

Mormon 6 — O Ye Fair Ones — The Last Battle at Cumorah, and a Father's Lament Over a Fallen Nation

Mormon 6: c. AD 384. The end. Mormon, now old, gathers all that remains of his people to the land of Cumorah for the last stand, and before the battle he completes this record and hides all the other sacred plates in the hill, keeping only a few to give his son Moroni. Then the Lamanites come, and the Nephite nation is destroyed in a single catastrophe: twenty-three commanders, each with ten thousand, fall with their tens of thousands — nearly a quarter of a million dead — and Mormon, himself wounded, survives with only twenty-three others and his son Moroni. From the top of the hill, surveying the corpses of his entire people, Mormon lifts the most sustained lament in scripture: O ye fair ones, how could ye have departed from the ways of the Lord, how could ye have rejected that Jesus who stood with open arms to receive you. The chapter is the death of a civilization and the grief of the last man who loved it.

Mormon 6 is the end of the Nephite nation, and it is one of the most sorrowful chapters ever written. Everything the book of Mormon has been moving toward since chapter 1 — the withdrawal of the Spirit, the false repentance, the oath of vengeance, the aggression that forfeited protection, the sweeping-off like dew — arrives here at the hill Cumorah, where a thousand years of Nephite history ends in a single battle. Mormon writes it as a man performing a series of last acts: he gathers his people for the final stand, he completes and hides the records, he leads his ten thousand into battle, he is wounded and survives, and then he climbs the hill and counts the dead. The counting is the heart of the chapter — a slow, deliberate roll call of commanders and their tens of thousands, each name followed by *had fallen*, until the numbers reach nearly a quarter of a million. And then, standing over the corpses of everyone he ever loved and led, Mormon does not analyze or explain; he laments. The chapter ends not with doctrine but with a cry — *O ye fair ones* — the grief of a father over dead children, repeated until it breaks the reader's heart as it broke his.

Hebrew Word Studies

qinah / *yapheh* / *mishpat-rachamim* (הַנִּיחַ / הָפִי / מִשְׁפָּט וְרַחֲמִים) — **a lament, a funeral dirge / fair, beautiful, comely / justice and mercy (the paired attributes of God) vv. 16–22, 17–19, 22.** The chapter is, in form, a *qinah* — the Hebrew funeral lament, the dirge sung over the dead. The *qinah* is a recognized biblical genre: David's *qinah* over Saul and Jonathan (*how are the mighty fallen!* 2 Sam. 1:19–27), the whole book of *Eikhah* (Lamentations) over fallen Jerusalem, Ezekiel's dirges over Tyre and Egypt. Mormon's *O ye fair ones, how is it that ye could have fallen* (v. 19) is a *qinah* in the exact pattern — the repeated *how* (Hebrew *eikhah*, the very word that names Lamentations), the address to the dead, the rhythm of grief. Mormon, steeped in the brass-plates scriptures, mourns his nation in the inherited form of Israel's mourning. *Yapheh* — fair, beautiful — is the word behind *fair ones* (vv. 17, 19). It is the word for physical beauty (Rachel, Joseph, the beloved of the Song of Songs), and Mormon's use of it for his slaughtered people is heartbreaking: he calls them *beautiful* as they lie moldering, seeing them not as the wicked who earned destruction but as the lovely children they were and might have remained. Love sees the *yapheh* even in the ruined. And the chapter closes on the paired Hebrew attributes *mishpat* and *rachamim* — *justice and mercy* (v. 22). These are the two poles of God's character that Alma's great discourse held in tension (Alma 42): *mishpat*, the justice that renders to each his due, and *rachamim*, the womb-deep mercy that reaches to save. Mormon does not choose between them for his people; he commits the dead to a God who is fully both. In Hebrew theology the genius of the atonement is that *mishpat* and *rachamim* are not enemies but are reconciled in Christ — and Mormon, unable to judge his own people, lays them down in the one place where justice and mercy meet.

From the Chapter's Architecture

``cross-references 2 Sam. 1:17–27 (David's qinah over Saul and Jonathan, how are the mighty fallen! — the lament form of vv. 16–19); Lamentations 1–5 (the whole book of Eikhah, the dirge over fallen Jerusalem, how doth the city sit solitary — the qinah tradition behind vv. 16–22); Ezek. 19:1–14; 27:1–36 (Ezekiel's dirges, take up a lamentation — the prophetic qinah Mormon performs); Gen. 3:19 (dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return — the moldering and returning to earth of v. 15); Job 19:25–26 (though... worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God — the moldering bodies that will yet rise, vv. 15, 21); Ps. 49:14–15 (like sheep they are laid in the grave... but God will redeem my soul — the dead and the hope beyond, vv. 15, 21); Isa. 25:8 (he will swallow up death in victory; and... wipe away tears — the consolation behind v. 21); Hos. 13:9 (O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thine help — if ye had not done this, ye would not have fallen, v. 18); Matt. 23:37 (how often would I have gathered thy children... and ye would not! — the open arms refused, v. 17); Lk. 19:41–44 (Jesus weeping over Jerusalem, if thou hadst known... the things which belong unto thy peace! — the wept-over city and the lament of vv. 16–19); 1 Cor. 15:53–54 (this mortal must put on immortality... death is swallowed up in victory — verbatim at v. 21); 2 Cor. 5:10 (we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ — v. 21); Alma 27:28 (the people of Ammon who never did look upon death with any degree of terror — the opposite of the awful fear of death of v. 7); Alma 28:4–5 (the earlier household-by-household mourning — the pattern of v. 19); Alma 34:16 (mercy that encircles them in the arms of safety — the open arms of v. 17); Alma 42:15–25 (justice and mercy reconciled in the atonement — the justice and mercy of v. 22); 3 Ne. 9:14; 10:4–6 (how oft would I have gathered you... and ye would not — the open arms of v. 17); 3 Ne. 11:9–15 (the risen Christ inviting all to come and feel the prints — the arms that were open, v. 17); Morm. 5:11 (the people who might have been clasped in the arms of Jesus — v. 17); Moro. 9:1–22 (Moroni's continuation of the lament over the same destruction — the grief of v. 19 carried on by the son); D&C 76:43–44 (Christ saves all except those... who deny the Son after the Father has revealed him — the justice and mercy of v. 22).
``