "wisdom" are also combined loosely by Nephi_i (2 Nephi 28:30), by Jacob (Jacob 4:10), and by Alma (Alma 37:12). Its use here — in the context of Mormon's record going forth to all nations — was certainly influenced by Alma's use, especially because Alma uses it in the context of the "wise purpose" for the plates of Nephi. Alma's words link directly to what Nephi_i wrote on those plates — plates Mormon had recently become aware of. He was certainly very familiar with Alma's letter to Helaman before writing this, and surely recognized the connection between Alma's words there and what Nephi wrote on the small plates. He alluded to them both in Words of Mormon 1:7.

Instrument in the hands of God (Alma 29:9) appears often. It is used by Mormon to describe Gideon (Alma 1:8) and the sons of Mosiah (Alma 17:9); by Alma (Alma 2:30); by the Lord (Alma 17:11); and by Ammon (Alma 26:3, 15). Lehi also uses the phrase (2 Nephi 1:24; 3:24) as did Mormon earlier (Mosiah 27:36) and again later (Alma 35:14). The phrase had clearly entered Nephite religious language.

69. Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants*, 2205–6.

Go no more out (Alma 29:17) was used by Alma (Alma 7:25; 34:36). It was also used by Mormon in other editorial comments (Helaman 3:30; 3 Nephi 28:40). Its appearance here reinforces the eschatological tone of Alma 29:17, in full harmony with Mormon’s closing editorial voice.

These examples show that while Alma’s voice and vocabulary echo throughout the text, their presence does not require his authorship—especially when Mormon—as abridger and prophet—adopted, echoed, and reframed the language of those he revered.



C. Robb Smith *is an independent researcher whose work examines the literary structure, editorial practice, and rhetorical strategies of the Book of Mormon. His research focuses on narrative framing, typology, and how prophetic writers use editorial design and structure to present historical narrative and guide interpretation across the text.*

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