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Abstract: In the Church we speak of Jesus Christ as the author and finisher of our faith. This paper examines and compares Mormon as an “author” and Joseph Smith as a “finisher” of the Book of Mormon. Perhaps no other prophet personifies the preparation and achievements of Joseph Smith better than the prophet Mormon. He was a type for the Prophet Joseph—foreshadowing Joseph’s life and important mission.



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John M. Butler

Joseph Smith, the Mormon Prophet, is a name that has been “had for good and evil among all nations, kindreds, and tongues,” as foretold by the angel Moroni in 1823 (JS-H 1:33). With more than 20,000 books and pamphlets referring to the Prophet Joseph Smith in the library of the Church (Benson, *Teachings* 103), Moroni’s prophecy has undeniably come to pass. Many people outside The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints view Joseph Smith as a charlatan, a lunatic, a fanatic, or at very best a mystic. To those who have read the Book of Mormon and have a testimony of it, Joseph Smith is a prophet, seer, revelator, and translator (see D&C 21:1). I approach the Prophet Joseph Smith as a believer; I am one who has benefited from the positive impact he has had upon the world.

Joseph Smith has been compared to many prophets and leaders, and only One surpassed him. Elder Francis M. Gibbons, in a recent general conference address, reiterated John Taylor’s famous statement found in D&C 135:3 that Joseph Smith did more than anyone else except the Savior Jesus Christ “for the salvation of men in this world” (32–33). Parley P. Pratt equated Joseph with John the Baptist as an Elias (80–82). And I would like to draw parallels between the lives of Joseph Smith and the prophet Mormon.

In the Church we speak of Jesus Christ as the author and finisher of our faith (Moroni 6:4; Heb 12:2). This paper examines and compares Mormon as an “author” and Joseph Smith as a “finisher” of the

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Book of Mormon. Perhaps no other prophet personifies the preparation and achievements of Joseph Smith better than the prophet Mormon. He was a type for the Prophet Joseph—foreshadowing Joseph's life and important mission.

We first meet Mormon as a young boy of ten as he is visited by the prophet Ammaron, who perceives that Mormon is a "sober child" and "quick to observe" (Mormon 1:2). An alert and reverent child must have been as unusual in those days as it is in ours. Lucy Mack Smith, Joseph Smith's mother, records that Joseph was "a remarkably quiet, well-disposed child" (67). From his own history, we see that Joseph is quick to observe the religious excitement around him and takes an active role in calling upon God for direction. Thus, both these men who became prophets were alert, reverent, and attentive to the nudgings of the Lord as boys. The Lord used them because they were spiritually awake and had learned in their youths to keep the commandments of God (see Alma 37:35).

Both Mormon and Joseph Smith had noble heritages with a common lineage. Mormon was "a pure descendant of Lehi" (3 Nephi 5:20) through Nephi (Mormon 1:5)—and thus from Joseph of Egypt (1 Nephi 5:14; 2 Nephi 3:4). He also notes that he was named after his father (Mormon 1:5). From 2 Nephi 3:15, we learn that Joseph Smith was also a descendant of Joseph of Egypt and named "after the name of his father." In other words, Mormon is really Mormon, Jr., in the same way that Joseph Smith is Joseph Smith, Jr.

Both prophets were seen in vision by their ancestors. No doubt Nephi saw his future descendant, Mormon, when he recorded the vision of the final destruction of the Nephite nation in 1 Nephi 12:14–19. Joseph of Egypt saw the future and prophesied of his posterity (2 Nephi 3:5). He also recorded the name of a major role player, stating, "And his name shall be called after me; and it shall be after the name of his father" (2 Nephi 3:15). As direct descendants of Joseph of Egypt, Mormon and Joseph Smith should naturally be major contributors to the "stick of Joseph" (Ezek 37:19). Moroni, the author, and Joseph Smith, the finisher, were bringing forth to the world their family records—the Book of Mormon, the record of the tribe of Joseph.

Next, in Mormon's introduction of himself, we learn that he "was carried by [his] father into the land southward" when he was 11 years old (Mormon 1:6). Here again Joseph Smith's life follows Mormon's

motif. Joseph went south with his father from Vermont to New York in his “tenth year or thereabouts” (JS-H 1:3).

Not long after moving to Zarahemla, Mormon saw that “there were no gifts from the Lord [among the people], and the Holy Ghost did not come upon any, because of their wickedness and unbelief” (Mormon 1:14). Being of “a sober mind,” he called upon God when he was 15 years of age and “was visited of the Lord, and tasted and knew of the goodness of Jesus” (v 15). Mormon experienced a personal visit from the Lord, like Samuel at Shiloh (see 1 Sam 3). Joseph Smith states that he was visited of the Lord in his fifteenth year (JS-H 1:7). He, too, “tasted and knew of the goodness of Jesus.” He saw and spoke with God the Father and God the Son (vv 13–20). Joseph had gone to the Lord in prayer seeking direction regarding his spiritual life (see vv 10–14), and his result was the same as Mormon’s. They were both visited by the Lord in their teenage years. Was it by accident that Joseph Smith and Mormon had their “First Visions” at the same age? Perhaps, for Joseph, it was preparation to becoming literally a Mormon prophet, or in other words, a prophet like Mormon.

Both men were instructed by older prophets as to their role in the Church and kingdom of God. The prophet Ammaron visited Mormon to prepare him for his life’s work and mission (Mormon 1:2–4). And while Joseph was yet in his youth, he was visited by the angel-prophet Moroni, who taught him of his life’s work and future mission (JS-H 1:27–54). Both received this message from a prophet who had hidden up records in the ground for their future use.

While we know only that Mormon was ministered unto by the Three Nephites (Mormon 8:10–11), Joseph was tutored by numerous heavenly messengers. H. Donl Peterson has listed 59 such personages who appeared to the Prophet Joseph or were seen by him in vision (184–86). In fact, President John Taylor stated, “When Joseph Smith was raised up as a Prophet of God, Mormon, Moroni, Nephi and others . . . came to him and communicated to him certain principles pertaining to the Gospel of the Son of God” (*Journal of Discourses* 17:374; hereafter *JD*). And he later said that Joseph “seemed to be as familiar with these people as we are with one another” (*JD* 21:94). Visits by the authors of the words he translated prepared Joseph to bring forth the Book of Mormon. In compiling the plates which bore his name, Mormon may have likewise been visited by the authors of the words he abridged.

Both Mormon and Joseph were men of large stature (Mormon 2:1 and Cannon 19). Having physical strength was possibly a prerequisite to prevent the records they protected from falling into the hands of the adversary's agents (see Mormon 6:6). And although they were both large and physically fit as youths, neither Mormon nor Joseph received the plates appointed them until they were spiritually mature enough to perform the labors required by them. Several years of testing and training went by after Ammaron and Moroni revealed to their respective charges the missions they were to fulfill regarding the record of the Nephites.

Their 24th year was an important one in the lives of both these prophets. Mormon was told to record his observations of Nephite society on the plates when he was 24 (Mormon 1:3–4). Joseph translated those words when he was in his 24th year (see JS-H 1:66–67) and published them to the world in March of 1830, shortly after his 24th birthday.

The adversary constantly struggled against both these men of Christ. Both gathered their people into one body trying to escape persecution. Mormon fled to the Hill Cumorah area before the hordes of Lamanites and assembled the Nephites for the final battles. Joseph, after suffering from his neighbors in New York, the apostates in Kirtland, and the mobs in Missouri and Illinois, gathered the Saints at Nauvoo seeking refuge from the hostile world. An "Extermination Order" faced them on every front, yet they never wavered in their faith. In the end, they both sealed their testimonies with their blood as they were martyred by enemies of Christ (Mormon 8:3; D&C 135:1; 136:39). They "lived great, and [they] died great in the eyes of God and [their] people" (Moroni 5:11; 8:3; D&C 135:3).

Both men had charisma which made them natural leaders. Mormon served as the chief captain of the Nephite armies almost all of his adult life. While speaking of Mormon's leadership qualities, Sterling W. Sill wrote the following:

Mormon impresses his greatness upon us in many ways. He was a greater general than Washington. Washington led a little Revolutionary army for just a few months, and the total American dead was 4,435. The total American dead in World War I was 116,563. The total American dead in World War II was 407,828. Mormon lost 230,000 in one single encounter. . . . Mormon led this great national army for 58 years, . . . and he was able to offer them victory at

any moment, providing only they would obey God, which they continually declined to do. (253)

With the organization of the Nauvoo Legion in 1841, Joseph Smith consented to serve as lieutenant general, in other words, the chief captain of his army. Protection of his people by military service was foremost on his mind when Joseph accepted that position. In his book, *Life of Joseph Smith the Prophet*, George Q. Cannon wrote, “His conduct in this respect is a reminder that, notwithstanding his divine appointment, he held himself amenable to every law and every regulation of his country” (365). Joseph and Mormon were always ready to help their people in time of need. They led from the front, and served and suffered with their soldiers and Saints in the trenches of war and before the mistreatment of mobs.

Both gave poignant farewell addresses. Over his slain people at Cumorah, Mormon cried, “O ye fair ones, how could ye have departed from the ways of the Lord! O ye fair ones, how could ye have rejected that Jesus, who stood with open arms to receive you!” (Mormon 6:17). The Prophet Joseph’s farewell to the Nauvoo Legion was a little more optimistic but no less heart-rending. “God has tried you. You are a good people; therefore I love you with all my heart. Greater love hath no man than that he should lay down his life for his friends. You have stood by me in the hour of trouble, and I am willing to sacrifice my life for your preservation” (Cannon 498). Both spoke to their armies with feelings of melancholy: Mormon for what had just happened—Joseph for what was about to happen.

In spite of all the evil that raged about them, both men maintained charity and forgiveness towards those who had harmed them. Mormon spent his entire life with “a continual scene of wickedness and abominations” before him and yet never lost charity, unlike so many of those around him (Mormon 2:18; Moroni 9:5). Joseph likewise endured much, yet never lost his love for others. Once when asked why he had so many followers, Joseph replied, “It is because I possess the principle of love. All that I offer the world is a good heart and a good hand” (Cannon 528). Mormon and Joseph possessed “the pure love of Christ” and showed that charity can endure forever (see Moroni 7:47; see also *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* 9; hereafter *TPJS*).

From the time that they were called to their ministries, both prophets never ceased to labor. From age 16 to his death sometime after age 74, Mormon struggled to aid his people militarily and spiritually. Joseph Smith similarly was in the service of God and his people from his teenage years to his death at age 38. They "labor[ed] diligently," knowing that "should [they] cease to labor, [they] should be brought under condemnation" (Moroni 9:6; see also *TPJS* 258).

Lifelong service is not always the norm for the Lord's leaders. David was called of God in his youth but afterwards lost favor with the Lord through transgression. On the other hand, the Apostle Paul and Alma the Younger championed the gospel cause in their later lives but spent their early years in opposition to the Church. Mormon and Joseph Smith never wavered in their faith or righteousness. "Mormon was faithful in the beginning of his life; he was faithful in the middle of his life; he was faithful in the end of his life" (Sill 250). The same can be said of the Prophet Joseph Smith: "He lived great, and he died great" (D&C 135:3).

The diligence of Mormon and Joseph Smith seems to have been rewarded with their having their callings and elections made sure while yet in the flesh. Mormon mentions in Mormon 2:19, "Nevertheless, I know that I shall be lifted up at the last day." Joseph's promise came in stronger words when the Lord said "I seal upon you your exaltation, and prepare a throne for you in the kingdom of my Father" (D&C 132:49). They had followed the Lord's commands, and they sealed their missions and their testimonies of the Savior with their blood and continue their work on the other side of the veil (138:57).

Mormon saw the end of a great civilization whereas Joseph Smith's ministry was at the beginning of a new civilization, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, which shall stand in the promised land through the Millennium. Mormon saw the Dark Ages begin; Joseph Smith saw them end.

It is not by accident that Mormon, the author, and Joseph Smith, the finisher of the Book of Mormon, have so many parallels in their lives. Being among the noble and great ones before the foundation of this earth, they were chosen before they were born to perform the work they did for God (see Abr 3:22–23; D&C 138:38, 53; *JD* 7:290). Both their lives centered around preparing and bringing forth the stick of Joseph so the world might know that "Jesus is the Christ" and "get

nearer to God by abiding by its precepts” (see Book of Mormon Title Page and Introduction). Mormon and Joseph Smith sacrificed all that they had, even their own lives, in sustaining and defending the kingdom of God.

We are to be judged by how we respond to the message authored by Mormon and finished by Joseph. Mormon wrote, “Ye must all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ . . . to be judged” (Mormon 3:20). Mormon and Joseph will undoubtedly also meet us before the bar of God that we may know that they have been “commanded of [Christ] to write these things” (see 2 Nephi 33:11; see also Jacob 6:13; Ether 12:38). Brigham Young told the Saints in his day, “Joseph Smith holds the keys of this last dispensation, and is now engaged behind the vail [*sic*] in the great work of the last days. . . . [N]o man or woman in this dispensation will ever enter into the celestial kingdom of God without the consent of Joseph Smith” (*JD* 7:289). In our day, President Ezra Taft Benson has warned us that we are on trial to see what we will do with the Book of Mormon (see Benson, *A Witness* 13). We will answer for our response to this second witness of Jesus Christ. Should not we do more to make the Book of Mormon a larger part of our lives?

No other latter-day prophet matches Mormon as well as the Prophet Joseph. Perhaps he possessed many of Mormon’s attributes so that he could be more in tune with the compiler of the Book of Mormon as he translated it. Or, as James E. Talmage put it in his book *The Articles of Faith*, “The translator must have the spirit of the prophet if he would render in another tongue the prophet’s words” (237). The attributes, character, and even many of the activities of Mormon can be considered a type which foreshadowed the future translator. In this manner, the author and the finisher of the Book of Mormon have more in common than just the book which they helped bring forth.

Today we may draw nearer to Christ—“the author and the finisher of [our] faith” (Moroni 6:4)—because of the efforts of Mormon and Joseph Smith—the “author” and the “finisher” of the Book of Mormon.

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