
Mormon 1 — A Sober Child, Quick to Observe — Mormon's Boyhood, and the Withdrawal of the Spirit from a People

Mormon 1: c. AD 321–326. The narrator who has stood behind the whole record finally steps forward to tell his own story. Mormon — named for his father and for the land of his ancestors' baptism — is a boy of ten when Ammaron, the last record-keeper, marks him as a sober child quick to observe and charges him to recover the buried plates at twenty-four. He grows up inside a dying civilization: war resumes when he is eleven, and by his fifteenth year the wickedness is so total that the Lord withdraws the three Nephite disciples, the gifts of the Spirit cease, and the boy who has tasted the goodness of Jesus is forbidden to preach to a people who have willfully rebelled. The chapter is the overture to the whole book of Mormon — the introduction of its author as a child of light raised in the dark, and the sober record of what it looks like when a people drives the Spirit of God entirely out of its land.

Mormon 1 is the moment the narrator becomes a character. For the entire Book of Mormon we have been reading Mormon's abridgment — his editorial *and thus we see*, his selection, his shaping hand — but always behind the curtain. Now, at the book that bears his name, he steps out and tells us who he is. And the self-portrait is heartbreaking in its setting: a boy of unusual soberness and spiritual sensitivity, born into the final generation of a civilization that has chosen to die. The chapter is the overture to the tragedy that fills the next eight chapters — the destruction of the Nephite nation at Cumorah — and it introduces both the man who will narrate that destruction and the spiritual condition that makes it inevitable. By the end of this single short chapter, the gifts of God have been withdrawn from the whole land, the three disciples have been taken, and a fifteen-year-old who knows the goodness of Jesus has been forbidden to preach. The light has gone out of the people, and only this one boy seems to carry any of it.

Hebrew Word Studies

chashah / *matanah* / *qalal* (חָשַׁח / הַנְתִּיחַ / לָלַךְ) — **to be silent, to hold one's peace, to be still / gift, that which is given / to curse, to make light/slippery, to treat as trifling vv. 16–17, 14, 17–18.** Three Hebrew ideas frame the chapter's tragedy. The forbidding of Mormon's preaching — *my mouth was shut* (v. 16) — touches the Hebrew *chashah*, to be silent, to hold one's peace, the enforced stillness that can be either rest or judgment. When a prophet is made to *chashah*, it is often a sign that the word has been withdrawn from a people who would not hear it; Amos warned of a *famine... of hearing the words of the Lord* (Amos 8:11), and Mormon's shut mouth is that famine made personal — the witness present but silenced because the people have forfeited the word. *Matanah* — gift — stands under *there were no gifts from the Lord* (v. 14). The *matanot* of the Spirit (the gifts later catalogued in Moroni 10 and 1 Cor. 12) are God's freely-given endowments to his people; their total absence is the measure of how complete the withdrawal is. A people without *matanot* is a people God has stopped giving to — not from stinginess but because they have closed the hand that would receive. *Qalal* — the root behind *cursed* (v. 17) — is a rich and ironic word: it means to be light, slight, trifling, and so to curse (to make light of, to treat as of no weight). The land *cursed* (*qalal*) for the people's sake is the land made *light* — and the chapter's own image follows exactly, the treasures becoming *slippery* (v. 18), unable to be held, sliding out of the grasp. A people that made light of (*qalal*) the things of God find that their own treasures become light, slippery, ungraspable. The curse fits the crime: those who treated the weighty things as trifles are left holding nothing that will stay in the hand.

From the Chapter's Architecture

``cross-references 1 Sam. 3:1–10 (the boy Samuel, sober and called young in a time when the word of the Lord was precious... there was no open vision — the direct parallel to the chosen sober child of vv. 2, 15); Gen. 6:3 (my spirit shall not always strive with man — the withdrawal of the Spirit, v. 14); Judg. 16:20 (Samson wist not that the Lord was departed from him — the unnoticed loss of the Spirit, v. 14); 1 Sam. 16:14 (the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul — the withdrawal, vv. 13–14); 1 Sam. 28:6, 15 (when the Lord answered him no more, neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets — the ceasing of gifts, v. 14); Prov. 1:24–28 (because I have called, and ye refused... I also will laugh at your calamity — the people past the reach of the word, vv. 16–17); Isa. 6:9–11 (make the heart of this people fat... lest they... understand — the forbidding of fruitful preaching to the hardened, v. 16); Amos 8:11–12 (a famine... of hearing the words of the Lord... they shall run to and fro to seek the word... and shall not find it — Mormon's shut mouth, v. 16); Mic. 3:6–7 (it shall be dark unto you... and the day shall be dark... for there is no answer of God — the land without gifts, v. 14); Matt. 13:58 (Christ did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief — miracles ceasing for unbelief, v. 13); Acts 7:51 (ye do always resist the Holy Ghost — the willful rebellion of v. 16); Mosiah 17:15–18 (Abinadi's prophecy of destruction — fulfilling... the words of Abinadi, v. 19); Hel. 13:17–23, 30–37 (Samuel the Lamanite's curse on the land and the slippery treasures — directly fulfilled at vv. 18–19); 4 Ne. 1:17, 46–49 (the vanished -ites now returned, and Ammaron's hidden records that Ammaron's charge to Mormon continues, vv. 2–5); Alma 34:35 (the Spirit withdrawn... no place in you — the individual doctrine made national, v. 14); Moro. 8:28; 9:4 (Mormon's later report that the Holy Ghost hath ceased to strive with them — the same withdrawal, v. 14); D&C 1:33 (my Spirit shall not always strive with man — v. 14); D&C 121:37–38 (when we cover sin or gratify pride, the Spirit of the Lord is grieved; and when it is withdrawn, Amen to the priesthood — the mechanism of vv. 13–14). ``