
Mormon 2 — The Sorrowing of the Damned — Mormon Made a Captain at Sixteen, and a Grief That Was Not Repentance

Mormon 2: c. AD 326–350. War returns, and the Nephites — with no other leader of stature — make Mormon their commander while he is still only sixteen. He spends the chapter leading a people he cannot save through retreat after retreat, city after city lost, the land filled with robbers and carnage. Midway, the people finally begin to mourn — and Mormon's heart leaps, hoping the mourning is repentance. It is not. It is the sorrowing of the damned: grief that one can no longer take happiness in sin, cursing God and wishing to die rather than coming to Christ with a broken heart. The chapter contains one of the most important spiritual diagnoses in all of scripture — the difference between godly sorrow that leads to repentance and the worldly sorrow that leads only to death — and it shows Mormon taking up the plates of Nephi at last, beginning the record even as his nation slides toward Cumorah.

Mormon 2 is the chapter of a young man given an impossible job. War resumes, and the Nephites, having driven out the Spirit and the disciples in chapter 1, now have no one of spiritual or military stature left — so they hand command of their armies to Mormon, who is *young* but *large in stature*, still only sixteen years old (v. 1). The chapter then becomes a grim chronicle of retreat: city after city taken, the people driven northward, *blood and carnage spread throughout all the face of the land* (v. 8). But the chapter's true subject is not the war; it is a single spiritual event in the middle of it, and the diagnosis Mormon makes of it. Partway through the losses, the people finally begin to mourn and lament — and Mormon, watching, lets himself hope. Then he sees what their sorrow actually is, and names it with a precision that has become one of the Book of Mormon's permanent gifts to the doctrine of repentance: *the sorrowing of the damned* (v. 13). The chapter is the moment Mormon learns that grief and repentance are not the same thing, and the moment his own sorrow returns to him, never to leave.

Hebrew Word Studies

nacham / *shuv* / *chesed* (נָחַם / שׁוּב / חֶסֶד) — **to be sorry, to mourn, to console oneself, to repent / to turn, to return, to turn back (the verb of repentance) / steadfast love, mercy, covenant-kindness, long-suffering vv. 11–13, 13, 12.** The chapter's central diagnosis turns on Hebrew distinctions English blurs. Two different motions of the heart hide under the one English word "sorrow." The mourning of the damned is *nacham* gone wrong — *nacham* is the verb of being-sorry, of mourning and consoling oneself, and it can mean either genuine contrition or mere regret. The Nephites *nacham*-ed — they mourned and lamented — but their *nacham* did not become *shuv*. *Shuv* — to turn, to return — is the actual Hebrew verb of repentance; to repent is to *turn back* to God, a change of direction, not merely a change of feeling. This is the exact line Mormon draws: their *sorrowing was not unto repentance* (v. 13) — their *nacham* never became *shuv*, their grief never turned them around. They felt sorry (*nacham*) but did not turn (*shuv*); they wept facing the same direction they had always faced, toward sin, mourning only that the pleasure had failed. True repentance is *shuv* — coming *unto Jesus with broken hearts* (v. 14), the whole self turned around — and that they would not do. Under Mormon's leaping hope lies *chesed* — the *mercies and the long-suffering of the Lord* (v. 12). *Chesed* is the great covenant word for God's steadfast, loyal love, the love that endures and waits; Mormon, *knowing the chesed* of the Lord, naturally hopes it will yet save his people. And the tragedy is not that the *chesed* failed but that the people would not turn into it. God's *chesed* endures; their *nacham* never became *shuv*; and so the steadfast love that was always available found no turned heart to land on.

From the Chapter's Architecture

``cross-references Gen. 6:5–6 (God repented — nacham — and was grieved; the heavy heart over human wickedness, v. 19); Ex. 9:27–35 (Pharaoh's repeated I have sinned that never becomes turning — sorrow without shuv, vv. 13–14); 1 Sam. 15:24–30 (Saul's confession that mourns consequences, not sin — the sorrowing that is not repentance, vv. 13–14); Ps. 34:18 (the Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart — the broken hearts the Nephites would not bring, v. 14); Ps. 51:17 (a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise — the contrition refused in v. 14); Prov. 1:24–31 (those who refused until their calamity comes and then call but are not answered — the day of grace passed, v. 15); Isa. 22:12–13 (called to weeping and mourning, the people instead say let us eat and drink; for to morrow we shall die — sorrow turned to fatalism, v. 14); Jer. 8:20 (the harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved — the day of grace passed, v. 15); Ezek. 18:30–32 (turn yourselves... so iniquity shall not be your ruin... why will ye die? — the shuv the Nephites refused, vv. 13–14); Joel 2:12–13 (turn ye even to me with all your heart... rend your heart, and not your garments — true turning vs. mere mourning, v. 13); Matt. 27:3–5 (Judas repented himself with remorse, then despaired and died — the sorrowing of the damned, cursing and wishing to die, vv. 13–14); 2 Cor. 7:9–10 (godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation... but the sorrow of the world worketh death — the master parallel to vv. 13–14); Heb. 12:16–17 (Esau found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears — sorrow that cannot turn, v. 15); Mosiah 9:17 (battle in the strength of the Lord — the borrowed strength now withdrawn, v. 26); Alma 34:33–35 (do not procrastinate the day of your repentance — the day of grace passed, v. 15); Hel. 13:38 (ye have sought... happiness in doing iniquity, which thing is contrary to the nature of... righteousness — Samuel's prophecy of the sorrowing of the damned, v. 13); Morm. 6:16–22 (Mormon's later lament O ye fair ones — the sorrow of v. 19 brought to its climax); D&C 1:31–33 (the Lord cannot look upon sin, and his Spirit shall not always strive — the withdrawal of v. 26). ``