
Mormon 9 — A God of Miracles — Moroni to the Unbeliever, and the Unchanging Christ

Mormon 9: c. AD 400–421, Moroni's address to those who do not believe in Christ and to those who say revelation and miracles are done away. Having seen the latter day, Moroni turns to argue with its unbelief. He confronts the one who denies Christ with the unbearable prospect of standing guilty before a holy God; he confronts the one who denies miracles with the logic of an unchangeable God who, being the same yesterday, today, and forever, cannot have ceased to be a God of miracles unless he has ceased to be God. He explains that miracles cease only because of unbelief, not because God changed, and he calls the reader to faith that doubts nothing. He closes the book of Mormon proper with a humble word about the imperfections of the reformed-Egyptian record, a plea not to condemn the writers, and a final prayer that God remember the covenant with Israel. It is the last great doctrinal sermon of the Nephite record — a defense of the God of miracles, written by the last man, against the unbelief of our day.

Mormon 9 is the closing sermon of the book of Mormon proper, and it is Moroni reasoning with the unbelief he has just been shown will mark the latter days. Having seen our day in chapter 8 — its polluted churches, its love of money, and its denial that miracles still occur — Moroni now turns to address that unbelief directly, in two movements aimed at two kinds of unbeliever. First he speaks *to those who do not believe in Christ* (vv. 1–6), confronting them not with argument but with a vision of the judgment: the prospect of standing before a holy God under a consciousness of guilt, a misery worse than hell itself. Then he speaks *to those who deny the revelations of God* and say *that miracles are done away* (vv. 7–25), and here he mounts one of the great arguments in scripture — that an unchangeable God cannot have ceased to be a God of miracles, and that miracles cease only because of human unbelief, never because God has changed. The chapter closes the Nephite record with a humble account of its imperfections and a final prayer for Israel. It is the last word of doctrine from a vanished people, and its subject is the God who does not change.

Hebrew Word Studies

shanah / *pele* / *kavas* (שָׁנָה / פֶּלַע / כָּבַס) — **to change, to repeat, to be different / a wonder, a marvel, a miracle / to wash, to cleanse (especially garments), to full** vv. 9–19, 16–20, 6, 35. Three Hebrew words anchor the chapter's doctrine. *Shanah* — to change — is the hinge of the whole argument about miracles. God has *no variableness neither shadow of changing* (v. 9); he does not *shanah*. The Hebrew *ani Yahweh lo shaniti, I am the Lord, I change not* (Mal. 3:6), is the bedrock Moroni builds on: because God does not *shanah*, whatever he has been he remains, and so the God of miracles is still the God of miracles. *Shanah* also means to repeat — and there is a quiet aptness in it: the unchanging God repeats his works, does again in every faithful age what he did in the first, precisely because he does not change. *Pele* — wonder, marvel, miracle — is the word for the *marvelous works of God* (v. 16). It is the root behind the name in Isaiah 9:6, *his name shall be called Wonderful (Pele)*, and behind the *wonders* of the Exodus. A *pele* is something that exceeds the natural order, a sign of the in-breaking power of God; and Moroni's claim is that the *pele* belongs to God's unchanging nature — the God whose very Son is named *Pele* cannot have ceased to do *pele*. *Kavas* — to wash, to cleanse, especially garments — stands behind both *cleansed by the blood of the Lamb* (v. 6) and *rid our garments of the blood of our brethren* (v. 35). *Kavas* is the fuller's washing, the deep cleansing of cloth (the same root in Malachi 3:2's *fullers' soap*); it is the word for the ritual washing of garments that made one fit to approach the holy. The chapter holds two washings in the same word-field: the unbeliever must be *kavas*-cleansed by the blood of the Lamb to bear God's presence (v. 6), and the prophet has *kavas*-cleansed his own garments of others' blood by faithful warning (v. 35). To be clean enough to stand before the holy God whose presence would otherwise be torment (v. 4) — that is the whole work of the blood of the Lamb, the cleansing that makes the miracle of dwelling with God possible.

From the Chapter's Architecture

``cross-references Gen. 18:14 (is any thing too hard for the Lord? — the God of miracles, vv. 16–19); Ex. 15:11 (who is like thee... fearful in praises, doing wonders / pele — the marvelous works of v. 16); Mal. 3:6 (I am the Lord, I change not — the unchanging God of v. 9); Num. 23:19 (God is not a man, that he should lie... hath he said, and shall he not do it? — the unvarying God, v. 9); Ps. 102:25–27 (they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end — the changelessness of v. 9); Isa. 9:6 (his name shall be called Wonderful / Pele — the Christ who is the miracle, vv. 16–18); Isa. 59:1 (the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save — God still able, vv. 19–20); Mal. 3:2 (the refiner's fire and fullers' soap / kavas — the cleansing of vv. 6, 35); Ezek. 33:1–9 (the watchman who warns rids himself of the blood of the people — v. 35); Dan. 6:27 (God worketh signs and wonders in heaven and in earth — the God of miracles, v. 11); Matt. 13:58 (Christ did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief — miracles ceasing for unbelief, v. 20); Mk. 16:15–18 (go ye into all the world... these signs shall follow them that believe — verbatim at vv. 22–24); Jn. 14:12 (the works that I do shall he do also — the continuing miracles, v. 24); Acts 5:12 (many signs and wonders wrought... by the apostles — v. 18); Heb. 13:8 (Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever — verbatim at v. 9); Jas. 1:17 (the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning — the source of v. 9); 1 Cor. 12:4–11 (the gifts of the Spirit that follow belief — the signs of v. 24); 2 Ne. 27:23 (I am a God of miracles... and I work not among the children of men save it be according to their faith — the doctrine of vv. 19–21); 2 Ne. 28:4–6 (the latter-day denial there is no God... he hath done his work — the unbelief Moroni answers, vv. 7–20); 3 Ne. 11:31–39 (the doctrine of Christ and the commission Moroni cites at vv. 22–24); Ether 12:12–18 (Moroni's own teaching that miracles come only after faith — the companion to vv. 20–21); Moro. 7:27–37 (Mormon: have miracles ceased? ... Nay... it is by faith that miracles are wrought — the fuller treatment of vv. 19–20); Moro. 10:7, 19, 24 (Moroni's closing testimony that God is a God of miracles and the gifts cease only through unbelief — the doctrine sealed); D&C 35:8 (I am God; I am a God of miracles — v. 11); D&C 20:11–12 (the Book of Mormon proving that God... is the same yesterday, today, and forever — v. 9). ``