

Moroni 8 — Little Children Are Alive in Christ — Mormon's Letter on the Mercy of God to the Innocent

Moroni 8: an epistle Mormon wrote to his son Moroni soon after Moroni's call to the ministry, preserved here. Word had reached Mormon of disputations about the baptism of little children, and he writes to remove this gross error. Having inquired of the Lord, he delivers the word that came by the Holy Ghost: little children are whole, not capable of sin, the curse of Adam taken from them in Christ, and so they need no baptism — for to suppose they do is to make God partial, changeable, a respecter of persons, and to deny the mercies and atonement of Christ. He sets forth the true order — repentance and baptism for the accountable — and the chain from faith to baptism to the Holy Ghost to perfect love. The letter closes with Mormon's grief over the pride and doom of the Nephites. It is the Book of Mormon's clearest text on the salvation of little children and the boundless mercy of God to the innocent.

Moroni 8 is a letter — an epistle Mormon wrote to his son Moroni soon after Moroni's call to the ministry — and Moroni preserves it as one of the closing treasures of the record. Its occasion is a doctrinal dispute: word had reached Mormon that *there have been disputations among you concerning the baptism of your little children* (v. 5), and he writes to remove what he bluntly calls *this gross error* (v. 6). The letter is the Book of Mormon's clearest and most forceful teaching on the salvation of little children, and through it, on the very character of God. Mormon does not argue from opinion; he *inquired of the Lord*, and *the word of the Lord came to me by the power of the Holy Ghost* (v. 7), and he delivers that word: little children are whole, not capable of sin, redeemed by Christ, and need no baptism. To teach otherwise, he insists, is not a minor error but a denial of the mercy and atonement of Christ and a slander against the character of God. The letter is fierce because the stakes are high — the innocence of children and the goodness of God are both on the line. And it closes with a father's grief over a nation ripening for destruction.

Hebrew Word Studies

***tam* / *nasa-panim* / *chanan* (תָּם / נָסַח / חָנַן) — whole, complete, innocent, blameless / to lift the face / show partiality, be a respecter of persons / to be gracious, to show mercy v. 8, vv. 12, 18, vv. 19, 22.** Three Hebrew ideas anchor the letter. *Tam* — whole, complete, innocent — is behind *little children are whole* (v. 8). *Tam* describes the blameless, the morally complete; Job was *tam*, perfect and upright (Job 1:1), and the *tamim* (whole/unblemished) was the standard for the sacrifice. Little children are *tam* — whole, innocent, not because they have achieved righteousness but because they are *not capable of committing sin*. Their wholeness is the innocence of those who cannot yet choose evil, and Christ keeps them *tam* by taking the curse of Adam from them. *Nasa panim* — to lift the face, to show partiality, to be a *respecter of persons* — is what Mormon insists God is NOT (v. 12). To *nasa panim* is to judge by favoritism rather than truth; the law forbade the judge to *nasa panim* (Lev. 19:15). Mormon's argument is that to damn unbaptized infants while saving baptized ones would make God a *respecter of persons*, a face-lifter, judging by an accident of ordinance rather than by justice and mercy — which the impartial, unchangeable God cannot be. *Chanan* — to be gracious, to show mercy — is why the children are safe: *they are all alive in him because of his mercy* (v. 19). *Chanan* is the free, unearned grace of God (the root of *chen*, grace, and of names like John, *the Lord is gracious*). The children are saved by pure *chanan* — God's free grace through Christ's atonement — needing nothing they cannot give, for grace asks nothing of the innocent. The letter's three words hold its whole argument: little children are *tam* (whole/innocent), God is no *nasa panim* (respecter of persons), and so the children are saved by *chanan* (free mercy) — innocent, before an impartial God, by grace alone.

From the Chapter's Architecture

``cross-references Gen. 8:21 (the imagination of man's heart evil from his youth — yet the children themselves not yet accountable, v. 8); Deut. 1:39 (the little ones... who in that day had no knowledge between good and evil — the children not capable of sin, v. 8); Deut. 10:17 (God regardeth not persons — God no respecter of persons, v. 12); Lev. 19:15 (the judge shall not respect persons — the impartiality of v. 12); Job 1:1 (Job perfect / tam and upright — the wholeness of the children, v. 8); Ps. 8:2 (out of the mouth of babes... thou hast ordained strength — the place of children before God, vv. 8–19); Mal. 3:6 (I am the Lord, I change not — God unchangeable, v. 18); Matt. 9:12–13 (they that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick... I am... come... to call sinners to repentance — verbatim behind v. 8); Matt. 18:3–6, 10 (except ye... become as little children... their angels do always behold the face of my Father — the standing of children, vv. 8–17); Matt. 19:14 (suffer little children... to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven — vv. 8–19); Mk. 10:14–16 (Christ takes the children in his arms and blesses them — the love of v. 17); Acts 10:34 (God is no respecter of persons — v. 12); Rom. 2:11 (there is no respect of persons with God — v. 12); 1 Jn. 4:18 (perfect love casteth out fear — verbatim at v. 16); James 1:17 (the Father with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning — God unchangeable, v. 18); 2 Ne. 9:25–26 (where there is no law, the atonement covers them, delivered by... the Holy One of Israel — the children without the law, v. 22); Mosiah 3:16–18, 21 (little children, the blood of Christ atoneth for them, but the accountable must repent — the doctrine of vv. 8–11); Mosiah 15:25 (little children also have eternal life — vv. 8–12); Moro. 7:47 (charity, the pure love of Christ — the love of v. 17); D&C 29:46–47 (little children are redeemed from the foundation of the world through mine Only Begotten — verbatim doctrine of vv. 8, 12); D&C 137:10 (all children who die before they arrive at the years of accountability are saved — vv. 8–19); D&C 68:25–27 (parents to teach repentance and baptism to children at eight, the age of accountability — the true order of v. 10). ``