

## 8

"WE ARE NOT CUT OFF":  
SEPARATION AND  
RECONCILIATION THROUGH  
SACRED COVENANTS

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Perhaps no theme in the Book of Mormon resonates so powerfully to modern readers as that of separation from and reconciliation with God. The sense of being cut off, isolated, or driven out is attested throughout the book. Similarly, messages from the Book of Mormon prophets of hope, reconciliation, and communion with God seek to alleviate the fears and depression that arise from loneliness or abandonment.

This theme is particularly evident in Jacob's great speech recorded in 2 Nephi 6–10 and the two "last" speeches from Moroni in Mormon 8 and Moroni 10. Jacob and Moroni both address separation from and reconciliation with God, providing a template for the reader to understand their own experiences. In particular, these prophets quote the words of Isaiah to teach how sacred covenants reconcile us to God.

SEPARATION IN JACOB'S SPEECH

Jacob's speech, recorded in 2 Nephi 6–10, can be divided into two sections, the first being the Isaiah chapters quoted in chapters 6–8, and

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the second being Jacob's commentary on the passages quoted. Though the record does not state when the speech was given or the specific circumstances leading to the speech, we do know that it was delivered in the land of Nephi, probably at the temple. More importantly, the reason for the speech is given both in 2 Nephi 9:1 and 10:22, where Jacob explains that he quoted the scriptures from Isaiah so his people "might know concerning the covenants of the Lord" (9:1) and how, through those covenants, "the Lord remembereth all them who have been broken off, wherefore he remembereth us also" (10:22). These two references suggest that the Nephites did not understand their covenant relationship with God. They likely believed that because they were "broken off," the covenant itself had been broken. This sense of being broken off from the covenant arises from their loss of land, as Jacob states: "We have been driven out of the land of our inheritance" (10:20).

The Nephite concern of being driven out of the lands of inheritance would have been understood to have covenantal implications as the promise of lands of inheritance are found in the covenant between God and Abraham and later reestablished with Israel in Sinai. Beginning in Genesis 13:14–15, Abraham is promised "all the land which thou seest" (v. 15). This promise is then given to his descendants as well: "To thee will I give it, and to thy seed forever" (v. 15). The promise is reiterated in Genesis 15:18: "Unto thy seed have I given this land," and in Genesis 17:8: "And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land . . . for an everlasting possession." Thus, tied in to the promises of posterity and priesthood is the granting of lands of inheritance to Abraham and his seed. Generations later, when Israel was delivered from Egypt, God reiterates these promises with those who were to enter the promised land (see Exodus 12:25; Deuteronomy 6:3; 19:8; 27:3; Joshua 23:5).

This promise of land was contingent on Israel's personal righteousness. On Mount Nebo, immediately prior to Israel's entering of the promised land, Moses warns the people of the curses that would be placed on Israel if they were disobedient. These curses conclude with God's warning that Israel would "be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth" (Deuteronomy 28:25) and that "the Lord shall bring thee . . .

unto a nation which neither thou nor thy fathers have known" (v. 36). Finally, the curse was directly connected to the Abrahamic covenant: "And ye shall be left few in number, whereas ye were as the stars of heaven for multitude. . . . And ye shall be plucked from off the land whither thou goest to possess it. And the Lord shall scatter thee among all people, from the one end of the earth even unto the other. . . . And among these nations shalt thou find no ease. . . . And the Lord shall bring thee into Egypt again" (vv. 62–68). In these references, Israel's unrighteousness is the cause of their being forced out from the lands of inheritance. Thus, the loss of the promised land during the exile would be understood as being "cut off" from the covenant and Israel's relationship with God.<sup>1</sup> Yet being "cut off" had other implications as well. The term is also used elsewhere in the Old Testament to refer to death.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, being cut off from the land of inheritance would have been viewed as a form of death.<sup>3</sup>

The Nephites, like their Israelite counterparts, were in exile from their homelands, having been driven out not once, but twice, first from Jerusalem and second from the land of first inheritance in the New World. Though Jacob's reference to the term *cut off* does not mean death, he does describe his people as a "lonesome and a solemn people, wanderers, cast out from Jerusalem, born in tribulation, in a wilderness, and hated of [their] brethren," and they "did mourn out [their] days" (Jacob 7:26).<sup>4</sup> Clearly, the Nephites felt abandoned, lost, and without a homeland. This passage describes a people who feel that they do not belong anywhere, that they do not have a place to provide identity or meaning. Being Israelites, the lack of a land to call their own would have been especially painful since their identity as God's chosen people specifically includes a promised land of inheritance. It would seem then that the loss of land led the Nephites to a sense of having a broken covenant relationship with God. Thus, they experience a sense of being lost, abandoned, and "cut off."<sup>5</sup>

#### SEPARATION IN MORONI'S INITIAL "LAST" SPEECH

This same sense of abandonment and separation can be found in the account of Moroni following the destruction of Nephite society. These feelings are recorded in Moroni's "last" speech delivered at the

end of his father's record, chapters 8 and 9 of Mormon. Though these chapters are not, in fact, Moroni's last words, it appears that Moroni believed they would be such. In the first few verses of Mormon 8, Moroni writes: "The Nephites who had escaped into the country southward were hunted by the Lamanites, until they were all destroyed. And my father also was killed by them, and I even remain alone" (vv. 2–3). He reiterates this loneliness a few verses later: "I am alone. My father hath been slain in battle, and all my kinsfolk, and I have not friends nor whither to go" (v. 5). At this point, it is clear that Moroni is completely isolated, having no one to turn to or to provide companionship.

Though Mormon expresses that he does not know "whither to go," in both verses 4 and 5, the context in which this expression appears in verse 4 is significant. In verse 4, the clause "whither I go it mattereth not" means that not only is there no place for Moroni to go but there is no reason to go anywhere. It no longer matters. This lack of caring for his well-being reveals the extent of his sense of loss.<sup>6</sup> In verse 7, he writes, "And behold, the Lamanites have hunted my people, the Nephites, down from city to city and from place to place, even until they are no more." It is hard to imagine an existence like this. Not only is Moroni lacking a home, but he is also hunted from place to place. Thus, there is no closure for Moroni. He cannot stay long enough to mourn for his dead, but instead he must constantly move to avoid capture. The added stress of having to always look over his shoulder in fear would have only heightened his sense of loneliness and abandonment.

Yet though his description of the loss of family and land is moving, the implication of being cut off from God is perhaps even more poignant. Mentioned twice in verses 3 and 5 are his statements that he does not know God's will.<sup>7</sup> Certainly this lack of knowledge does not come from his own personal unrighteousness, nor does it suggest that he has not asked God for support. Nevertheless, the fact that he has not received revelation suggests that his prayers have gone temporarily unanswered.

Significantly, throughout this speech Moroni feels it necessary to continually make mention of his own failings. For instance, in verse 12 he speaks of the imperfections that may exist in the record. In verse 17, he speaks again of the faults that may be in the record, but now relates

them to his own faults: "And if there be faults they be the faults of a man." Finally in Mormon 9:31, these faults are made explicitly personal: "Condemn me not because of mine imperfection, neither my father, because his imperfection, neither them who have written before him; but rather give thanks unto God that he hath made manifest unto you our imperfections, that ye may learn to be more wise than we have been."

This context sets the scene for the last two chapters. These are not happy messages; instead Moroni focuses on the negative consequences that he sees unfolding in latter days. Though he admits that he knows of the "great and marvelous things" that will happen, his words are filled with warning and condemnation. For instance, chapter 8 ends with the warning that the sword of vengeance hangs over our heads and is ready to fall. While the warnings and exhortations are true and should be heeded, they also demonstrate the sense of loss that Moroni is experiencing. Moroni warns a later covenant people that, like his own people, their actions will lead to their being cut off from God.<sup>8</sup>

Moroni's sense of being cast out also reveals itself in his words concerning the covenant. In 8:23, after stating that he has no room to write any Isaiah passages, he adds: "Yea, behold I say unto you, that those saints who have gone before me, who have possessed this land, shall cry, yea, even from the dust will they cry unto the Lord; and as the Lord liveth he will remember the covenant which he hath made with them."

While it is true that the Book of Mormon literally emerged from the dust, the association of broken covenants and death provides added meaning to this statement by Moroni. In chapter 9, verse 30, he repeats the concept for himself: "Behold, I speak unto you as though I spake from the dead." Though he is addressing an audience who will read these things after his death, it also affirms the sense found elsewhere that, having lost all, he is as being dead.

Finally, the entire speech ends with the plea: "May God the Father remember the covenant which he hath made with the house of Israel" (Mormon 9:31), suggesting that, for the time, the covenant is not in force because of unworthiness by the Nephites, with Moroni feeling all the effects of the broken covenant, being left utterly alone and bereft of purpose.

## RECONCILIATION IN JACOB'S SPEECH

But all is not lost. As powerful as the theme of separation and abandonment may be in the Book of Mormon, even more powerful is the theme of reconciliation, that the sense of loss and of being cut off can be overcome. This is certainly the case in Jacob's speech as he sought to convey a sense of hope to those who felt cut off and forgotten by God. While acknowledging that the Nephites had been driven out, Jacob goes on to say: "Let us remember him, and lay aside our sins, and not hang down our heads, for we are not cast off" (2 Nephi 10:20). Jacob makes an important distinction here that is lacking in the Old Testament explanations of being cut off. Though the Nephites had been physically separated from their lands of inheritance, this did not necessarily mean that they were cast off from God.

This message is reinforced throughout the Isaiah passages quoted by Jacob. Using the imagery of God as warrior, Jacob emphasizes God's ability and character as Israel's deliverer. In 2 Nephi 6:17 we read, "For the Mighty God shall deliver his covenant people.<sup>9</sup> For thus saith the Lord: I will contend with them that contendeth with thee." In chapter 7, Isaiah states, "Yea, for thus saith the Lord: Have I put thee away, or have I cast thee off forever? . . . And the Lord is near, and he justifieth me. . . . For the Lord God will help me" (vv. 1, 8–9). Chapter 8 is replete with promises of God's deliverance, including verse 12: "I am he; yea, I am he that comforteth you."

Jacob begins his own discourse in chapter 9 by stating that he offered the passages from Isaiah so that "ye might know concerning the covenants of the Lord that he has covenanted with all the house of Israel, . . . that they shall be restored to the true church and fold of God; when they shall be gathered home to the lands of their inheritance, and shall be established in all their lands of promise" (vv. 1–2). Thus, Jacob's message was one of hope and eventual return, that the covenants were still, somehow, in effect. As he states in verse 3: "My beloved brethren, I speak unto you these things that ye may rejoice, and lift up your heads forever." Central to his message is the role of Jesus as the Christ, the one anointed to deliver them. As pointed out, being cut off was associated with death; thus Jacob begins to emphasize the role of Christ as one who must be cut off from the Father in order to provide us with

life: "For it behooveth the great Creator that he suffereth himself to become subject unto man in the flesh, and die for all men . . . to fulfil the merciful plan of the great Creator" (vv. 5–6).

This understanding of Christ as our deliverer from death and abandonment is also found in Alma's words to the people of Gideon. Like Jacob, he speaks of Christ's ability to care for us: "And he shall go forth, suffering pains and afflictions, and temptations of every kind. . . . And he will take upon him death" (Alma 7:11–12). Though we often ponder Christ's physical suffering and death, too often we forget His spiritual suffering, particularly on the cross. Though the physical pain was tremendous, it is his cry, "Eli, Eli lama sabachthani? My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" that demonstrates a completely different level of suffering. There, on the cross, Christ experienced something so unique and alien to Him that He cried out in anguish. For the first time in His mortality, Christ was forsaken by His Father—cut off from God. His cry suggests His surprise and shock at experiencing this ultimate abandonment.<sup>10</sup>

Back in Alma 7 we are told that Christ experienced these things, "that he may know . . . how to succor his people." The word *succor* means "to run to."<sup>11</sup> Thus, Christ experienced all things so He would know how to succor His people, or, in other words, know how to run to them and be able to get to them, no matter how lost, abandoned, or cut off they are. He performed the Atonement, both in the garden and on the cross, to gain the power and knowledge necessary to be able to succor. It is Christ's succoring that is Jacob's message of hope.

Moreover, as Jacob points out, the true land of inheritance promised in the covenants was not an earthly possession but a heavenly one, made possible through Christ: "Behold, the righteous, the saints of the Holy One of Israel, they who have believed in the Holy One of Israel, . . . they shall inherit the kingdom of God, which was prepared for them from the foundation of the world" (2 Nephi 9:18). This is reinforced at the end of his speech: "Wherefore, may God raise you from death . . . that ye may be received into the eternal kingdom of God" (2 Nephi 10:25). This is the true land of inheritance, not some earthly land that can be lost. Regardless of physical land, covenantal worthiness brings upon one the blessings of a place in the eternal kingdom of God. With

this as his message, Jacob exhorts: “And now behold, the Lord remembereth all them who have been broken off, wherefore he remembereth us also. Therefore, cheer up your hearts” (2 Nephi 10:22–23).<sup>12</sup>

### RECONCILIATION IN MORONI'S FINAL WORDS

Moroni's true last speech in Moroni 10 expresses a similar hope in the reconciliation with God made possible through Christ's Atonement. Mormon chapters 8–9 emphasize Moroni's loneliness and separation; his abandonment and forsaken state from his family, people, and God; and provides warnings for us about similar states based on unworthiness. Moroni 10, however, stresses the reconciliation made possible through Christ.

Not surprisingly, Moroni demonstrates this reconciliation through the writings of Isaiah. In fact, Moroni uses the same passage from Isaiah that Jacob ends with: “And awake, and arise from the dust, O Jerusalem; yea, and put on thy beautiful garments, O daughter of Zion” (Moroni 10:31). This is then followed by another passage from Isaiah: “And strengthen thy stakes and enlarge thy borders forever” (v. 31). These two verses from Isaiah 52 and 54 refer to the eventual return of the tribes of Israel to their lands of inheritance and are used by both Christ and Jacob to emphasize that Israel is not cut off if her people will come unto Christ.<sup>13</sup> Importantly, both suggest that it is Israel who determines the outcome. It is Israel who, though driven out, can still stand up and strengthen her stakes. By doing these things, “the covenants of the Eternal Father which he hath made unto thee, O house of Israel, may be fulfilled” (v.31), which is exactly what he pled for at the end of the earlier “last” speech.

In Moroni 10:32, he once again exhorts Israel to “come unto Christ, and be perfected in him.” Like Jacob, Moroni points out that the true covenant is not necessarily about land possession but about coming to the Father: “And again, if ye by the grace of God are perfect in Christ, . . . then are ye sanctified in Christ by the grace of God, through the shedding of the blood of Christ, which is in the covenant of the Father, . . . that ye may become holy” (v. 33). In fact, this is the context of the entire chapter: by seeking personal revelation one can be reconciled with God. Nothing has changed physically for Moroni since the events



## "WE ARE NOT CUT OFF" 121

described in Mormon 8. He is still alone and wandering, but the sense of abandonment and loss is missing in this chapter. Instead of warning us of being cut off from God, he encourages us to come unto Christ. Instead of a sword of vengeance bringing judgment and separation, he looks forward to uniting with us before the "pleasing bar" of God (see Moroni 10:34).

## "THAT THEY MAY KNOW"

While we are separated by the events described within the Book of Mormon by hundreds, even thousands of years, this does not mean that its writers do not speak to us. The Nephite concerns of abandonment, loss, and feeling cut off are not unique experiences but are all too common emotions experienced today. As Moroni rightly points out, the sense of isolation and loneliness and of being cast out is characteristic of our time.<sup>14</sup> Whether through our own errors or the mistakes and sins of others, we will all experience the trials and tribulations of being cut off like the ancient Israelites. The Book of Mormon's message resonates within all of us when we too cry out to our Heavenly Father in times of need.

Yet the Book of Mormon's messages of hope and reconciliation are just as applicable as the negative experiences mentioned above. Through the words of the ancient prophets, we learn that it is our covenant relationship with God that allows us to have both communion with Him and an eternal inheritance. Though we may be experiencing isolation and loneliness, even being cast away from those we care about, we are not cut off—thanks to the covenants made possible through the Atonement of Christ. His power to succor us as demonstrated in the Book of Mormon means that we need never feel cut off or alone. Thus, the necessity of the Book of Mormon is revealed as it demonstrates the true power of our covenants and of the Atonement of Christ. Moroni's explanation of the purpose of the book, that we "may know the covenants of the Lord, that [we] are not cast off forever" (Book of Mormon title page), whispers to us still, providing peace and reconciliation with God and promising that our true inheritance, eternal life with Him, has not been forgotten.

## NOTES

1. In 1 Kings 9:6–7, the Lord, speaking to Solomon, promises that He would be with Solomon as long as he remained obedient but then warns: “But if ye shall at all turn from following me . . . and will not keep my commandments and my statutes, . . . then will I cut off Israel out of the land which I have given them; and this house, which I have hallowed for my name, will I cast out of my sight.” Similarly in the Psalms, the righteous are promised an earthly inheritance, while the wicked are cursed with being cut off (see Psalm 37:22, 34). “Adversity—drought, famine, epidemic, defeat, or whatever—could be accounted for by reference to a violation of covenant obligations. Conversely, the prosperity and tranquility of either the past or the coming age could be seen as a consequence of faithful partnership with God” (Jon D. Levenson, *Sinai and Zion: An Entry into the Jewish Bible* [New York: Harper Collins, 1986], 55); see also Stephen L. Cook, *The Social Roots of Biblical Yahwism*, Studies in Biblical Literature 8 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004).

2. See Isaiah 53:8: “For he was cut off out of the land of the living,” and Psalm 88:4–5: “I am like . . . the slain that lie in the grave, whom thou rememberest no more: and they are cut off from thy hand”; see also Saul M. Olyan, “We Are Utterly Cut Off”: Some Possible Nuances of לֹנֵן in Ezek 37:11,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* (2003), 43–51.

3. The connection between the dead and the lands of inheritance is also intriguing since the family burial grounds would have been on the family’s land of inheritance: “An ancestral tomb, whether located on inherited land or in the village cemetery, served as a physical, perpetual claim to the patrimony. . . . Interment in the family tomb guaranteed a continuous claim to the *nah’la* or patrimony, and propitiatory post-mortem care for the ancestors with its consequent benefits for the living” (Elizabeth Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices and Beliefs about the Dead* [Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992], 146, 150).

4. The imagery of being in the wilderness was often used in the scriptures to describe separation from family and God. “Wilderness imagery does not express beauty, success, or security. It crystallizes abject fear, destruction, and desolation” (Shemaryahu Talmon, “The ‘Desert Motif’ in the Bible and in Qumran Literature,” *Biblical Motifs: Origins and Transformations*, ed. Alexander Altmann [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966], 45); see also Robert Barry Leal, *Wilderness in the Bible: Toward a Theology of Wilderness*, Studies in Biblical Literature 72 [New York: Peter Lang, 2004].

5. This same sense of loss is also addressed by Nephi in 1 Nephi 19:24, immediately preceding a quote from Isaiah: “Hear ye the words of the prophet, ye who are a remnant of the house of Israel, a branch who have been broken off; hear ye the words of the prophet . . . that ye may have hope as well as your brethren from whom ye have been broken off.” Unfortunately, the land of Nephi does not remain their land of inheritance since they are driven out again because of unrighteousness

into the land of Zarahemla, a land already inhabited. Unlike the Canaanites in the Old Testament, the descendants of Mulek are allowed to remain. That at least some Nephites continue to feel driven out can be seen in the Nephite expedition to reclaim the land of Nephi recorded in Mosiah 9–24. Later, Captain Moroni also reveals the Nephite sense of loss when writing to Ammoron. Captain Moroni declares: "I will arm my women and my children, and I will come against you, and I will follow you even into your own land, which is the land of *our* first inheritance" (Alma 54:12; emphasis added). He repeats this later in verse 13: "Behold, if ye seek to destroy us more . . . we will seek *our* land, the land of *our* first inheritance" (emphasis added). Since Ammoron is residing in the land of Nephi, it is probably this particular land to which Captain Moroni is referring.

6. A lack of caring for one's own well-being is a symptom of depression. Though Moroni may not be suffering from a full case of depression, having witnessed not only the destruction of his civilization, but also the continuing destruction of Lamanite civilization, it would not be surprising to see Moroni exhibit some characteristics of depression.

7. Mormon 8:3: "Whether they will slay me, I know not;" 8:5: "How long the Lord will suffer that I may live I know not."

8. In Mormon 8:21, he warns those who work against the covenant that they are in danger of being cast into the fire. In Mormon 9:3–4, he speaks of being unable to be in the presence of God. In 9:26, he states that those who despise the works of the Lord "shall wonder and perish." Finally, in 9:29, he proclaims, that we must be baptized worthily, partake of the sacrament worthily, and do all things in the name of Christ to keep from being "cast out."

9. Interestingly, this clause is not found in the biblical Isaiah, nor in the same quoted passage in 1 Nephi 21:24, suggesting that it was added by Jacob to emphasize the meaning of the original Isaiah.

10. James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1954), 660–61: "At the ninth hour, or about three in the afternoon, a loud voice, surpassing the most anguished cry of physical suffering issued from the central cross, rending the dreadful darkness. It was the voice of Christ: '*Eloí, Eloí, lama sabachthani? which is, being interpreted, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*' What mind of man can fathom the significance of that awful cry? It seems, that in addition to the fearful suffering incident to crucifixion, the agony of Gethsemane had recurred, intensified beyond human power to endure. In that bitterest hour the dying Christ was alone, alone in most terrible reality."

11. The word *succor* literally means "to run towards," from the Latin prefix *suc/sub* (toward) and the verb *currere* (to run).

12. This understanding for the promise of land is also recognized by Abraham himself. In Hebrews 11, Paul states that the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob "all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, . . . and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. . . . They desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city" (vv. 13, 16).

## 124 DANIEL L. BELNAP

13. In 3 Nephi 20:36–37, Christ quotes Isaiah 52:1–2 in reference to Israel being restored to their lands of inheritance. Importantly, the restoration of lands of inheritance is then associated not necessarily with physical land, but with salvation or redemption, and the fulfillment of covenants: “Then will the Father gather them together again, and give unto them Jerusalem for the land of their inheritance. Then shall they break forth into joy—Sing together, ye waste places of Jerusalem; for the Father hath comforted his people, he hath redeemed Jerusalem. . . . Verily, verily, I say unto you, all these things shall surely come, even as the Father hath commanded me. Then shall this covenant which the Father hath covenanted with his people be fulfilled” (3 Nephi 20:33–34, 46). The relationship between God’s comfort and the fulfillment of His covenant is also expressed in 2 Nephi 8:12, where the Lord states that He will comfort His people by delivering them.

14. A similar experience can be found in Doctrine and Covenants 121:1. After five months of extreme persecution and suffering of the Church, Joseph Smith pleaded that God reveal Himself. Like Moroni, Joseph had earlier prayed for alleviation of the Saints’ suffering.