

What's in a Name?

In the Book of Mormon we have nothing like the instances in the Bible where the Lord changed people's names¹, but there are some interesting stories about others changing names². However, I am even more interested in some of the names that *weren't* changed, but became significant through usage.

The first is the name Mormon. The name came from a land close to the land of Nephi, and apparently was named by either King Zeniff or King Noah³. Of course, we are most familiar with the name because one of the last Nephite generals was named Mormon, and he received the assignment from the Lord to create the abridgment of the Nephite history which we know as the Book of Mormon. Because the church founded by Joseph Smith was largely identified through their use of that book, the church was called the Mormon church. Although the brethren in the last few years have encouraged us to refer to the church by its formal name, and deemphasize the use of the name "Mormon," we are still widely known by that name. What does it mean to be called "Mormons"?

First, Mormon was a great leader. The people looked to him to save them from the Nephites after everything else had failed⁴. They felt his strength which came from righteousness, even when they were not righteous. Do we project that righteous leadership?

Second, Mormon was faithful in the face of overwhelming opposition. Even when it became clear to him that the Nephite people was beyond hope he persisted in his mission⁵, counting obedience as more important than anything else. Do we rationalize away our obedience because of the wickedness of others?

Finally, Mormon was righteously prepared for any mission the Lord should assign him⁶ - general, prophet, historian, Mormon was ready. Have we ever tried to dictate to the Lord what callings we will or will not fulfill?

Technically it is incorrect to call us "Mormons", but if we are so called,

1 Abraham – Genesis 17:5; Sarah – Genesis 17:15; Israel – Genesis 32:28

2 Nephi – Jacob 1:11; Anti-Nephi-Lehi – Alma 24:3

3 Mosiah 18:4

4 Mormon 5:1

5 Moroni 9:6

6 Mormon 1:15

are we worthy of the name?

There is, of course, a much more important name by which we are to be called which figures prominently in the Book of Mormon – the name of Christ. When Alma the Elder was baptizing⁷ and when Benjamin was preaching⁸, the name of Christ was given to the people as a powerful symbol of whom they should follow, and as the only source of their salvation. However, it was Christ himself who gave a most important insight into the use of his name.

In 3 Nephi Chapter 27 the disciples pray to Christ to know the name they should give to the church. In verse 8 Christ gives an answer which first appears rather simple, but on reflection becomes very profound.

And how be it my church save it be called in my name? For if a church be called in Moses' name then it be Moses' church; or if it be called in the name of a man then it be the church of a man; but if it be called in my name then it is my church, if it so be that they are built upon my gospel.

The name is important, as it is the reflection of the motivation behind what we do. It is not sufficient to do good works, we must do them in the name of Christ. On the other hand, the name alone is likewise insufficient if the works are not based in Christ. We can take upon us the name of Christ, but it is only efficacious if we do it by his power and in his way. Just because we take upon us the name doesn't mean that the name belongs to us, it still belongs to Him who bore it – and so do we.

The final significance of the name then is in fact the ownership⁹. It is the powerful symbol of who is our shepherd¹⁰, the title of ownership of Him who leads us. Are we truly Latter-day saints? Are we truly Christians? Then let us do His works, let us follow His lead. We may never be able to claim to be worthy of His name, but we are authorized to use it and to seek to magnify it.

7 Mosiah 18:10

8 Mosiah 5:8

9 This also explains the brethren's concern over the name by which we are known – we do not belong to Mormon, we belong to Christ.

10 Alma 5:38