

Mormon 5 — Without Hope, Yet Faithful — Mormon Takes Up the Sword Again, and Writes the Record for Us and for Israel's Return

Mormon 5: c. AD 375–384. Mormon repents of his oath never to lead the Nephites again and resumes command — not because he hopes to save them (he knows the judgments of God are fixed) but because they have no one else and he cannot abandon them. The wars run one direction now: cities burned, the people swept down, the swift escaping and the slow destroyed. In the middle of the carnage Mormon turns again to the reader and explains why he writes — a small abridgment, daring not to give the full account, so that a knowledge of these things might reach the remnant of his people and the Gentiles, that they might believe Jesus is the Christ and that the scattered house of Israel might be gathered at last. He closes with a direct, thundering appeal to the Gentiles of the latter days: know ye not that ye are in the hands of God? Repent, lest justice come. It is the chapter of faithful service without hope, and of the record's purpose declared outright.

Mormon 5 is the chapter of a man who keeps working after hope is gone. In chapter 3 Mormon had sworn he would utterly refuse to lead the Nephites again, because of the oath of vengeance they had sworn. Now, watching them be slaughtered, he *repents of the oath* and takes command once more (v. 1). But he is careful to tell us why, and the why is one of the most poignant things in scripture: not because he has regained hope, for *I was without hope, for I knew the judgments of the Lord which should come upon them* (v. 2), but because the people *looked upon me as though I could deliver them*, and he could not leave them to die leaderless. This is service stripped of every reward — no hope of victory, no expectation of repentance, only the refusal of a shepherd to abandon doomed sheep. From this hopeless faithfulness the chapter turns, as the book of Mormon increasingly does, to the reader: Mormon explains the purpose of his record and then delivers a direct, urgent appeal to the Gentiles of the latter days who will hold it.

Hebrew Word Studies

***tiqvah* / *ro'eh* / *zakar* (תִּקְוָה / רֹעִי / זָכַר) — hope, expectation (lit. "a cord, a thing stretched toward") / shepherd, the one who tends and leads a flock / to remember, to call to mind and act upon vv. 2, 17–18, 20.** Three Hebrew words frame the chapter. *Tiqvah* — hope — is the thing Mormon explicitly lacks: *I was without hope* (v. 2). The Hebrew *tiqvah* derives from *qavah*, to stretch out like a cord, to wait expectantly; it is the cord by which the soul is tethered to a hoped-for future (the scarlet cord Rahab hung was a *tiqvah*, a literal cord and a figure of her hope, Josh. 2:18). Mormon serves with the cord cut — no future to be tethered to, no expectation to wait for — and the heroism of his service is precisely that it continues *without* the *tiqvah* that normally sustains effort. *Ro'eh* — shepherd — stands behind *they had Christ for their shepherd* (v. 17). It is the great pastoral image of the Lord as the shepherd of Israel (Ps. 23:1; Ezek. 34), the one who leads, feeds, gathers, and defends the flock. The chapter's tragedy is the loss of the *ro'eh*: a people that once had Christ as *ro'eh* now has Satan leading them about, and the sheep without a shepherd become exactly what the figure threatens — scattered, driven, *as a vessel... without sail or anchor* (v. 18). The flock that loses its *ro'eh* does not become free; it becomes prey. *Zakar* — to remember — recurs at the chapter's hinge of hope: *then will the Lord remember the covenant which he made unto Abraham* (v. 20). As throughout the record, divine *zakar* is active and effectual: when God *remembers* his covenant, he acts to fulfill it (Gen. 8:1; Ex. 2:24). The destruction of the Nephites is not the forgetting of the covenant; the same *zakar* that delivered Israel from Egypt is pledged to remember scattered Jacob and gather the remnant. Mormon's hopelessness for his generation rests inside a larger *tiqvah* grounded in God's *zakar* — the people may be lost, but the covenant is remembered, and the remembering God will yet gather the seed.

From the Chapter's Architecture

```cross-references Josh. 2:18 (the scarlet cord/tiqvah of hope hung in the window — the hope Mormon lacks, v. 2); Ps. 23:1 (the Lord is my shepherd — the ro'eh lost in vv. 17–18); Ps. 107:23–30 (those who go down to the sea, tossed in the storm until the Lord bringeth them unto their desired haven — the rudderless vessel of v. 18); Isa. 34:4 (the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll — verbatim at v. 23); Isa. 41:10–14 (fear not... I will help thee... thou worm Jacob — the covenant care for scattered Jacob, v. 20); Isa. 49:14–16 (can a woman forget her sucking child?... yet will I not forget thee... I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands — the God who remembers, v. 20); Isa. 53:6 (all we like sheep have gone astray — the flock that left its shepherd, vv. 17–18); Ezek. 34:5–6, 11–16 (the scattered sheep with no shepherd, and the Lord who will seek out and gather them — the ro'eh doctrine of vv. 17–20); Mic. 5:8 (the remnant of Jacob as a lion among the beasts of the forest — verbatim at v. 24); Matt. 9:36 (the multitude as sheep having no shepherd — vv. 17–18); Matt. 23:37 (how often would I have gathered thy children... and ye would not — the refused embrace, v. 11); Lk. 13:34 (the same lament — the arms of Jesus refused, v. 11); Jn. 10:11–16 (I am the good shepherd... other sheep I have... one fold, and one shepherd — the Shepherd of v. 17 and the gathering of v. 20); Eph. 2:12 (without Christ... having no hope, and without God in the world — verbatim sense of vv. 2, 16); 2 Pet. 3:9 (not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance — the appeal of vv. 22–24); 3 Ne. 9:14; 10:6 (how oft would I have gathered you as a hen gathereth her chickens... will ye not now return — the open arms refused, v. 11); 3 Ne. 16:8–12; 20:15–20 (the Gentiles warned of being as a lion-torn flock if they reject the gospel — the warning of v. 24); 3 Ne. 21:12–21 (the remnant of Jacob among the Gentiles as a lion — v. 24); Morm. 3:22 (I would that I could persuade all ye ends of the earth to repent — the appeal continued at vv. 22–24); Morm. 8:21–41 (Moroni's expansion of the appeal to the Gentiles who will receive the record — vv. 10, 22); D&C 3:16–20 (the record preserved that the remnant of Lehi might come to the knowledge of Christ — the purpose of vv. 9–15); D&C 109:61–67 (the latter-day prayer for the scattered remnants of Jacob — the covenant-remembrance of v. 20). ```