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## Book of Mormon Minute, Volume 2: Jacob through Mosiah

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**Abstract:** The Book of Mormon Minute is a verse-by-verse commentary that was custom-designed for the ScripturePlus app. Each installment covers one to three verses, and ideally can be read in one minute. This commentary focuses on the subtle yet important hand of Mormon in telling the Nephite story. The author, Brant Gardner, will often highlight ways that Mormon makes this narrative truly stunning. In addition, Gardner will touch on points of Nephite history and culture. This commentary is an excellent way to deeply engage with every verse in the Book of Mormon in an easy, digestible way.

# Preface

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The Book of Mormon Minute commentary was created for the ScripturePlus app. It continues to be part of the app. The idea for the commentary was to have something that could be read in a short amount of time yet provide illumination for a set of verses. This version is lightly edited from the text as it appears in the app. It simply changes the format to provide a different way to access the information for those for whom it makes their experience with the text and the commentary easier.

Because the author has also written a more formal commentary on the Book of Mormon (*Second Witness: An Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, Kofford Books, 2007), it is appropriate to note the way in which the Book of Mormon Minutes differs from that more complete commentary. The Book of Mormon Minutes were written fresh, without directly consulting *Second Witness*. Thus, they may contain insights that at times differ from those in *Second Witness* because they were written over fifteen years later, and the author must have learned something in the interim. The Book of Mormon Minutes were also written with a more general audience in mind.

One place where there is a continuation of an aspect of *Second Witness*, and a difference from the text in the app is that this edition standardizes on Yahweh as the name for the pre-Mortal Jesus rather than the more heavily Anglicized name Jahweh. The reason is that it is hoped that the shift in name can free readers from some ideas that might be brought to the text based on the way that name has been used.

Beginning with the book of Mosiah, this commentary uses subscript numbers to differentiate between individuals sharing the same name. In the book of Mosiah, there are two: Mosiah<sub>1</sub> (father of Benjamin) and Mosiah<sub>2</sub> (son of Benjamin), and Alma<sub>1</sub> (father) and Alma<sub>2</sub> (son)

# **The Book of Jacob**



# Jacob 1

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## ***Jacob: Header***

*The words of his preaching unto his brethren. He confoundeth a man who seeketh to overthrow the doctrine of Christ. A few words concerning the history of the people of Nephi.*

## ***Comments***

The book headers in Nephi, and later in Mormon's edited chapters, suggest that they were written prior to the content of the book. They serve as an outline of the intended content. They do not necessarily represent all of the content. For example, the book header for 2 Nephi spoke only of the historical events. That book header has nothing that covers the material from 2 Nephi 6 through 33.

This makes the header for the book of Jacob more interesting. We will see that there is a gap between the content of Jacob's sermon and his account of the incident with Sherem, yet both of those are included in the book header. This suggests that both were intended to be included, and therefore suggests that the whole of the book of Jacob may have been written after the header, and therefore after the incident with Sherem. That makes the entire book of Jacob a reminiscence, rather than having been written during the events recounted.

Nevertheless, there is also evidence that Jacob wrote in three distinct sections. The first two sections are sermons and would fall under the idea that he wrote what he preached. Perhaps the section on Sherem was appended after the fact.

## **Jacob Keeps the Record**

### ***Jacob 1:1–4***

1 For behold, it came to pass that fifty and five years had passed away from the time that Lehi left Jerusalem; wherefore, Nephi gave me, Jacob, a commandment concerning the small plates, upon which these things are engraven.

2 And he gave me, Jacob, a commandment that I should write upon these plates a few of the things which I considered to be most precious; that I should not touch, save it were lightly, concerning the history of this people which are called the people of Nephi.

3 For he said that the history of his people should be engraven upon his other plates, and that I should preserve these plates and hand them down unto my seed, from generation to generation.

4 And if there were preaching which was sacred, or revelation which was great, or prophesying, that I should engraven the heads of them upon these plates, and touch upon them as much as it were possible, for Christ's sake, and for the sake of our people.

### *Comments*

Fifty-five years after leaving Jerusalem, Nephi gave the small plates to his brother, Jacob. There is no way to know how long before Nephi died that he gave them to Jacob, but we may surmise that Nephi felt that his end was near and that was the impetus to give up the plates.

When Jacob received them, they came with instructions. Nephi had created two sets of plates. The one that dealt with the reigns of the kings stayed with the kings. In this separate set of plates, which was to travel a very different line of transmission, the content was to be different. Nephi declared in 1 Nephi 9:9 that this set of plates was to contain the more part of the ministry. The instructions to Jacob continued the theme that they should only lightly touch history but should rather deal with “preaching which was sacred, or revelation which was great.” It was all preaching or all revelation. It was the most important teachings and revelations.

That is the intent of the phrase “engraven the heads of them upon these plates.” In this case, the “heads” indicates the most important aspects. Research into Protestant sermons contemporary with Joseph Smith strongly suggest that the word is related to that sermon tradition where the sections of an extemporaneous sermon were called “heads.”

### ***Jacob 1:5–8***

5 For because of faith and great anxiety, it truly had been made manifest unto us concerning our people, what things should happen unto them.

6 And we also had many revelations, and the spirit of much prophecy; wherefore, we knew of Christ and his kingdom, which should come.

7 Wherefore we labored diligently among our people, that we might persuade them to come unto Christ, and partake of the goodness of God, that they might enter into his rest, lest by any means he should swear in his wrath they should not enter in, as in the provocation in the days of temptation while the children of Israel were in the wilderness.

8 Wherefore, we would to God that we could persuade all men not to rebel against God, to provoke him to anger, but that all men would believe in Christ, and view his death, and suffer his cross and

bear the shame of the world; wherefore, I, Jacob, take it upon me to fulfil the commandment of my brother Nephi.

### *Comments*

Nephi told Jacob to record the most important preaching and revelation. Jacob notes that they did receive revelations. For Jacob, the most important revelation was the same as it was for Nephi. They “knew of Christ and his kingdom, which should come.” Jacob does not give any information about how those revelations might have differed from what Nephi had written. It sufficed that they knew of this Messiah who was to come. Phrases discussing what was to come in the Book of Mormon typically point to the mortal mission of the Messiah.

Jacob declares that he taught as did Nephi. The preaching was to bring his people to the understanding of the atoning Messiah. As with Nephi, we may expect that Jacob also taught that the law of Moses was to be lived while understanding the future atonement and its present meaning.

Having stated the commission Nephi gave him concerning the plates, Jacob declares that he did “take it upon me to fulfil the commandment of my brother Nephi.”

## **The Current State of Affairs**

### ***Jacob 1:9–12***

9 Now Nephi began to be old, and he saw that he must soon die; wherefore, he anointed a man to be a king and a ruler over his people now, according to the reigns of the kings.

10 The people having loved Nephi exceedingly, he having been a great protector for them, having wielded the sword of Laban in their defence, and having labored in all his days for their welfare—

11 Wherefore, the people were desirous to retain in remembrance his name. And whoso should reign in his stead were called by the people, second Nephi, third Nephi, and so forth, according to the reigns of the kings; and thus they were called by the people, let them be of whatever name they would.

12 And it came to pass that Nephi died.

### *Comments*

When we see the comment that someone “began to be old” in the Book of Mormon, we are being notified that they are about to die. Thus, in verse 9 Nephi begins to be old, and in verse 12 “it came to pass that Nephi died.”

The rest of the information Jacob gives is part of the command to only touch lightly on history. This is important history, even more important because we have lost the 116 pages that would have given us more of this history. We knew that Nephi was a king, and here Jacob notes that, as is typical, he was followed by kings. Jacob does not say that the next king was Nephi’s son, but that is the logical assumption.

What Jacob does state is that when the next king ascended to the throne, he was called Nephi. What is not clear is whether this is a name change, or whether the designation of Nephi became a term for the king. Julius Caesar was the emperor, and subsequent emperors bore the title Caesar along with their own name.

It is also interesting that Jacob tells us that Nephi “wielded the sword of Laban” in defense of his people. In Words of Mormon 1:3 we will learn that king Benjamin also wielded the sword of Laban in defense of his people. After that time, we see the sword as a sacred relic, but not necessarily as functional in battle. Of course, even in these cases, it may have been more symbolic. With a hilt of pure gold, Laban’s sword was probably more ceremonial than military.

### ***Jacob 1:13–14***

13 Now the people which were not Lamanites were Nephites; nevertheless, they were called Nephites, Jacobites, Josephites, Zoramites, Lamanites, Lemuelites, and Ishmaelites.

14 But I, Jacob, shall not hereafter distinguish them by these names, but I shall call them Lamanites that seek to destroy the people of Nephi, and those who are friendly to Nephi I shall call Nephites, or the people of Nephi, according to the reigns of the kings.

### ***Comments***

These two verses are critical for understanding the rest of the Book of Mormon. Jacob begins with two names that will form the essential cultural dichotomy in the Book of Mormon, Lamanites and Nephites. The statement begins by noting that those who are not Lamanites are Nephites. It is a binary division.

Jacob explains that these two collective terms include tribal names. There are Jacobites, Josephites, Zoramites, Lemuelites, and so forth, but Lamanite and Nephite are not used in the sense of tribal designations. Specifically, Jacob says “I shall call them Lamanites that seek to destroy the people of Nephi, and those who are friendly to Nephi I shall call Nephites.”

This begins the essential division between “us” and “them” which characterizes so many ancient societies. The division is not tribal and is in no way genetic. It is a political designation, which explains how it is so easy for Book of Mormon peoples to cross the boundaries. Lamanites easily become Nephites by believing as Nephites do, and when Nephites no longer believe as Nephites are supposed to, they become Lamanites. As Jacob says, the difference is whether anyone is friendly or an enemy.

It is also important to remember that it was Nephi who discussed the cursing of the Lamanites and their skin of blackness. For Jacob, that doesn’t enter into his discussion of the difference between Lamanite and Nephite at all—except that the skin of blackness defines the character of the enemy. Most importantly, Jacob never says that skin pigment was a difference. It is only whether one is a friend or an enemy.



## ***Jacob 1:15–19***

15 And now it came to pass that the people of Nephi, under the reign of the second king, began to grow hard in their hearts, and indulge themselves somewhat in wicked practices, such as like unto David of old desiring many wives and concubines, and also Solomon, his son.

16 Yea, and they also began to search much gold and silver, and began to be lifted up somewhat in pride.

17 Wherefore I, Jacob, gave unto them these words as I taught them in the temple, having first obtained mine errand from the Lord.

18 For I, Jacob, and my brother Joseph had been consecrated priests and teachers of this people, by the hand of Nephi.

19 And we did magnify our office unto the Lord, taking upon us the responsibility, answering the sins of the people upon our own heads if we did not teach them the word of God with all diligence; wherefore, by laboring with our might their blood might not come upon our garments; otherwise their blood would come upon our garments, and we would not be found spotless at the last day.

### ***Comments***

In 2 Nephi 33:2 Nephi said: “there are many that harden their hearts against the Holy Spirit, that it hath no place in them.” That is the people that Jacob, as a priest, has inherited. Nephi saw it happening, and Jacob either assigns it to the reign of the second king or suggests that it has intensified. What we see at the end of verse 15 and in verse 16 are the twin evils of “many wives and concubines,” and beginning “to search much gold and silver, manifest in beginning to be lifted up somewhat in pride. These are the themes of the discourse Jacob will include, beginning in the next chapter.

Both Jacob and his brother, Joseph, were consecrated priests and teachers. These titles should be seen as functions, not priesthood designations as we might see them in the modern church. It is within his responsibility as a priest and a teacher that Jacob gave a sermon to the people concerting those two troublesome developments in Nephite society.



# Jacob 2

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## Jacob Preaches against Polygamy and Pride

### ***Jacob 2:1***

<sup>1</sup> The words which Jacob, the brother of Nephi, spake unto the people of Nephi, after the death of Nephi:

### *Comments*

There are two types of headers that are original to the original or printer's manuscripts. They were not separated from the rest of the text during dictation, so our present headers represent those that the compositor recognized.

The easy ones to see are the book headers. John Gilbert, the compositor, recognized these. The second type of header is a chapter header. Gilbert saw them more clearly when he was preparing the books of Mosiah and Alma. However, he missed them in the material from 1 Nephi through Words of Mormon. There are not many, but there are arguably two in Nephi's writings. One appears at the end of the book header for 1 Nephi. It should probably be set as a header. The second is for 2 Nephi 6, where verse 1 is the chapter header introducing the insertion of Jacob's sermon.

In this case, Jacob 2:1 should also have been set as a chapter header. This one is interesting because it is much more similar to the chapter header to 1 Nephi 1. Most chapter headers introduce inserted text from a different author. The chapter header for 1 Nephi 1 and this chapter header for Jacob 2 both introduce text by the main author. Nephi's first chapter header functions more as a declaration of authorship, but this chapter header does indicate the insertion of material given at a different time but included in the text. What follows is the content of a sermon that Jacob gave. The basic context for the sermon was indicated in Jacob 1. The two critical themes will be multiple wives and being puffed up which is associated with the search for gold and silver.

### ***Jacob 2:2–5***

<sup>2</sup> Now, my beloved brethren, I, Jacob, according to the responsibility which I am under to God, to magnify mine office with soberness, and that I might rid my garments of your sins, I come up into the temple this day that I might declare unto you the word of God.

3 And ye yourselves know that I have hitherto been diligent in the office of my calling; but I this day am weighed down with much more desire and anxiety for the welfare of your souls than I have hitherto been.

4 For behold, as yet, ye have been obedient unto the word of the Lord, which I have given unto you.

5 But behold, hearken ye unto me, and know that by the help of the all-powerful Creator of heaven and earth I can tell you concerning your thoughts, how that ye are beginning to labor in sin, which sin appeareth very abominable unto me, yea, and abominable unto God.

### *Comments*

Jacob begins his sermon telling his audience that it will not be a pleasant sermon. Jacob is there to call them to repentance. He is performing his duties so that their sins might not be accounted to his lack of proper instruction. He has been diligent in fulfilling the office of his calling, but now is weighed down, “with much more desire and anxiety for the welfare of your souls.”

Verses 4 and 5 form an interesting contrast. He first says that “ye have been obedient unto the word of the Lord,” but follows that with “ye are beginning to labor in sin.” That they were farther along than simply just *beginning* will become evident as he continues. If he is about to call them to repentance, why does he say that as yet they have been obedient?

The promise of the land is that the Nephites will be protected upon obedience. They have not been destroyed. Therefore, their obedience is at least sufficient to forego that destruction. Nephi was saddened by what he saw as the direction of his people, and Jacob confirms that they continue to head in the wrong direction. If they continue, then will the destruction come.

### ***Jacob 2:6–8***

6 Yea, it grieveth my soul and causeth me to shrink with shame before the presence of my Maker, that I must testify unto you concerning the wickedness of your hearts.

7 And also it grieveth me that I must use so much boldness of speech concerning you, before your wives and your children, many of whose feelings are exceedingly tender and chaste and delicate before God, which thing is pleasing unto God;

8 And it supposeth me that they have come up hither to hear the pleasing word of God, yea, the word which healeth the wounded soul.

### *Comments*

Jacob addresses his people at a crucial juncture in their development. They are a new nation, and they have been taught a new religion and new precepts. There were those among them who had been obedient

to God's laws, as evidenced when Jacob told them in verse 4 above that they had, "as of yet . . . been obedient unto the word of the Lord."

Nevertheless, Jacob has not come to speak of obedience, but rather of the path to disobedience. That same people of whom he said had as yet been obedient, here must be spoken to "concerning the wickedness of your hearts."

Verse 8 is particularly poignant. Jacob knows that they have come expecting some sermon that might make them feel good, to feel "the word which healeth the wounded soul." That is not what they are going to get. It will be a sermon to open wounds with the hope of cauterizing them, not to cover them and allow them to fester.

### ***Jacob 2:9–11***

9 Wherefore, it burdeneth my soul that I should be constrained, because of the strict commandment which I have received from God, to admonish you according to your crimes, to enlarge the wounds of those who are already wounded, instead of consoling and healing their wounds; and those who have not been wounded, instead of feasting upon the pleasing word of God have daggers placed to pierce their souls and wound their delicate minds.

10 But, notwithstanding the greatness of the task, I must do according to the strict commands of God, and tell you concerning your wickedness and abominations, in the presence of the pure in heart, and the broken heart, and under the glance of the piercing eye of the Almighty God.

11 Wherefore, I must tell you the truth according to the plainness of the word of God. For behold, as I inquired of the Lord, thus came the word unto me, saying: Jacob, get thou up into the temple on the morrow, and declare the word which I shall give thee unto this people.

### ***Comments***

What Jacob will preach comes as a commandment. It is a fascinating contrast between the people who are "as yet" obedient, but nevertheless are to be admonished "according to your crimes." That there is a contradiction between obedience and crimes is clear, and it suggests that Nephi society may have reached some tipping point where the actions of the majority slip from obedience to what Jacob will describe as their crimes.

We are looking at three verses in this section, and in each one Jacob declares that he is fulfilling Yahweh's commandment. In verse 11 he quotes Yahweh, telling him when and where to give this speech. With the reinforcement of being repeated three times in three verses, they—and we—are to understand that Yahweh has provided the substance of this sermon. The ills to be described are contrary to Yahweh's will, and therefore a prophet warns his people.

## Pride and Social Inequity Condemned

### ***Jacob 2:12***

12 And now behold, my brethren, this is the word which I declare unto you, that many of you have begun to search for gold, and for silver, and for all manner of precious ores, in the which this land, which is a land of promise unto you and to your seed, doth abound most plentifully.

### *Comments*

The first topic is the search for gold and silver. To understand more fully this sin, we need to understand some of the economics behind it. Modern readers see that they searched for gold and silver, and all manner of precious ores, and immediately assume that finding them led to wealth. We understand the California gold rush, where the lucky few did find gold and it made them wealthy.

What we miss in this verse is the final statement. Jacob tells them that gold and silver and precious ore “doth abound most plentifully.” That is the economic contradiction to value. One does not become rich by having what everyone else has in similar quantities. Wealth comes through scarcity. It was the very fact that only a few struck gold in California, and as a percentage of the population of the United States, only very few obtained the gold. That isn’t the inference in Jacob. In Jacob, these ores are plentiful.

Our first clue that we should read Jacob carefully is that our predisposition about the meaning of gold and silver may not inform the issues Jacob will discuss.

### ***Jacob 2:13–16***

13 And the hand of providence hath smiled upon you most pleasingly, that you have obtained many riches; and because some of you have obtained more abundantly than that of your brethren ye are lifted up in the pride of your hearts, and wear stiff necks and high heads because of the costliness of your apparel, and persecute your brethren because ye suppose that ye are better than they.

14 And now, my brethren, do ye suppose that God justifieth you in this thing? Behold, I say unto you, Nay. But he condemneth you, and if ye persist in these things his judgments must speedily come unto you.

15 O that he would show you that he can pierce you, and with one glance of his eye he can smite you to the dust!

16 O that he would rid you from this iniquity and abomination. And, O that ye would listen unto the word of his commands, and let not this pride of your hearts destroy your souls!

### *Comments*

Jacob had noted two positive things about his audience. The first was that, as yet, they had obeyed the commandments. The second was that they had come to “hear the pleasing word of the Lord.” Those two

positive comments establish the baseline against which he will now show the reality of their situation. Jacob had noted that they had searched for riches, and now notes that they have obtained them.

Jacob is not against riches. There is nothing in his sermon that suggests that riches are inherently problematic. What is a problem, however, is that “some of you have obtained more abundantly than that of your brethren.” Wealth isn’t the problem, it is the uneven distribution of that wealth.

However, it isn’t even the actual distribution of wealth. It is virtually impossible that all could be precisely equally rich. The problem isn’t the wealth itself, but the human reaction to that wealth. Because there are those who have accumulated more wealth, they consider themselves better than those who have not accumulated that wealth. The sin is that you “persecute your brethren because ye suppose that ye are better than they.” The sin is exalting oneself over another, particularly for something so worldly as wealth.

Perhaps this is a reason that Jacob noted that there were those in their society who had been obedient. For Jacob, the problem is the smaller set of people who assume that they are better than others. While that is probably a smaller number, it is also probably the more powerful in society. Human society tends to empower the rich, even though wealth may not display the type of leadership that social welfare might require.

### ***Jacob 2:17–19***

17 Think of your brethren like unto yourselves, and be familiar with all and free with your substance, that they may be rich like unto you.

18 But before ye seek for riches, seek ye for the kingdom of God.

19 And after ye have obtained a hope in Christ ye shall obtain riches, if ye seek them; and ye will seek them for the intent to do good—to clothe the naked, and to feed the hungry, and to liberate the captive, and administer relief to the sick and the afflicted.

### ***Comments***

In verses 18 and 19 Jacob clearly demonstrates that wealth is not the problem. It is fine to seek riches, but first we should seek the kingdom of God. Then we will have the necessary wealth to use it for the benefit of our fellow beings.

The idea expressed in verse 19 that the rich would use their wealth to clothe the naked and feed the hungry is the logical extension of verse 17’s injunction that they should “think of your brethren like unto yourselves, and be familiar with all and free with your substance.” In the ancient world, that was an understandable and important requirement.

Without attempting to diminish the value of caring for our brethren, we should also understand that the nature of economics and wealth were different in the ancient world. In the Old World, access to land

governed the ability to produce, and when land and goods were concentrated in fewer hands, there was less available for others. The ancient world had a concept of limited good. There was only so much wealth available, and if some people took a larger portion of that pie, there was less left for others. Thus, wealth was often considered to have been created by diminishing one's brethren.

Note Alma's definition of riches: "And now, because of the steadiness of the church they began to be exceedingly rich, having abundance of all things whatsoever they stood in need—an abundance of flocks and herds, and fatlings of every kind, and also abundance of grain, and of gold, and of silver, and of precious things, and abundance of silk and fine-twined linen, and all manner of good homely cloth" (Alma 1:29). Although some of these things might be considered the finer trappings of wealth, most of them indicate the ability to provide. If people have an abundance of flocks and herds and of grain, they will be able to eat. If any should fall prey to a natural disaster that might take away the produce of their fields, the excess that others have can fill their want.

In Nephite society, that was the ideal for wealth. It was a situation where all had what they needed, and if a need arose, those with the ability could care for those who had the need. In agricultural societies, that was often the result of the vicissitudes of weather and land, not will.

### ***Jacob 2:20–22***

20 And now, my brethren, I have spoken unto you concerning pride; and those of you which have afflicted your neighbor, and persecuted him because ye were proud in your hearts, of the things which God hath given you, what say ye of it?

21 Do ye not suppose that such things are abominable unto him who created all flesh? And the one being is as precious in his sight as the other. And all flesh is of the dust; and for the selfsame end hath he created them, that they should keep his commandments and glorify him forever.

22 And now I make an end of speaking unto you concerning this pride. And were it not that I must speak unto you concerning a grosser crime, my heart would rejoice exceedingly because of you.

### ***Comments***

Jacob concludes his discussion of the first grave sin of pride. Although it is placed in terms of the search for gold and silver and the accumulation of wealth, the issue is pride. Nothing in this conclusion returns to the theme of wealth. The problem was always pride. In Nephite society, pride will always be associated with social inequality, with considering one person to be better than another.

Jacob's setup statement for the next section should have been devastating to his audience. He has told them that their pride was an abomination to God, but that if that were their only problem, Jacob's "heart would rejoice exceedingly because of you." An even greater sin is to come.



## Unauthorized Polygamy Condemned

### ***Jacob 2:23–26***

23 But the word of God burdens me because of your grosser crimes. For behold, thus saith the Lord: This people begin to wax in iniquity; they understand not the scriptures, for they seek to excuse themselves in committing whoredoms, because of the things which were written concerning David, and Solomon his son.

24 Behold, David and Solomon truly had many wives and concubines, which thing was abominable before me, saith the Lord.

25 Wherefore, thus saith the Lord, I have led this people forth out of the land of Jerusalem, by the power of mine arm, that I might raise up unto me a righteous branch from the fruit of the loins of Joseph.

26 Wherefore, I the Lord God will not suffer that this people shall do like unto them of old.

### ***Comments***

The grosser crime is that the people have begun to “excuse themselves in committing whoredoms.” The first problem with Jacob’s condemnation is one of definitions. The sin is committing whoredom, but the justification is the scriptural evidence of wives and concubines. Without yet examining the issue of wives and concubines, there is a disconnect between the definition of *whoredom* and either *wife* or *concubine*. The significant difference is legal. Both wives and concubines are legal, and the difference between a wife and a concubine has to do with inheritance rights for the children, not the legality of the marriage. Whoredom indicates something that is not legal.

The juxtaposition of these two suggests that Nephite law, however that was defined, did not allow for multiple wives. Therefore, any who took another wife did so contrary to law and therefore fit the designation of whoredom. The contradiction to current law also explains why there was an appeal to the scriptures. If the Nephites believed in the scriptures, then the scriptures could be used as a justification. That is clearly what happened, with the examples of David and Solomon being presented as men in the scriptures who legally had multiple wives and concubines.

Jacob’s response is interesting. He apparently understands that the scriptures contain history that was perhaps not an appropriate model for current behavior. In this case, Jacob declares that Yahweh specifically “will not suffer that this people shall do like unto them of old.” This is a case where God’s current comment supersedes what was allowed at a different time.

### ***Jacob 2:27–30***

27 Wherefore, my brethren, hear me, and hearken to the word of the Lord: For there shall not any man among you have save it be one wife; and concubines he shall have none;

28 For I, the Lord God, delight in the chastity of women. And whoredoms are an abomination before me; thus saith the Lord of Hosts.

29 Wherefore, this people shall keep my commandments, saith the Lord of Hosts, or cursed be the land for their sakes.

30 For if I will, saith the Lord of Hosts, raise up seed unto me, I will command my people; otherwise they shall hearken unto these things.

### *Comments*

In light of the argument that was made from scripture, Jacob declares the current word of God. The principle is that what God intends for a current people is not dependent upon what was required or allowed for a previous time and place.

The command is clear. The current law is that there be only a single wife. There is no other legal allowance, either for other wives or for concubines. With that declaration, Jacob reminds the people that the promise of the land is that they are preserved upon the condition of living the commandments. The reverse side of that promise is destruction, and that is what Jacob emphasizes when he indicates that the land would be cursed for their sakes.

That leaves a small problem in that there is still the scriptural justification that is contrary to the current commandment. Jacob declares that there are times when Yahweh's commands to his people are conditional for the times and circumstances of his people. It is possible that Yahweh could command, or allow, multiple wives. However, that is not the current case. God's word today takes precedence over God's word to a different people and time.

### ***Jacob 2:31–33***

31 For behold, I, the Lord, have seen the sorrow, and heard the mourning of the daughters of my people in the land of Jerusalem, yea, and in all the lands of my people, because of the wickedness and abominations of their husbands.

32 And I will not suffer, saith the Lord of Hosts, that the cries of the fair daughters of this people, which I have led out of the land of Jerusalem, shall come up unto me against the men of my people, saith the Lord of Hosts.

33 For they shall not lead away captive the daughters of my people because of their tenderness, save I shall visit them with a sore curse, even unto destruction; for they shall not commit whoredoms, like unto them of old, saith the Lord of Hosts.

### *Comments*

In these three verses, Jacob focuses on the position of the women in Nephite society who have become multiple wives. He has them mourning, as though their marriages were equal to a death. In verse 33 he

says that the daughters should not be led away captive. It is difficult to know how these verses are to be read. Were the women coerced into the marriages? There is insufficient evidence to tell.

What we can do, however, is look at the interesting combination of the two sins that were so great that they initiated this sermon. The first was pride through wealth and the second is having multiple wives. Why were these seemingly different sins grouped together?

The answer is speculative but based on the events occurring in the New World in the region, and at the time, that we believe Book of Mormon peoples lived in that region. Economic development requires that there be an excess production of some desirable good which may be exchanged with someone else. The popularity of the exchange would increase the demand, and those who can produce more are able to trade for more. Although this image is from a monetized society, the more you sell, the more money you make.

At that time, there were people who were creating trade goods, and, as Jacob indicated, gathering wealth. The key to wealth was production, and at this early stage, production was a family business. Thus, the more hands, the more product. In the history of the early Maya region, those hands were supplied by multiple wives and the larger number of children available. Therefore, in that time and place, these two incipient sins were precisely the sins most widespread and developing in multiple societies. Since trade would typically be outside the community, those ideas were clearly affecting the way the Nephites saw themselves and what was desirable.

### ***Jacob 2:34–35***

34 And now behold, my brethren, ye know that these commandments were given to our father, Lehi; wherefore, ye have known them before; and ye have come unto great condemnation; for ye have done these things which ye ought not to have done.

35 Behold, ye have done greater iniquities than the Lamanites, our brethren. Ye have broken the hearts of your tender wives, and lost the confidence of your children, because of your bad examples before them; and the sobbings of their hearts ascend up to God against you. And because of the strictness of the word of God, which cometh down against you, many hearts died, pierced with deep wounds.

### ***Comments***

There is no chapter break after verse 35 in the 1830 edition. The current break obscures the function of these two verses as a transition from the condemnation of the plurality of wives to the next theme, which will be the Nephite relationship with the Lamanites.

Verse 34 ends the condemnation. Jacob says: “for ye have done these things which ye ought not to have done.” They contradict current law as given to Lehi, and which should be binding upon them.

Verse 35 introduces the issue of the Lamanites. We remember at this point that Jacob has told us that his definition of Lamanite is any who are against them, or basically, any who are not Nephites. In most

ancient societies, there was great animosity toward the outsider, and they were subject to almost codified prejudice. That is what we see here. The Lamanites are considered opposite of the Nephites, and, therefore, Jacob uses them as a juxtaposition to what the Nephites are doing.

When Jacob declares that “ye have done greater iniquities than the Lamanites,” it would have been almost inconceivable. By cultural definition the Nephites would assume themselves better. After all, it was the Lamanites who were cursed, with the assumption that therefore the Nephites were blessed.

This statement both highlights their sin and transitions into the next discussion.

# Jacob 3

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## ***Jacob 3:1–3***

1 But behold, I, Jacob, would speak unto you that are pure in heart. Look unto God with firmness of mind, and pray unto him with exceeding faith, and he will console you in your afflictions, and he will plead your cause, and send down justice upon those who seek your destruction.

2 O all ye that are pure in heart, lift up your heads and receive the pleasing word of God, and feast upon his love; for ye may, if your minds are firm, forever.

3 But, wo, wo, unto you that are not pure in heart, that are filthy this day before God; for except ye repent the land is cursed for your sakes; and the Lamanites, which are not filthy like unto you, nevertheless they are cursed with a sore cursing, shall scourge you even unto destruction.

## *Comments*

As Jacob transitions from discussing the sin of thinking oneself better than another, he returns to the idea that not all people are under condemnation. He had said that the Nephites were, as yet, living the commandments. Then launched into the sin of those who were not.

Similarly, the transition recognizes that not all are under condemnation. There are those who are pure in heart. They have been faithful and are admonished to continue to be faithful. Those people are not the target of his sermon. The next phase of the sermon begins by pronouncing a wo upon those who are not pure in heart.

The way that Jacob will begin to make this case is interesting. He brings the Lamanites into the issue. The Lamanites are the enemy, and most people create divisions between the in-group and the out-group. The in-group is good, and the out-group is not as good. In the ancient world, it was often more dramatic, and for the Nephites, it was an even greater division. Nephites were good. Lamanites were the opposite. The social division had been reinforced by prohibitions of intermarriage. They were dangerous; they were opposites.

In spite of that difference, Jacob uses them as a comparison against which the Nephites do not fare well. In absolute contrast to cultural expectation, Jacob declares that the Lamanites “are not filthy like unto you.” Built into that reversal is the reminder that the negative aspect of the promise of the land is that the Nephites would be destroyed if they do not live the commandments. Jacob does not threaten them with

destruction, but with scourging. Perhaps there are sufficient numbers of righteous to forestall destruction, but not to prevent serious problems.

### ***Jacob 3:4–6***

4 And the time speedily cometh, that except ye repent they shall possess the land of your inheritance, and the Lord God will lead away the righteous out from among you.

5 Behold, the Lamanites your brethren, whom ye hate because of their filthiness and the cursing which hath come upon their skins, are more righteous than you; for they have not forgotten the commandment of the Lord, which was given unto our father—that they should have save it were one wife, and concubines they should have none, and there should not be whoredoms committed among them.

6 And now, this commandment they observe to keep; wherefore, because of this observance, in keeping this commandment, the Lord God will not destroy them, but will be merciful unto them; and one day they shall become a blessed people.

### ***Comments***

Jacob is aware of Nephi’s prophecy that the Nephites would be destroyed, but that the Lamanites would remain. That prophetic knowledge undergirds this part of the discussion. The essential prophecy is in verses 4 and 6, where verse 4 indicates that the Lamanites will possess the Nephite lands, and verse 6 promises that the Lamanites will not be destroyed but will one day be redeemed—will “become a blessed people.”

Nevertheless, Jacob appears to be referencing something long before the end of the Nephites in a thousand years. The most likely reference is to the dispersal of the Nephites out of the land of Nephi and into the land of Zarahemla under the reign of Mosiah<sub>1</sub> (father of Benjamin). Thus, verse 4 notes that “the Lord God will lead away the righteous out from among you.

The immediate point is contained in verse 5. Jacob reiterates that the Lamanites are the outsiders, and that they are hated. The expectation that the Nephites are good and the Lamanites are bad is upended when Jacob declares that they “are more righteous than you.” The reason has to do with the marriage law Lehi gave his children; they are to have no more than one wife. The Lamanites are living that law. Clearly, some of the Nephites are not.

See the comments on 2 Nephi 5:20–21 for a short discussion of the skin of blackness. Jacob refers to the cursing of the Lamanites, and notes that the curse came upon their skins. In Jacob, there is no reference to pigmentation, just to the curse. Interestingly, one of the elements of the curse was that they were to be a scourge to the Nephites, a threat that Jacob has reiterated in verse 3.

## Nephite Prejudice Condemned

### ***Jacob 3:7–8***

7 Behold, their husbands love their wives, and their wives love their husbands; and their husbands and their wives love their children; and their unbelief and their hatred towards you is because of the iniquity of their fathers; wherefore, how much better are you than they, in the sight of your great Creator?  
8 O my brethren, I fear that unless ye shall repent of your sins that their skins will be whiter than yours, when ye shall be brought with them before the throne of God.

### *Comments*

The contrast between the Lamanites and the Nephites continues and is intensified. Jacob declares that Lamanite husbands love their wives, and their wives and children love their fathers. There is an implicit statement that this is not the case for the Nephites practicing plural marriage. Indeed, Jacob already discussed the plight of the women in Jacob 2:32 and 33.

The assumed superiority of the Nephites over the Lamanites is again questioned. If the Lamanites have loving families and live the law given to Lehi, and the unstated declaration is that the Nephites do not, Jacob asks “how much better are you than they, in the sight of your great Creator?”

It was that Creator who had given the commandment that the Nephites were violating. Therefore, Jacob also declares “I fear that unless ye shall repent of your sins that their skins will be whiter than yours, when ye are brought with them before the throne of God.” Again, we see the reference to white skins. In this case, it is obvious that the word white is being used in the sense of purity or righteousness. The skin is simply the metaphorical location of this aspect.

Many in the ancient world believed that what was inside a person could be seen on the surface. Hence, righteousness might be visibly manifest. That is the concept behind the metaphor that is expressed in Joel 2:6 and Nahum 2:10, where faces gather blackness. There is no assumption of a change in pigmentation, only that the pain would be metaphorically visible on their faces.

### ***Jacob 3:9–11***

9 Wherefore, a commandment I give unto you, which is the word of God, that ye revile no more against them because of the darkness of their skins; neither shall ye revile against them because of their filthiness; but ye shall remember your own filthiness, and remember that their filthiness came because of their fathers.

10 Wherefore, ye shall remember your children, how that ye have grieved their hearts because of the example that ye have set before them; and also, remember that ye may, because of your filthiness, bring your children unto destruction, and their sins be heaped upon your heads at the last day.

11 O my brethren, hearken unto my words; arouse the faculties of your souls; shake yourselves that ye may awake from the slumber of death; and loose yourselves from the pains of hell that ye may not become angels to the devil, to be cast into that lake of fire and brimstone which is the second death.

### *Comments*

This is the conclusion of the sermon. He ends, as he should, with a command to repent. What Jacob does do is highlight the reversal of expectations. He tells the Nephites not to revile the Lamanites, if the Lamanites are better than they are.

In verse 10 he asks that they remember their children. It is interesting that there is no declaration that any should divorce any wives. The command is to remember their children, and what is being taught to them. It is speculation, because this is all Jacob gives us, but it appears that Jacob is willing to allow those with multiple wives to continue in the responsibilities they have made to those families. The injunction would be to stop the practice and teach the children that it should not occur.

Jacob's sermon presents two seemingly unrelated issues. One is the pride of self, coming from the search for wealth, and the second is multiple wives. Is there a connection between those two?

Assuming a Mesoamerican background, around the time that Jacob is giving this sermon, the early cities of the Maya have been forming, and social distinctions are becoming apparent in the archaeological record. Archaeologists studying that rise have suggested that one of the mechanisms for the rise in social segregation was a set of people they have called aggrandizers. These were people who attempted to accumulate more than others and were eventually successful.

The actual mechanism for such aggrandizing was trade. Trade required goods in surplus that were available for trade. Therefore, those who could produce a greater surplus of trade goods were in a position to receive more in the exchange and thus elevate themselves above those who did not have that ability. In the early stages of the trade, production was largely family based, and one of the ways to have more workers was to have more wives and more children. Thus, there were more workers who would create the trade goods.

In the assumed Mesoamerican context, the very time and place in which we suggest for the early Nephites is right in the middle of a larger culture that is going through the very same growing pains and is witnessing the very same sins that Jacob decries. Across the region, there were those who were creating social segregation based upon the wealth they were accumulating, and they were accumulating that wealth through large families consisting of multiple wives and, therefore, a larger number of children.

### ***Jacob 3:12–14***

12 And now I, Jacob, spake many more things unto the people of Nephi, warning them against fornication and lasciviousness, and every kind of sin, telling them the awful consequences of them.



13 And a hundredth part of the proceedings of this people, which now began to be numerous, cannot be written upon these plates; but many of their proceedings are written upon the larger plates, and their wars, and their contentions, and the reigns of their kings.

14 These plates are called the plates of Jacob, and they were made by the hand of Nephi. And I make an end of speaking these words.

### *Comments*

When Nephi wrote the book of 1 Nephi, he clearly had an outline for the entire book. There was a long story he wanted to tell, and he wanted to tell it in a particular way. That plan also drove the early chapters of 2 Nephi. In contrast, Jacob has no plan for his book. It exists in three discreet sections. This first is a sermon. The next is a different sermon on a different topic, and then finally there is his conflict with Sherem. There is no cohesion.

This closing statement would have been a fine ending for the book of Jacob. The declaration that these are the plates of Jacob, and that he couldn't write everything, are both themes for conclusions, not beginnings.

It appears that in contrast to Nephi's plan, Jacob wrote in sections, probably with time between writing. Thus, he writes three incidents and had no plan for future text. It is possible that the next sermon had not yet been given when Jacob wrote this part of his record, contrasting with Nephi's retroactive writing of his history, which didn't catch up to real time until 2 Nephi 5.



# Jacob 4

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## Jacob's Purpose in Writing

### *Jacob 4:1–2*

1 Now behold, it came to pass that I, Jacob, having ministered much unto my people in word, (and I cannot write but a little of my words, because of the difficulty of engraving our words upon plates) and we know that the things which we write upon plates must remain;

2 But whatsoever things we write upon anything save it be upon plates must perish and vanish away; but we can write a few words upon plates, which will give our children, and also our beloved brethren, a small degree of knowledge concerning us, or concerning their fathers—

### *Comments*

This was originally the second chapter of Jacob. When Jacob concluded writing the previous chapter, he mentioned that he could write only a hundredth part of the history of his people on the plates of Jacob, and that there were other, larger plates. At the beginning of a new chapter, he appears to repeat himself and mentions that he writes little. In this case, he clarifies that it is because it is difficult to engrave on the plates. Nevertheless, he writes because “whatsoever things we write upon anything save it be upon plates must perish and vanish away.”

From the perspective of a Mesoamerican location, this statement is not only true, but observedly true in the history of the region. When the murals at San Bartolo were discovered, it was the first time that there was a significant text from Book of Mormon times that remained. It was painted, not carved. All the rest of the texts which have been preserved were not upon plates, but rather upon stone. During Jacob's time, it does not appear that they had begun carving texts in stone. It has been sadly true that whatsoever they didn't write upon plates, really did perish.

When Jacob began this chapter, he essentially repeated himself from the end of the last chapter. Had he been writing this chapter right after the previous one, there would be no reason to repeat himself. It appears that some length of time had passed between the first chapter and this new one, and Jacob read at least the ending for the previous. Thinking about that ending, he wrote this beginning, which initially

repeats the information as the end of the previous chapter, but which will expand upon it. The expansion comes when Jacob notes that he is writing for future generations.

### ***Jacob 4:3–4***

3 Now in this thing we do rejoice; and we labor diligently to engraven these words upon plates, hoping that our beloved brethren and our children will receive them with thankful hearts, and look upon them that they may learn with joy and not with sorrow, neither with contempt, concerning their first parents.

4 For, for this intent have we written these things, that they may know that we knew of Christ, and we had a hope of his glory many hundred years before his coming; and not only we ourselves had a hope of his glory, but also all the holy prophets which were before us.

### ***Comments***

Jacob expands on the idea that he writes for future generations. It is not only for his own line, but also for “our beloved brethren.” That phrase often signifies future Lamanites, but it cannot be determined exactly how Jacob intended it. This record is being passed down through his lineage, as opposed to the regnal line of transmission of the large plates. The large plates would be assumed to be of value to all Nephites. A family record might not. Thus, it is possible that “our brethren” in this case refers to other Nephites. Whatever was in Jacob’s mind, we cannot know. We do know that in the modern day it became available to the Lamanites, and, therefore, that might be the prophetically intended meaning.

What Jacob hopes is that the writings will assist future generations in understanding that the Nephites knew of the atoning Messiah and the messages of all the prophets from the plates of brass. This statement looks forward to what he is about to write but does not look back to the previously recorded sermon. That was not the theme of the first chapter that Jacob wrote, which we have as chapters 1 through 3. That sermon admonished, but did not specifically teach the hope of the Messiah’s glory. That is the message that Jacob is now about to write.

## **Prophets Testify of Christ**

### ***Jacob 4:5–6***

5 Behold, they believed in Christ and worshiped the Father in his name, and also we worship the Father in his name. And for this intent we keep the law of Moses, it pointing our souls to him; and for this cause it is sanctified unto us for righteousness, even as it was accounted unto Abraham in the wilderness to be obedient unto the commands of God in offering up his son Isaac, which is a similitude of God and his Only Begotten Son.

6 Wherefore, we search the prophets, and we have many revelations and the spirit of prophecy; and having all these witnesses we obtain a hope, and our faith becometh unshaken, insomuch that we truly can command in the name of Jesus and the very trees obey us, or the mountains, or the waves of the sea.

### *Comments*

The pronoun “they” in verse 5 refers to the prophets of old who Jacob had mentioned in the previous verse. Jacob is grounding the Nephite believe in the atoning Messiah to the old, and venerated, prophets. Those prophets had prophesied the coming Messiah, and they had also kept the law of Moses. Thus, the Nephites, who also prophesied the coming Messiah, also keep the law of Moses. The plates of brass contain Yahweh’s word to past prophets, and Jacob declares that while they were distant in both time and space, they continue to be relevant for the Nephites.

The idea that one might command in the name of Jesus and have the trees, or mountains, or the sea obey, is related to concepts they learned from the plates of brass. Although the verse uses the name Jesus, that is probably a translator’s choice. For Jacob, the Messiah was Yahweh, and Jesus was the name for Yahweh come to earth. Understanding that Jacob intended Yahweh here is important because it gives us the context to understand why he says that nature obeys Yahweh. Yahweh is the god of nature in the Old Testament. Isaiah had spoken of Yahweh’s defeat of Rahab, who was a primordial monster of the sea. Later, in the New Testament, Jesus will also tie himself to this Yahweh who is dominant over nature when he calms the storm in the Sea of Galilee.

### ***Jacob 4:7–9***

7 Nevertheless, the Lord God showeth us our weakness that we may know that it is by his grace, and his great condescensions unto the children of men, that we have power to do these things.

8 Behold, great and marvelous are the works of the Lord. How unsearchable are the depths of the mysteries of him; and it is impossible that man should find out all his ways. And no man knoweth of his ways save it be revealed unto him; wherefore, brethren, despise not the revelations of God.

9 For behold, by the power of his word man came upon the face of the earth, which earth was created by the power of his word. Wherefore, if God being able to speak and the world was, and to speak and man was created, O then, why not able to command the earth, or the workmanship of his hands upon the face of it, according to his will and pleasure?

### *Comments*

Verse 7 is the conclusion to the previous statement that New World prophets might command nature. However, it is also the transition to the next theme, which is the power of Yahweh. It is Yahweh who has dominion over the earth; the prophets, in their weakness, may call upon Yahweh to exercise his power

according to their word and faith. This is a great gift to humankind. God is far above our understanding, and yet will condescend to work with us, and for us.

Jacob notes the extent of this power upon which prophets might call by noting that all of creation came by the power of his word. Therefore, Yahweh can command, and even the trees, and mountains, and sea will obey. Lest anyone think that the prophets who Jacob said could do these things in verse 6 could do them of themselves, Jacob makes it clear that it is Yahweh's power that accomplishes these great and marvelous works.

### ***Jacob 4:10–11***

10 Wherefore, brethren, seek not to counsel the Lord, but to take counsel from his hand. For behold, ye yourselves know that he counseleth in wisdom, and in justice, and in great mercy, over all his works.

11 Wherefore, beloved brethren, be reconciled unto him through the atonement of Christ, his Only Begotten Son, and ye may obtain a resurrection, according to the power of the resurrection which is in Christ, and be presented as the first-fruits of Christ unto God, having faith, and obtained a good hope of glory in him before he manifesteth himself in the flesh.

### ***Comments***

One of the literary structures we see throughout the Book of Mormon is an argument that is set up as a thesis, followed by the concluding instruction. In the early part of the Book of Mormon, the conclusion is typically introduced with “wherefore.” Thus, these two verses beginning with “wherefore” serve as the conclusion to the thesis that Jacob established in the preceding verses. That thesis was the power of Yahweh. The conclusion is that the powerful Yahweh who rules over nature has, in wisdom, justice, and great mercy, also taken care of humankind.

The first “wherefore” conclusion is that we “seek not to counsel the Lord, but to take counsel from his hand.” This is a nice turn of the phrase, but the concept of counseling the Lord is a commentary on the way humankind would prefer to deal with God. We would much prefer it if God would only act, and counsel, according to our mortal preferences. He does not, and we need to understand that his vision and understanding are greater than ours.

The second “wherefore” speaks of how we put ourselves in a position to receive that divine counsel. That occurs through the atoning mission of the Messiah. While that is the understanding that Nephi taught, and Jacob now teaches, it doesn't have a specific process included for how that might be done. One of those methods was baptism, as Nephi taught in 2 Nephi 31:4. The other is continuing to live the law of Moses.

## Old World Jews Looked beyond the Mark

### *Jacob 4:12–14*

12 And now, beloved, marvel not that I tell you these things; for why not speak of the atonement of Christ, and attain to a perfect knowledge of him, as to attain to the knowledge of a resurrection and the world to come?

13 Behold, my brethren, he that prophesieth, let him prophesy to the understanding of men; for the Spirit speaketh the truth and lieth not. Wherefore, it speaketh of things as they really are, and of things as they really will be; wherefore, these things are manifested unto us plainly, for the salvation of our souls. But behold, we are not witnesses alone in these things; for God also spake them unto prophets of old.

14 But behold, the Jews were a stiffnecked people; and they despised the words of plainness, and killed the prophets, and sought for things that they could not understand. Wherefore, because of their blindness, which blindness came by looking beyond the mark, they must needs fall; for God hath taken away his plainness from them, and delivered unto them many things which they cannot understand, because they desired it. And because they desired it God hath done it, that they may stumble.

### *Comments*

Jacob had just declared, in verse 11, that the way to reconcile ourselves to our God is through the Messiah's atonement. That atonement is over five hundred years away from being effected. The Nephites know of the six hundred-year prophecy, that the atoning Messiah would come to earth in six hundred years from the time Lehi's family left Jerusalem. That means they understood that the act of the atonement was in the far, and perhaps unimaginable, future. For this reason, Jacob declares "marvel not that I tell you these things." Jacob understands that while the act of atonement is in the future, the benefit of that future act applied to them based on the divine promise that it would occur.

Therefore, Jacob speaks of prophesy as "things as they really are, and of things as they really will be; wherefore, these things are manifested unto us plainly, for the salvation of our souls." When a true prophecy is made, it may speak of things that will be, but in the case of the atonement, it also describes things as they really are. Humankind was capable of salvation before the atonement occurred. Repentance and forgiveness of sins were possible in the lives of those to whom Jacob spoke, even though the atoning act that allowed for repentance and forgiveness of sins had not yet occurred.

In verse 14, Jacob returns to a theme that must have still been present in the minds of those who had left Jerusalem. The Jews, meaning the house of Israel in the Old World, had rejected the prophets. They had lost this important understanding of the atoning mission of the Messiah. Jacob would have been sensitive to the state of the Old World because he was born there. He was born in the wilderness, but certainly understood that where he was born was a result of Jews who had rejected a specific prophet.

## ***Jacob 4:15–18***

15 And now I, Jacob, am led on by the Spirit unto prophesying; for I perceive by the workings of the Spirit which is in me, that by the stumbling of the Jews they will reject the stone upon which they might build and have safe foundation.

16 But behold, according to the scriptures, this stone shall become the great, and the last, and the only sure foundation, upon which the Jews can build.

17 And now, my beloved, how is it possible that these, after having rejected the sure foundation, can ever build upon it, that it may become the head of their corner?

18 Behold, my beloved brethren, I will unfold this mystery unto you; if I do not, by any means, get shaken from my firmness in the Spirit, and stumble because of my over anxiety for you.

### ***Comments***

After speaking of the definition of prophesy, Jacob is “led on by the Spirit unto prophesying.” He had also let his thoughts return to the house of Israel in the Old World. The combination of understanding the importance of the atoning mission of the Messiah, the loss of that understanding among the Old World house of Israel, and the future rejection of the Messiah by those who should have received him with gladness, led Jacob to a discussion of how the reconciliation would occur. Specifically, he asks “how is it possible that these, after having rejected the sure foundation, can ever build upon it, that it may become the head of their corner?” To explain, he will return to the scriptures. This time not to Isaiah, but to Zenos.

Jacob’s introductory question signals the use of the scriptures by alluding to scripture. He referenced Psalm 118:22: “The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner.”



# Jacob 5

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## Zenos's Allegory of the Olive Tree

### *Jacob 5:1–2*

1 Behold, my brethren, do ye not remember to have read the words of the prophet Zenos, which he spake unto the house of Israel, saying:

2 Hearken, O ye house of Israel, and hear the words of me, a prophet of the Lord.

### *Comments*

Zenos is a prophet from the plates of brass, but not one who is recorded in the version of the Old Testament that has come to us through history. The brass plates were kept by descendants of Joseph of Egypt, and they had their inheritance in the northern kingdom of Israel. The Old Testament as we have received it came through the southern kingdom of Judah. That division had occurred over three hundred years before the Book of Mormon story begins. Thus, there were three hundred years in which the northern kingdom had their own prophets, recorded in their own records, but who were distinct from both the prophets and records kept in the kingdom of Judah.

While we are accustomed to a specific collection of books that we call the Bible, before there was such a collection there were multiple copies of separate books which were later combined into a canon. There were other writings that were left out. The most commonly known set of writings are known as the Apocrypha, a set of pre-Christian books accepted by the Catholic Church, but not accepted by Protestants and those influenced by Protestant ideas. The fact that there was no specific authorized canon meant that the northern kingdom scriptures kept among the descendants of Joseph could be brought to Jerusalem and then added to with the southern prophets after its arrival. It is in that way that we have the lost northern kingdom prophets Zenos and Zenock, and still have the southern kingdom prophets such as Isaiah and Jeremiah.

### *Jacob 5:3–4*

3 For behold, thus saith the Lord, I will liken thee, O house of Israel, like unto a tame olive tree, which a man took and nourished in his vineyard; and it grew, and waxed old, and began to decay.

4 And it came to pass that the master of the vineyard went forth, and he saw that his olive tree began to decay; and he said: I will prune it, and dig about it, and nourish it, that perhaps it may shoot forth young and tender branches, and it perish not.

### *Comments*

Most people in the ancient world were involved with things that grew. They might plant for their own sustenance, or they might have orchards producing fruit or—in the case of this allegory—olives. Olive production was important in the ancient near east, and the images that will be invoked would have been very familiar to an ancient population so attuned to the work involved in caring for fields and orchards.

Most modern readers of this allegory are not so familiar with caring for fields and orchards, and so we need a little more information than did ancient readers of the same allegory. Nevertheless, botanists who have examined the many details given in this allegory have found that the processes mentioned, and the actions taken in the allegory, replicate good practices in olive-growing culture.

One of the interesting aspects of the allegory is the seeming confusion of vineyards and orchards. In verse 3, Israel is likened to a tame olive tree, which was in a vineyard. In verse 4 it is the lord of the vineyard, not the orchard, who attempts to save the tree. While this seems unusual, it is an old tradition. In the Eastern Mediterranean, olive trees were planted in and around vineyards. The trees protected the vines from strong winds and provided other symbiotic benefits.

There is an allegory using an olive tree in Romans 11:13–24. That allegory is given in a context where it also assumes that those who read it understand the processes being discussed. It also speaks of branches broken off and grafted in. The purpose of that allegory is to discuss the inclusion of gentiles in the blessings of the house of Israel, which is only a part of Zenos' allegory. In general, more complete and complex stories are considered to be older, and upon that principle we would expect that Paul is tapping into a long tradition, rather than the Book of Mormon allegory being taken from Paul. This is particularly true when we understand that Zenos' allegory required an intimate knowledge of how olive trees were cared for.

## **Branches Grafted to Preserve the Tree**

### ***Jacob 5:5–6***

5 And it came to pass that he pruned it, and digged about it, and nourished it according to his word.

6 And it came to pass that after many days it began to put forth somewhat a little, young and tender branches; but behold, the main top thereof began to perish.

## *Comments*

The allegory begins with the efforts to save the tree. The tree is the house of Israel, and the various elements of the tree will represent different aspects of the history of the house of Israel. The first, and most important part, is that the olive tree is old and has begun to decay. This is a theme of many prophecies of Israel just before the Assyrian invasion. We have the record of Isaiah preaching that the house of Israel has strayed from Yahweh. Clearly, Zenos preached the same message in the north.

The efforts to save the tree begin with the first level of care. It is pruned and fertilized. That suggests that there are religious reforms attempting to return to a more correct form of worship. In the southern kingdom, we have the reforms of Hezekiah as an example of this pruning and nourishing.

The result is that there is some success, but most of Israel continues. The top of the tree is the larger amount of the leaves and branches, and therefore the location where there should be fruit. That continues to perish. More is required.

## ***Jacob 5:7–8***

7 And it came to pass that the master of the vineyard saw it, and he said unto his servant: It grieveth me that I should lose this tree; wherefore, go and pluck the branches from a wild olive tree, and bring them hither unto me; and we will pluck off those main branches which are beginning to wither away, and we will cast them into the fire that they may be burned.

8 And behold, saith the Lord of the vineyard, I take away many of these young and tender branches, and I will graft them whithersoever I will; and it mattereth not that if it so be that the root of this tree will perish, I may preserve the fruit thereof unto myself; wherefore, I will take these young and tender branches, and I will graft them whithersoever I will.

## *Comments*

The next step is to remove the dying branches of the house of Israel. At the time of Zenos, this would have been a direct reference to the Assyrian invasion that took away the top, or more importantly, the population of the kingdom of Israel. They were literally plucked off and were taken away. The idea that they were burned in the fire might simply suggest the scattering. The kingdom of Israel was effectively destroyed, but the people were not.

The young and tender branches were those that had heeded the prophets' call for repentance. These were taken away. It is possible that since Zenos is seeing this prophecy from the perspective of the northern kingdom, some of the young branches were carried away to Jerusalem. Many were among those who were scattered among the ten tribes. The allegory suggests that there would be righteous among those scattered, who would later be gathered.

As Jacob tells the allegory, he clearly adds his own perspective, seeing the Babylonian invasion as doing the very same thing. The descendants of Lehi were one of the young and tender branches that were taken away.

### ***Jacob 5:9–12***

9 Take thou the branches of the wild olive tree, and graft them in, in the stead thereof; and these which I have plucked off I will cast into the fire and burn them, that they may not cumber the ground of my vineyard.

10 And it came to pass that the servant of the Lord of the vineyard did according to the word of the Lord of the vineyard, and grafted in the branches of the wild olive tree.

11 And the Lord of the vineyard caused that it should be digged about, and pruned, and nourished, saying unto his servant: It grieveth me that I should lose this tree; wherefore, that perhaps I might preserve the roots thereof that they perish not, that I might preserve them unto myself, I have done this thing.

12 Wherefore, go thy way; watch the tree, and nourish it, according to my words.

### ***Comments***

One of the ways to preserve an olive tree was to graft in branches from a wild olive tree. The allegory suggests this, which is completely appropriate for ancient practice. The dead branches are destroyed by Assyria or Babylon. The wild branches are gentiles. Gentile is the definition of anyone who was not of the natural lineage of the house of Israel. This infusion of the gentiles began before the time of Christ when there were a number of gentiles who converted to Judaism, but many more who were sympathizers without officially converting to the religion. As Paul would later explain, one of the hindrances was the Mosaic law's insistence upon circumcision, which was not only not practiced in the Greek-influenced world but seen with derision as a defilement of the body. Nevertheless, for the purposes of the allegory, these gentiles added to the number of believers, and they strengthened the faith.

An important lesson for the way God works in our lives is contained in verse 12's admonition to "go thy way; watch the tree, and nourish it." We will later learn that this will not be sufficient, but the important aspect is that God will work with us over his time, not ours. While we might hope for a mighty miracle that will change things dramatically and immediately, God moves more slowly. His method is to make small changes and wait for us to learn them and react to them.

### ***Jacob 5:13–14***

13 And these will I place in the nethermost part of my vineyard, whithersoever I will, it mattereth not unto thee; and I do it that I may preserve unto myself the natural branches of the tree; and also, that I

may lay up fruit thereof against the season, unto myself; for it grieveth me that I should lose this tree and the fruit thereof.

14 And it came to pass that the Lord of the vineyard went his way, and hid the natural branches of the tame olive tree in the nethermost parts of the vineyard, some in one and some in another, according to his will and pleasure.

### *Comments*

The allegory returns to the young and tender shoots that were good, but which were removed. Those were taken to different parts of the vineyard and planted to give them a chance to grow. From Zenos's perspective, these would be the lost ten tribes, among whom there were righteous people. For Jacob, the Nephites were clearly one of those young and tender branches. They had clearly been planted in the nethermost part of the vineyard, literally on the other side of the world. They would grow in isolation from the rest of the trees of the vineyard. Nevertheless, they were part of the original tree, part of the house of Israel. They were preserved so that the house of Israel might continue and might also grow.

## **The First Return to the Vineyard: The Fruit Is Good**

### ***Jacob 5:15–18***

15 And it came to pass that a long time passed away, and the Lord of the vineyard said unto his servant: Come, let us go down into the vineyard, that we may labor in the vineyard.

16 And it came to pass that the Lord of the vineyard, and also the servant, went down into the vineyard to labor. And it came to pass that the servant said unto his master: Behold, look here; behold the tree.

17 And it came to pass that the Lord of the vineyard looked and beheld the tree in the which the wild olive branches had been grafted; and it had sprung forth and begun to bear fruit. And he beheld that it was good; and the fruit thereof was like unto the natural fruit.

18 And he said unto the servant: Behold, the branches of the wild tree have taken hold of the moisture of the root thereof, that the root thereof hath brought forth much strength; and because of the much strength of the root thereof the wild branches have brought forth tame fruit. Now, if we had not grafted in these branches, the tree thereof would have perished. And now, behold, I shall lay up much fruit, which the tree thereof hath brought forth; and the fruit thereof I shall lay up against the season, unto mine own self.

### *Comments*

The allegory is first a story, and secondly a lesson. The lesson will not be taught unless there is a story to follow. Therefore, the allegory spends time on the efforts of the Lord of the vineyard and his servant. Some commentators have suggested that we are seeing Elohim the father and Jesus the son as the Lord

of the vineyard and the servant respectively. That would be a modern perspective, but not one that would have informed Zenos' or Jacob's understanding.

As children of Israel, Zenos and Jacob believed in one God, who was Yahweh. Therefore, the Lord of the vineyard had to be Yahweh. As Yahweh is the celestial realm designation for the mortal realm's Jesus, the Lord of the vineyard and servant would not be the same person. It is better to understand Yahweh as the Lord of the vineyard and perhaps a prophet as the servant.

The two come to the vineyard after waiting to see what the effect of the last effort produced. It had begun to work. The grafting in of the gentiles allowed the original covenant to be refreshed, and the results were "like unto the natural fruit." That is, there is no difference in God's eyes whether one was naturally of the house of Israel or adopted into it. The covenants nourish all who come to that source.

### ***Jacob 5:19–22***

19 And it came to pass that the Lord of the vineyard said unto the servant: Come, let us go to the nethermost part of the vineyard, and behold if the natural branches of the tree have not brought forth much fruit also, that I may lay up of the fruit thereof against the season, unto mine own self.

20 And it came to pass that they went forth whither the master had hid the natural branches of the tree, and he said unto the servant: Behold these; and he beheld the first that it had brought forth much fruit; and he beheld also that it was good. And he said unto the servant: Take of the fruit thereof, and lay it up against the season, that I may preserve it unto mine own self; for behold, said he, this long time have I nourished it, and it hath brought forth much fruit.

21 And it came to pass that the servant said unto his master: How comest thou hither to plant this tree, or this branch of the tree? For behold, it was the poorest spot in all the land of thy vineyard.

22 And the Lord of the vineyard said unto him: Counsel me not; I knew that it was a poor spot of ground; wherefore, I said unto thee, I have nourished it this long time, and thou beholdest that it hath brought forth much fruit.

### ***Comments***

The Lord of the vineyard and the servant go to examine one of the young and tender branches planted in the nethermost part of the vineyard. The first thing described is that the new tree is flourishing. Then comes the important question.

The servant asks why they were planted in such a place when it was poor ground; it was "the poorest spot in all the land of [the] vineyard." This place is not clearly defined in the real world and might not need to be. The point is that the location is not the reason for the flourishing of the gospel. Even difficult places can yield faithful children of Israel. It is for that reason that God nourishes and cares for all his children, wherever they might be.

## ***Jacob 5:23–24***

23 And it came to pass that the Lord of the vineyard said unto his servant: Look hither; behold I have planted another branch of the tree also; and thou knowest that this spot of ground was poorer than the first. But, behold the tree. I have nourished it this long time, and it hath brought forth much fruit; therefore, gather it, and lay it up against the season, that I may preserve it unto mine own self.

24 And it came to pass that the Lord of the vineyard said again unto his servant: Look hither, and behold another branch also, which I have planted; behold that I have nourished it also, and it hath brought forth fruit.

### *Comments*

The allegory moves to a spot even poorer than the one just examined. This reinforces the point of the lesson, which is that God is able to nourish his children regardless of where they find themselves. The repetition of the action of going to a poor spot in the vineyard and finding a flourishing tree does not only reinforce the lesson, it emphasizes it. The progression for poor ground to even poorer ground is intended to underscore the ability of Yahweh to nourish the house of Israel wherever they might be.

For Zenos and Jacob, these two events would signify the dispersal of the ten tribes. For Jacob, it would include those taken away to Babylon. However, it does not yet describe the Nephites.

## ***Jacob 5:25–28***

25 And he said unto the servant: Look hither and behold the last. Behold, this have I planted in a good spot of ground; and I have nourished it this long time, and only a part of the tree hath brought forth tame fruit, and the other part of the tree hath brought forth wild fruit; behold, I have nourished this tree like unto the others.

26 And it came to pass that the Lord of the vineyard said unto the servant: Pluck off the branches that have not brought forth good fruit, and cast them into the fire.

27 But behold, the servant said unto him: Let us prune it, and dig about it, and nourish it a little longer, that perhaps it may bring forth good fruit unto thee, that thou canst lay it up against the season.

28 And it came to pass that the Lord of the vineyard and the servant of the Lord of the vineyard did nourish all the fruit of the vineyard.

### *Comments*

For Zenos, the allegory would continue to describe unknown peoples and places. It would be a generic understanding that contrasts the poor ground with the difficulties of the branches in the rich ground. Jacob saw this part of the allegory as dramatically personal. For Jacob, there would have been no question that the single planting that brought both wild and tame fruit represented the Lamanites and Nephites.

Since the allegory is created to teach a lesson, the Lord of the vineyard says to the servant: “pluck off the branches that have not brought forth good fruit, and cast them into the fire.” Modern readers assume a more patient and lenient God and might be surprised at this reaction from the Lord of the vineyard. This story might be best seen in the light of Abram bargaining with Yahweh to spare Sodom if a decreasing number of righteous people were found.

The result is that the Lord of the vineyard grants a reprieve and attempts to save the whole tree. The principle that the Lord will act on our behalf, and then wait for results, is repeated.

### ***Jacob 5:29–32***

29 And it came to pass that a long time had passed away, and the Lord of the vineyard said unto his servant: Come, let us go down into the vineyard, that we may labor again in the vineyard. For behold, the time draweth near, and the end soon cometh; wherefore, I must lay up fruit against the season, unto mine own self.

30 And it came to pass that the Lord of the vineyard and the servant went down into the vineyard; and they came to the tree whose natural branches had been broken off, and the wild branches had been grafted in; and behold all sorts of fruit did cumber the tree.

31 And it came to pass that the Lord of the vineyard did taste of the fruit, every sort according to its number. And the Lord of the vineyard said: Behold, this long time have we nourished this tree, and I have laid up unto myself against the season much fruit.

32 But behold, this time it hath brought forth much fruit, and there is none of it which is good. And behold, there are all kinds of bad fruit; and it profiteth me nothing, notwithstanding all our labor; and now it grieveth me that I should lose this tree.

### ***Comments***

The allegory returns to the original tree. It has produced much fruit, indicative that it is thriving. However, when the Lord of the vineyard tastes the fruit, it is not good. It has the appearance of prosperity but is still useless for its intended purpose.

The real-world sense of the allegory now moves to a time when Christianity has been grafted into the covenant root of Israel. Christianity, in particular, has prospered, and the Jews have also become more populous. In numbers, the people who have inherited the covenants are large. For the Lord, however, it is not the numbers, but rather, the transformation of souls that matters. Individuals are the fruit of the tree, and the ultimate goal is to transform the fruit into something more pure and more important. For the olive tree, it was the production of the oil. For God it is the refinement of the soul.

The long time that has passed has led to a false impression that the tree of Israel is doing well. It is not. It is not producing the quality transformation that is desired. Thus again, something needs to be done.



Even with so many failures, the Lord of the vineyard continues to attempt to save the tree so that he might have the desired fruit.

### ***Jacob 5:33–37***

33 And the Lord of the vineyard said unto the servant: What shall we do unto the tree, that I may preserve again good fruit thereof unto mine own self?

34 And the servant said unto his master: Behold, because thou didst graft in the branches of the wild olive tree they have nourished the roots, that they are alive and they have not perished; wherefore thou beholdest that they are yet good.

35 And it came to pass that the Lord of the vineyard said unto his servant: The tree profiteth me nothing, and the roots thereof profit me nothing so long as it shall bring forth evil fruit.

36 Nevertheless, I know that the roots are good, and for mine own purpose I have preserved them; and because of their much strength they have hitherto brought forth, from the wild branches, good fruit.

37 But behold, the wild branches have grown and have overrun the roots thereof; and because that the wild branches have overcome the roots thereof it hath brought forth much evil fruit; and because that it hath brought forth so much evil fruit thou beholdest that it beginneth to perish; and it will soon become ripened, that it may be cast into the fire, except we should do something for it to preserve it.

### ***Comments***

The solution for the main tree is to take drastic measures. The important statement is that the roots are good. Those roots are the covenants God has made with the house of Israel. Those covenants are good and remain for those who can access them. The Lord of the vineyard does not see a reason to alter the covenants themselves.

The blame is put on the wild branches, which have been identified as the gentiles. Thus, this part of the allegory would describe the time of Christian apostasy. It was a time when there was a great increase in the numbers of Christians, but the loss of some of the pure doctrines had made it difficult to receive the full benefits of the covenant with the house of Israel.

Once again, a possible solution is to destroy the entire experiment, but that is not what the Lord of the vineyard desires. The desire is to preserve the roots, or the covenant, if at all possible.

### ***Jacob 5:38–40***

38 And it came to pass that the Lord of the vineyard said unto his servant: Let us go down into the nethermost parts of the vineyard, and behold if the natural branches have also brought forth evil fruit.

39 And it came to pass that they went down into the nethermost parts of the vineyard. And it came to pass that they beheld that the fruit of the natural branches had become corrupt also; yea, the first and the second and also the last; and they had all become corrupt.

40 And the wild fruit of the last had overcome that part of the tree which brought forth good fruit, even that the branch had withered away and died.

### *Comments*

The scene moves to the New World and to the Lamanites and the Nephites. Both parts of the original branch planted in this land have now become corrupted. One had become corrupt earlier, but not both of them had. The earlier state showed the relationship between Lamanites and Nephites while the Nephites were righteous. However, the Nephites did not continue in righteousness. Although the allegory doesn't know of the promise of the land for the Nephites, it does depict the fulfillment of the negative aspect of that promise.

The Nephites did not continue in righteousness—therefore they were destroyed. In the allegory, they are the branch that withered away and died.

## **The Servant Urges the Lord to Spare the Vineyard**

### ***Jacob 5:41–47***

41 And it came to pass that the Lord of the vineyard wept, and said unto the servant: What could I have done more for my vineyard?

42 Behold, I knew that all the fruit of the vineyard, save it were these, had become corrupted. And now these which have once brought forth good fruit have also become corrupted; and now all the trees of my vineyard are good for nothing save it be to be hewn down and cast into the fire.

43 And behold this last, whose branch hath withered away, I did plant in a good spot of ground; yea, even that which was choice unto me above all other parts of the land of my vineyard.

44 And thou beheldest that I also cut down that which cumbered this spot of ground, that I might plant this tree in the stead thereof.

45 And thou beheldest that a part thereof brought forth good fruit, and a part thereof brought forth wild fruit; and because I plucked not the branches thereof and cast them into the fire, behold, they have overcome the good branch that it hath withered away.

46 And now, behold, notwithstanding all the care which we have taken of my vineyard, the trees thereof have become corrupted, that they bring forth no good fruit; and these I had hoped to preserve, to have laid up fruit thereof against the season, unto mine own self. But, behold, they have become like unto the wild olive tree, and they are of no worth but to be hewn down and cast into the fire; and it grieveth me that I should lose them.

47 But what could I have done more in my vineyard? Have I slackened mine hand, that I have not nourished it? Nay, I have nourished it, and I have digged about it, and I have pruned it, and I have dunged it; and I have stretched forth mine hand almost all the day long, and the end draweth nigh. And it grieveth me that I should hew down all the trees of my vineyard, and cast them into the fire that they should be burned. Who is it that has corrupted my vineyard?

### *Comments*

Verses 41 through 45 show the Lord's lament for the New World branch of the house of Israel. Verses 46 and 47 return to the perspective of the entire vineyard. Before examining the New World, the Old World tree into which the gentiles had been grafted appeared to be laden with fruit, but the fruit was bitter. The New World tree that was planted in the good ground has become corrupt, with the previously fruitful branch dying entirely.

Before providing any hope, the allegory has the Lord of the vineyard consider the possible loss of the entire vineyard. That loss cannot be placed at the feet of either the Lord of the vineyard or his servant. Yet it happened, and therefore the lament: "who is it that has corrupted my vineyard? The answer will not lay blame at the feet of any person but rather on the nature of the world.

### ***Jacob 5:48–51***

48 And it came to pass that the servant said unto his master: Is it not the loftiness of thy vineyard—have not the branches thereof overcome the roots which are good? And because the branches have overcome the roots thereof, behold they grew faster than the strength of the roots, taking strength unto themselves. Behold, I say, is not this the cause that the trees of thy vineyard have become corrupted?

49 And it came to pass that the Lord of the vineyard said unto the servant: Let us go to and hew down the trees of the vineyard and cast them into the fire, that they shall not cumber the ground of my vineyard, for I have done all. What could I have done more for my vineyard?

50 But, behold, the servant said unto the Lord of the vineyard: Spare it a little longer.

51 And the Lord said: Yea, I will spare it a little longer, for it grieveth me that I should lose the trees of my vineyard.

### *Comments*

As a story, the tension is built by having the Lord of the vineyard ready to cut down all trees and cast them into the fire. The servant prevails upon the Lord of the vineyard to be yet patient, and the Lord acquiesces.

As with the comment on Jacob 5:25–28, the picture of a God wanting to destroy who is being held off by his servant is part of the story, but not a reflection of the reality of God. It is God who has planted the vineyard and who desires it to thrive, and who ultimately does all that is possible to save humankind.

## Natural Branches Grafted Back into the Tree

### *Jacob 5:52–56*

52 Wherefore, let us take of the branches of these which I have planted in the nethermost parts of my vineyard, and let us graft them into the tree from whence they came; and let us pluck from the tree those branches whose fruit is most bitter, and graft in the natural branches of the tree in the stead thereof.

53 And this will I do that the tree may not perish, that, perhaps, I may preserve unto myself the roots thereof for mine own purpose.

54 And, behold, the roots of the natural branches of the tree which I planted whithersoever I would are yet alive; wherefore, that I may preserve them also for mine own purpose, I will take of the branches of this tree, and I will graft them in unto them. Yea, I will graft in unto them the branches of their mother tree, that I may preserve the roots also unto mine own self, that when they shall be sufficiently strong perhaps they may bring forth good fruit unto me, and I may yet have glory in the fruit of my vineyard.

55 And it came to pass that they took from the natural tree which had become wild, and grafted in unto the natural trees, which also had become wild.

56 And they also took of the natural trees which had become wild, and grafted into their mother tree.

### *Comments*

This part of the allegory is concerned with the gathering of Israel. The allegory spoke of Old World branches that had been scattered, at least including the lost ten tribes. Those are to be gathered in and brought back to the house of Israel. The New World branches are to be gathered. They too are to be reunited. The allegory does not specify locations, and those natural branches in the poor soil are not specifically mentioned, although it is certain that they too are part of the gathering.

In verse 55 it can be a little confusing because it says that they “took from the natural tree which had become wild, and grafted in unto the natural trees, which also had become wild.” The original, or the mother tree, is one of the trees which had become wild. The other branches that became wild were the young and tender shoots that were originally broken off and placed in far regions. The botanical process is to cross-graft branches among the trees. The spiritual process is to reunite scattered Israel through the restoration of the gospel.

## Additional Servants Called

### *Jacob 5:57–59*

57 And the Lord of the vineyard said unto the servant: Pluck not the wild branches from the trees, save it be those which are most bitter; and in them ye shall graft according to that which I have said.

58 And we will nourish again the trees of the vineyard, and we will trim up the branches thereof; and we will pluck from the trees those branches which are ripened, that must perish, and cast them into the fire.  
59 And this I do that, perhaps, the roots thereof may take strength because of their goodness; and because of the change of the branches, that the good may overcome the evil.

### *Comments*

There are two processes occurring. The first is to save that which is salvageable. The second is to pluck off those that are most bitter, those farthest gone into apostasy, those for whom there is no hope. This is a principle taught in Proverbs 10:24: “The fear of the wicked, it shall come upon him: but the desire of the righteous shall be granted.” There is, of course, an ultimate time when this distinction is made. It is made at this point in the allegory to show that there are those who will not bend to the will of the Lord.

After the section describing the despair of thinking that all was lost, these actions show the continued attempts to save humankind. Note that the image is that the roots may take strength. The root continues to be God’s covenant promises to Israel.

### ***Jacob 5:60–64***

60 And because that I have preserved the natural branches and the roots thereof, and that I have grafted in the natural branches again into their mother tree, and have preserved the roots of their mother tree, that, perhaps, the trees of my vineyard may bring forth again good fruit; and that I may have joy again in the fruit of my vineyard, and, perhaps, that I may rejoice exceedingly that I have preserved the roots and the branches of the first fruit—

61 Wherefore, go to, and call servants, that we may labor diligently with our might in the vineyard, that we may prepare the way, that I may bring forth again the natural fruit, which natural fruit is good and the most precious above all other fruit.

62 Wherefore, let us go to and labor with our might this last time, for behold the end draweth nigh, and this is for the last time that I shall prune my vineyard.

63 Graft in the branches; begin at the last that they may be first, and that the first may be last, and dig about the trees, both old and young, the first and the last; and the last and the first, that all may be nourished once again for the last time.

64 Wherefore, dig about them, and prune them, and dung them once more, for the last time, for the end draweth nigh. And if it be so that these last grafts shall grow, and bring forth the natural fruit, then shall ye prepare the way for them, that they may grow.

### *Comments*

The important part of this section of the allegory comes in verses 62 and 64. The Lord of the vineyard notes that these efforts will be for one last time because the end is near. Those two concepts appear in

both verse 62 and 64. These are the last actions the Lord will take for the salvation of humankind. What are those actions?

The root, or the covenant with Israel, has been preserved. The various scattered branches of the house of Israel are gathered in and grafted back into the mother tree. This last attempt is not simply the Lord of the vineyard and one servant, but a number of them, all laboring diligently that they might preserve “the natural fruit, which natural fruit is good and the most precious above all other fruit.

### ***Jacob 5:65–69***

65 And as they begin to grow ye shall clear away the branches which bring forth bitter fruit, according to the strength of the good and the size thereof; and ye shall not clear away the bad thereof all at once, lest the roots thereof should be too strong for the graft, and the graft thereof shall perish, and I lose the trees of my vineyard.

66 For it grieveth me that I should lose the trees of my vineyard; wherefore ye shall clear away the bad according as the good shall grow, that the root and the top may be equal in strength, until the good shall overcome the bad, and the bad be hewn down and cast into the fire, that they cumber not the ground of my vineyard; and thus will I sweep away the bad out of my vineyard.

67 And the branches of the natural tree will I graft in again into the natural tree;

68 And the branches of the natural tree will I graft into the natural branches of the tree; and thus will I bring them together again, that they shall bring forth the natural fruit, and they shall be one.

69 And the bad shall be cast away, yea, even out of all the land of my vineyard; for behold, only this once will I prune my vineyard.

### ***Comments***

As the cross-grafted branches grow, the branches that that are not good will be cleared away. This is the winnowing of the wicked in the last days. Verses 68 and 69 essentially repeat the instructions in verse 65.

It is possible that this separation of the righteous from the wicked refers to the last days when Satan will be bound. The millennial state will be one where the wicked have been cast off, leaving only the righteous. This is an allegory covering the overall task of the Lord of the vineyard, so looking to that future date fits with the great scope of the allegory.

### ***Jacob 5:70–73***

70 And it came to pass that the Lord of the vineyard sent his servant; and the servant went and did as the Lord had commanded him, and brought other servants; and they were few.

71 And the Lord of the vineyard said unto them: Go to, and labor in the vineyard, with your might. For behold, this is the last time that I shall nourish my vineyard; for the end is nigh at hand, and the season speedily cometh; and if ye labor with your might with me ye shall have joy in the fruit which I shall lay up unto myself against the time which will soon come.

72 And it came to pass that the servants did go and labor with their might; and the Lord of the vineyard labored also with them; and they did obey the commandments of the Lord of the vineyard in all things.

73 And there began to be the natural fruit again in the vineyard; and the natural branches began to grow and thrive exceedingly; and the wild branches began to be plucked off and to be cast away; and they did keep the root and the top thereof equal, according to the strength thereof.

### *Comments*

As noted in the previous episode, it is no longer just the Lord of the vineyard and a single servant. In the last days, many servants are sent to provide the gospel to those who are spiritually of the house of Israel, that they might be gathered in. The covenants and laws of the gospel are the way in which humankind learns of the path that leads to eternal life and salvation, and in the last days there is a full army of servants working to implant that message in the hearts of humankind.

The result is again a good one. “There began to be the natural fruit again in the vineyard; and the natural branches began to grow and thrive exceedingly.” The patience and hard work of the many servants was rewarded with success.

### ***Jacob 5:74–75***

74 And thus they labored, with all diligence, according to the commandments of the Lord of the vineyard, even until the bad had been cast away out of the vineyard, and the Lord had preserved unto himself that the trees had become again the natural fruit; and they became like unto one body; and the fruits were equal; and the Lord of the vineyard had preserved unto himself the natural fruit, which was most precious unto him from the beginning.

75 And it came to pass that when the Lord of the vineyard saw that his fruit was good, and that his vineyard was no more corrupt, he called up his servants, and said unto them: Behold, for this last time have we nourished my vineyard; and thou beholdest that I have done according to my will; and I have preserved the natural fruit, that it is good, even like as it was in the beginning. And blessed art thou; for because ye have been diligent in laboring with me in my vineyard, and have kept my commandments, and have brought unto me again the natural fruit, that my vineyard is no more corrupted, and the bad is cast away, behold ye shall have joy with me because of the fruit of my vineyard.

## *Comments*

Perhaps the most important part of the allegory is the comment about the fruit that was the result of all the various branches that were split off and returned. They included both those who were naturally of the house of Israel, and gentiles who were adopted in. In verse 74, the Lord of the vineyard says of the fruit of this entire process: “the Lord had preserved unto himself that the trees had become again the natural fruit; and they became like unto one body; and the fruits were equal.” It did not matter how one came to the covenant. The fruit is equal. Paul would later teach this very principle: “For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:13).

Verse 75 turns to the many servants and the Lord of the vineyard blesses them for their service. The result is “that my vineyard is no more corrupted, and the bad is cast away, behold ye shall have joy with me because of the fruit of my vineyard. That sentiment is echoed in Doctrine and Covenants 18:16: “And now, if your joy will be great with one soul that you have brought unto me into the kingdom of my Father, how great will be your joy if you should bring many souls unto me!”

## ***Jacob 5:76–77***

76 For behold, for a long time will I lay up of the fruit of my vineyard unto mine own self against the season, which speedily cometh; and for the last time have I nourished my vineyard, and pruned it, and dug about it, and dunged it; wherefore I will lay up unto mine own self of the fruit, for a long time, according to that which I have spoken.

77 And when the time cometh that evil fruit shall again come into my vineyard, then will I cause the good and the bad to be gathered; and the good will I preserve unto myself, and the bad will I cast away into its own place. And then cometh the season and the end; and my vineyard will I cause to be burned with fire.

## *Comments*

When the millennium arrives, there will be a time for improving the vineyard. At the end of that time will come the final end. At the end of the time allotted for this earth, there will be a final division between the wicked and the righteous. After the righteous are gathered to the Lord of the vineyard, the bad are “cast away into [their] own place.” The end of the earth is characterized by burning. As with other images of burning from this agrarian society, it is perhaps a signal of reseeding and renewal. We see nothing that comes after that burning, but we need not see it as a destruction. Perhaps it is a different beginning, when “the earth will be renewed and receive its paradisiacal glory” (Tenth Article of Faith).

Jacob ends a chapter with the end of the long quotation from Zenos. It is probable that it was the ending of the quotation that triggered the end of the chapter, as the next chapter is clearly the continuation of the discourse begun in chapter 4.



# Jacob 6

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## Jacob Testifies of Christ

### *Jacob 6:1–3*

1 And now, behold, my brethren, as I said unto you that I would prophesy, behold, this is my prophecy—that the things which this prophet Zenos spake, concerning the house of Israel, in the which he likened them unto a tame olive tree, must surely come to pass.

2 And the day that he shall set his hand again the second time to recover his people, is the day, yea, even the last time, that the servants of the Lord shall go forth in his power, to nourish and prune his vineyard; and after that the end soon cometh.

3 And how blessed are they who have labored diligently in his vineyard; and how cursed are they who shall be cast out into their own place! And the world shall be burned with fire.

### *Comments*

Jacob allows most of the allegory to stand without any explanation. The clear references to the Nephites and the Lamanites are not pointed out. They must have been obvious, or perhaps had been taught in previous sermons. At this time, Jacob focuses on the very end of the allegory, the last days. He first testifies that the allegory is a prophecy, and that it is true.

The second time that the Lord will attempt to recover his people is during the ending of the purpose of the world. That event is so far in the Nephite future that the events are collapsed in time so that the gathering appears to be immediately prior to the pruning and when the earth would burn as fire. This directly references Jacob 5:77, which is the last verse before the end of that chapter, and the last thing Jacob would have quoted in the sermon.

However, Jacob also declares that those who are the servants to assist in the vineyard are blessed. Again, this refers to the ending of the allegory, Jacob 5:75.

Of all of the elements discussed in the allegory, Jacob's message focuses on the final gathering and the destruction of the wicked. That appears to be the essential message for his current audience. In the previously recorded sermon, he chastised the people for beginning to stray from the gospel. In this sermon,

it appears that he returns to the same theme, but without specifics. The message is still that the Nephites are beginning to follow paths that would lead to their destruction.

### ***Jacob 6:4–6***

4 And how merciful is our God unto us, for he remembereth the house of Israel, both roots and branches; and he stretches forth his hands unto them all the day long; and they are a stiffnecked and a gainsaying people; but as many as will not harden their hearts shall be saved in the kingdom of God.

5 Wherefore, my beloved brethren, I beseech of you in words of soberness that ye would repent, and come with full purpose of heart, and cleave unto God as he cleaveth unto you. And while his arm of mercy is extended towards you in the light of the day, harden not your hearts.

6 Yea, today, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts; for why will ye die?

### ***Comments***

Jacob's message isn't that the destruction will come, although that is what will occur at the end of the purpose of the earth. The message is one of repentance to avoid a more present possibility of destruction. Throughout the allegory the Lord of the vineyard cares for his olive trees, even when they have had problems, even when some fruit was corrupt. That message of the overarching concern Yahweh has for his people extends to the Nephites and allows them the possibility of repentance.

Repentance is the message. Therefore, Jacob declares: "I beseech of you in words of soberness that ye would repent, and come with full purpose of heart, and cleave unto God as he cleaveth unto you." That Lord who cared for the vineyard, cares for his people.

Most poignantly, Jacob asks: "today, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts; for why will ye die?" The call to repentance is immediate, and the promise of the land is that they will prosper only upon righteousness. The result of unrighteousness is destruction. The question "why will ye die?" has two meanings. In the most obvious, it refers to a physical death that would be the result of the destruction of the unrighteous. However, it is also a spiritual death that is the direct result of turning away from God.

### ***Jacob 6:7–8***

7 For behold, after ye have been nourished by the good word of God all the day long, will ye bring forth evil fruit, that ye must be hewn down and cast into the fire?

8 Behold, will ye reject these words? Will ye reject the words of the prophets; and will ye reject all the words which have been spoken concerning Christ, after so many have spoken concerning him; and

deny the good word of Christ, and the power of God, and the gift of the Holy Ghost, and quench the Holy Spirit, and make a mock of the great plan of redemption, which hath been laid for you?

### *Comments*

Verse 7 highlights the implied message in the previous verses. Yahweh has nourished his people, just as the Lord of the vineyard nourished his trees. The choice remains with the people to accept and live the gospel, which is to bear good fruit, or to turn from it and bear evil fruit. There are only two choices in the end. We choose God, or we choose the opposite of God. At the final day, there is no middle ground provided in the allegory.

Jacob continues his admonition to follow the gospel, according to the words of the prophets. Very specifically, he asks: “will ye reject all the words which have been spoken concerning Christ, after so many have spoken concerning him?” The Nephite preaching is an expansion on the law of Moses, emphasizing the coming atoning mission of the Messiah. While not explicit here, in the next chapter dealing with Sherem, the division between the law of Moses without an understanding of the coming of the atoning Messiah will be contrasted with the Nephite emphasis on that message. It is possible that there is a subtle reference here to the nature of the Nephite incipient apostasy. They may see themselves keeping the law of Moses but rejecting the teachings about the coming atoning Messiah.

### ***Jacob 6:9–13***

9 Know ye not that if ye will do these things, that the power of the redemption and the resurrection, which is in Christ, will bring you to stand with shame and awful guilt before the bar of God?

10 And according to the power of justice, for justice cannot be denied, ye must go away into that lake of fire and brimstone, whose flames are unquenchable, and whose smoke ascendeth up forever and ever, which lake of fire and brimstone is endless torment.

11 O then, my beloved brethren, repent ye, and enter in at the strait gate, and continue in the way which is narrow, until ye shall obtain eternal life.

12 O be wise; what can I say more?

13 Finally, I bid you farewell, until I shall meet you before the pleasing bar of God, which bar striketh the wicked with awful dread and fear. Amen.

### *Comments*

The coming atonement is the foundation of the ability to repent. It is the “power of the redemption and the resurrection.” Thus, Jacob’s emphasis is on this particular belief. The Nephites are not being encouraged to live the law of Moses better, but to accept the teaching of this atoning Messiah who is to come. That is the unique Nephite message.

The final verse has the feel of a termination. Jacob says: “I bid you farewell, until I shall meet you before the pleasing bar of God.” We know that Jacob will continue to live in the same place, but this farewell until the time when they meet before God suggests that he is leaving a position of authority and, therefore, leaves this as a final statement that will stand to possibly condemn them at the bar of God. It is possible that Jacob is being removed from any position of authority by those against whom he has preached. In the previous sermon, those were the more wealthy, and perhaps, therefore, the more socially powerful. The allegory’s separation of the wicked and the righteous might have been seen as being acted out in Jacob’s city.

The phrase “pleasing bar of God” is somewhat unusual, and Royal Skousen has suggested that it might have been intended to be the “pleading bar of God,” as a more logical legal reference for the translator.

# Jacob 7

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## Sherem Comes among the People

### *Jacob 7:1–2*

1 And now it came to pass after some years had passed away, there came a man among the people of Nephi, whose name was Sherem.

2 And it came to pass that he began to preach among the people, and to declare unto them that there should be no Christ. And he preached many things which were flattering unto the people; and this he did that he might overthrow the doctrine of Christ.

### *Comments*

The previous chapter ended with a very final note. However, the final note was to a public audience. This chapter is written for posterity. It contrasts in form with the two copied sermons that were the first two entries in Jacob’s book. It isn’t clear when Jacob wrote this, only that the incident occurred some years after the end of the last sermon.

This chapter deals with Jacob’s interaction with Sherem. The implication of “there came a man among the people of Nephi” is that Sherem was not part of the city of Nephi. Not only does the language imply that he was from another city, but other clues that come later will reinforce that conclusion.

Sherem comes with a specific mission. He has come to preach. Specifically, he has come to preach that there should be no Christ. Jacob’s conclusion to the previously recorded sermon which included the allegory of the olive tree ended with the importance of believing in the coming atoning mission of the Messiah. Sherem is preaching very specifically against that very teaching. Sherem will not be declaring that the law of Moses should not be lived, but only that the Nephite emphasis on the atoning Messiah is not part of the law of Moses and therefore should be abandoned. It is an attempt to remove the teaching of Nephi and Jacob and return to perhaps a version of the law that Laman and Lemuel might have approved.

There is no indication that Sherem had any connection to Laman and Lemuel, but he does know the law of Moses, and he appears to follow it in the way that those in Jerusalem had lived it. Those in Jerusalem rejected Lehi’s teaching of a coming atoning Messiah, and Laman and Lemuel’s desires were to return both physically and symbolically to Jerusalem. It is an interesting speculation to see Sherem as coming from a people who had learned and lived the law of Moses as Laman and Lemuel might have taught it.

## ***Jacob 7:3–4***

3 And he labored diligently that he might lead away the hearts of the people, insomuch that he did lead away many hearts; and he knowing that I, Jacob, had faith in Christ who should come, he sought much opportunity that he might come unto me.

4 And he was learned, that he had a perfect knowledge of the language of the people; wherefore, he could use much flattery, and much power of speech, according to the power of the devil.

### ***Comments***

These two verses set up the conflict. First, while Sherem does preach to the people, he makes a particular target of Jacob. He knows that Jacob “had faith in Christ who should come” and therefore sought him out. As noted with the earlier verses, the issue is faith in Christ for a people who follow the law of Moses. That will be the most important issue.

The idea that Sherem is an outsider is highlighted by the idea that “he had a perfect knowledge of the language of the people.” There are two ways to understand that phrase. One is that he came from the outside and the Nephite language was a second language for him. In the Mesoamerican setting, this would be quite possible. The second reading is that Sherem was simply fluent and proficient in the language. Perhaps that idea is strengthened by the fact that he could use “much flattery, and much power of speech”—although that would be possible if he were truly fluent in his second language.

Most importantly, however, Jacob notes that Sherem has to seek him out. Sherem knows about Jacob, but does not appear to know who he is, or where he lives. In a smaller city, where Jacob had been a principal priest and teacher, it would be surprising that a long-time resident would not have known Jacob and where to find him.

## ***Jacob 7:5***

5 And he had hope to shake me from the faith, notwithstanding the many revelations and the many things which I had seen concerning these things; for I truly had seen angels, and they had ministered unto me. And also, I had heard the voice of the Lord speaking unto me in very word, from time to time; wherefore, I could not be shaken.

### ***Comments***

Jacob informs his readers that Sherem’s intention was directed at Jacob’s faith in the coming atoning Messiah. Perhaps Sherem did not understand what lay behind Jacob’s faith. Jacob’s foundation was particularly strong, for he had seen angels and they had ministered to him. He had heard the voice of Yahweh speaking to him. His spiritual experiences were sufficient foundation that his faith could not be moved.

Most of Jacob's readers do not have that quantity of quality experiences upon which to build our faith, but we typically have at least one. To have our faith shaken, that experience must also be shaken. So many are able to do so. As humans we are excellent at rationalizing, and it is possible for us, unlike Jacob, to reexamine our spiritual experience (or experiences), and find reasons why it should not be a building block of our faith.

Although we may never have the number or type of experiences that Jacob had, we do need to revisit our foundational experiences with the spirit, to keep them alive in us. We need to be able to call upon them to remind ourselves to have patience in learning and in understanding. We may have Sherems come to us, and we may not be as unshakeable as Jacob. We can, however, withstand through our own experience—as long as we keep it alive and do not hedge it around with excuses and rationalizations.

## **Sherem Confronts Jacob**

### ***Jacob 7:6–7***

6 And it came to pass that he came unto me, and on this wise did he speak unto me, saying: Brother Jacob, I have sought much opportunity that I might speak unto you; for I have heard and also know that thou goest about much, preaching that which ye call the gospel, or the doctrine of Christ.

7 And ye have led away much of this people that they pervert the right way of God, and keep not the law of Moses which is the right way; and convert the law of Moses into the worship of a being which ye say shall come many hundred years hence. And now behold, I, Sherem, declare unto you that this is blasphemy; for no man knoweth of such things; for he cannot tell of things to come. And after this manner did Sherem contend against me.

### ***Comments***

Jacob places this experience in dialog. It is part of the stylistic inheritance from the Old World that important lessons are couched in dialog. The interchange allows the principles to be taught in a more gradual and interesting way, as opposed to straight exposition.

Sherem gets right to the point. Jacob has taught the doctrine of Christ, and Sherem declares that this is a perversion. In particular, he contrasts the doctrine of Christ with the law of Moses, which he declares “is the right way.” The issue is the problem that the doctrine of Christ is wholly reliant upon an atoning Messiah who will not come for over half a millennium.

Sherem denies that any being so far distant could be important now, and that Jacob could not know that his coming would be important because “no man knowest of such things; for he cannot tell of things to come.” While this appears to be a condemnation of prophecy, it should not be read so broadly. The Old Testament supported prophets, and as one who declared that the law of Moses was the right

way, Sherem would have to accept prophets, including the principle of prophecy. It is not any prophecy, but rather this particular one.

In the Book of Mormon, the atoning Messiah is often referred to as one who would come, or even that which is to come. All that Sherem says, and does, declares that his particular issue is the teaching of the atoning Messiah and not prophecy in general.

### ***Jacob 7:8–12***

8 But behold, the Lord God poured in his Spirit into my soul, insomuch that I did confound him in all his words.

9 And I said unto him: Deniest thou the Christ who shall come? And he said: If there should be a Christ, I would not deny him; but I know that there is no Christ, neither has been, nor ever will be.

10 And I said unto him: Believest thou the scriptures? And he said, Yea.

11 And I said unto him: Then ye do not understand them; for they truly testify of Christ. Behold, I say unto you that none of the prophets have written, nor prophesied, save they have spoken concerning this Christ.

12 And this is not all—it has been made manifest unto me, for I have heard and seen; and it also has been made manifest unto me by the power of the Holy Ghost; wherefore, I know if there should be no atonement made all mankind must be lost.

### ***Comments***

If we did not yet know that this was written after the fact, it is clear from Jacob's statement in verse 8. Jacob declares that he confounded Sherem. Then he relates the exchange that demonstrates how he did it. The exchange is related in terms of a dialog.

Sherem wanted to preach against the coming atoning Messiah, so Jacob begins with that topic. Jacob asks if Sherem denies the Messiah who is to come. Sherem's response is that he cannot deny something that does not exist. The basic argument is that this Messiah does not exist in the present and did not exist in the past. Neither of those are points that Sherem can argue. Sherem does leave the door open, however, because he also says that he does not believe that there will ever be such a Messiah.

Jacob cannot turn to history, but he can turn to prophets and prophecy. They are found in the scriptures, so Jacob makes certain that Sherem indicates that he believes in the scriptures. Sherem says yes, and Jacob tells him that he must, therefore, not understand them as they speak of this coming Messiah, and Jacob himself is a prophetic witness. Again, this is not any Messiah, but the atoning Messiah, as Jacob makes clear in verse 12.

Thus, Jacob has declared, but only asserted, that the scriptures point to the atoning Messiah. That might be a difficult thing to prove as Nephi apparently believed that much of the teaching about that coming atoning Messiah had been removed, or left out of, the scriptures.



## God Smites Sherem

### ***Jacob 7:13–15***

13 And it came to pass that he said unto me: Show me a sign by this power of the Holy Ghost, in the which ye know so much.

14 And I said unto him: What am I that I should tempt God to show unto thee a sign in the thing which thou knowest to be true? Yet thou wilt deny it, because thou art of the devil. Nevertheless, not my will be done; but if God shall smite thee, let that be a sign unto thee that he has power, both in heaven and in earth; and also, that Christ shall come. And thy will, O Lord, be done, and not mine.

15 And it came to pass that when I, Jacob, had spoken these words, the power of the Lord came upon him, insomuch that he fell to the earth. And it came to pass that he was nourished for the space of many days.

### *Comments*

The problem with arguments based on scriptures between two people who both believe in the scriptures, but read them differently, is that it will be difficult for either to be convincing. This is a common problem in many modern discussions of the meanings of scriptures. Different people read them differently, and sometimes, even without a faith tradition, we have brothers or sisters who might read them differently.

Sherem perhaps understood that he would not be able to confound Jacob through words, so he attempted to have Jacob fail at what might be seen as a reasonable request. Sherem suggests that, if Jacob believes that this is the message of the old prophets, and that he is claiming place among them, that he should simply show a sign, and then all would believe.

Jacob removes himself from the suggestion of power and declares that Yahweh himself will provide that sign. It would be that coming Messiah himself, who would show a sign upon the person of Sherem, the unbeliever. Yahweh does something to Sherem whereby Sherem becomes so weak that he cannot even feed himself. Others are required to feed him for several days.

### ***Jacob 7:16–20***

16 And it came to pass that he said unto the people: Gather together on the morrow, for I shall die; wherefore, I desire to speak unto the people before I shall die.

17 And it came to pass that on the morrow the multitude were gathered together; and he spake plainly unto them and denied the things which he had taught them, and confessed the Christ, and the power of the Holy Ghost, and the ministering of angels.

18 And he spake plainly unto them, that he had been deceived by the power of the devil. And he spake of hell, and of eternity, and of eternal punishment.

19 And he said: I fear lest I have committed the unpardonable sin, for I have lied unto God; for I denied the Christ, and said that I believed the scriptures; and they truly testify of him. And because I have thus lied unto God I greatly fear lest my case shall be awful; but I confess unto God.

20 And it came to pass that when he had said these words he could say no more, and he gave up the ghost.

### *Comments*

Sherem realizes that he is about to die and asks that the people be gathered. He had preached publicly, therefore he had to make amends publicly. He had asked for a sign and that sign had been given. He was soon to face the being whom he had denied, and now knew that that being had power. Therefore, he atones for his own actions by affirming the coming atoning Messiah whom he had previously denied.

Sherem also realized that since Yahweh had stricken him nigh to death that his soul was also in danger. Thus, he worries about hell and punishment, and is concerned that he would not be forgiven. Modern Latter-day Saint teachings speak of an unpardonable sin, but even with his denial, Sherem does not meet the modern definition of the term. For Sherem, it is simply wondering if he could be pardoned. Since he had not learned about the atonement, and had actively denied it, he would not have understood the expanse of God's mercy.

### ***Jacob 7:21–23***

21 And when the multitude had witnessed that he spake these things as he was about to give up the ghost, they were astonished exceedingly; insomuch that the power of God came down upon them, and they were overcome that they fell to the earth.

22 Now, this thing was pleasing unto me, Jacob, for I had requested it of my Father who was in heaven; for he had heard my cry and answered my prayer.

23 And it came to pass that peace and the love of God was restored again among the people; and they searched the scriptures, and hearkened no more to the words of this wicked man.

### *Comments*

Sherem provided dramatic evidence of Yahweh's power, and Yahweh's approval of Jacob and Jacob's teachings. The people also fall to the earth. In this case, it is probably not weakness, but a sign of respect where they prostrated themselves before God, accepting him anew as their God.

There is an important subtext to what Jacob reports. In verse 23, note that he says that "peace and the love of God was restored again among the people." In Jacob's first recorded sermon he indicated that the Nephites were straying from the path. In the second, he ended with the burning of the wicked, with the implication that the Nephites were approaching that end. Here, the powerful example Yahweh

made of Sherem leads the Nephites to a repentance they apparently had not been willing to entertain previously. The incident with Sherem had exactly the opposite effect on what Sherem had intended.

### ***Jacob 7:24–25***

24 And it came to pass that many means were devised to reclaim and restore the Lamanites to the knowledge of the truth; but it all was vain, for they delighted in wars and bloodshed, and they had an eternal hatred against us, their brethren. And they sought by the power of their arms to destroy us continually.

25 Wherefore, the people of Nephi did fortify against them with their arms, and with all their might, trusting in the God and rock of their salvation; wherefore, they became as yet, conquerors of their enemies.

### ***Comments***

Jacob does not explain why the Nephite repentance led them to seek a similar repentance among the Lamanites. If Sherem had truly come from a Lamanite community, that provides the explanation for his understanding of the scriptures, the reason he was so against the atoning Messiah, and thus turning to the Lamanites as a result. If Sherem came from the Lamanites and he had repented, then thinking the Lamanites might repent would have been reasonable.

Nevertheless, the hatred was too strong, and the relationship with the Lamanites was not one of peace, but rather of war. Neither Nephi nor Jacob spends any time discussing wars in their small plate record. We must assume that they were chronicled on the large plates and neither Nephi nor Jacob saw reason to record them on the small plates that had a different purpose.

Jacob notes that they fortified themselves against the Lamanites and “became as yet, conquerors of their enemies.” That might suggest Nephite wars of conquest but is more likely a translation term that simply indicated that they had defeated the Lamanites in battle. Subsequent writers will note that they did often defeat, or conquer, their enemies, but it is never said that they acquired territory through that method, which is the typical understanding of the word *conquer*.

## **Plates Passed to Enos**

### ***Jacob 7:26–27***

26 And it came to pass that I, Jacob, began to be old; and the record of this people being kept on the other plates of Nephi, wherefore, I conclude this record, declaring that I have written according to the best of my knowledge, by saying that the time passed away with us, and also our lives passed away

like as it were unto us a dream, we being a lonesome and a solemn people, wanderers, cast out from Jerusalem, born in tribulation, in a wilderness, and hated of our brethren, which caused wars and contentions; wherefore, we did mourn out our days.

27 And I, Jacob, saw that I must soon go down to my grave; wherefore, I said unto my son Enos: Take these plates. And I told him the things which my brother Nephi had commanded me, and he promised obedience unto the commands. And I make an end of my writing upon these plates, which writing has been small; and to the reader I bid farewell, hoping that many of my brethren may read my words. Brethren, adieu.

### *Comments*

Once again, we see the phrase “began to be old,” which occurs in descriptions of leaders who are about to die. Jacob finds that he is about to die, and, therefore, concludes his record. He knows that he will write no more.

It is a sad farewell. He was of a family forcibly driven from Jerusalem, and then across an ocean to a new world. He was a leader in a community which had been taught true principles but had often not been able to keep them. They were involved in wars and contentions. Jacob’s melancholy conclusion is that “we did mourn out our days.” Jacob may have been a righteous man, but he suffered the knowledge that he had not been able to lead his people to the righteous path as he fervently desired.

Jacob ends with the word recorded as *adieu*. For some reason, much has been made of that word. It was a normal part of English speech after the Norman domination where French was the official language of the court in England. It is no more surprising to see *adieu* than it would be to see *good-bye*. Both are words that are part of the translation. Neither is original to the Nephite language. We don’t know what word Jacob wrote, only that it was translated as the fully understandable *adieu*.

# **The Book of Enos**



# Enos 1

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## Enos Wrestles with God

### ***Enos 1:1–2***

1 Behold, it came to pass that I, Enos, knowing my father that he was a just man—for he taught me in his language, and also in the nurture and admonition of the Lord—and blessed be the name of my God for it—  
2 And I will tell you of the wrestle which I had before God, before I received a remission of my sins.

### *Comments*

Enos begins his record with a declaration that his father was a just man, and that he was taught in his father’s language as well as by the admonition of the Lord. This seems to be so similar to Nephi’s introduction of himself and his goodly parents that it would seem that Enos had read at least the beginning of Nephi’s book before writing his own book on those very same plates. It is an introduction that has no other purpose than to connect himself to his father, and then Enos moves to what will be the topic of his book. He will speak “of the wrestle which I had before God.”

The book of Enos is not very long, and it is possible that it was composed in a single writing event. However, it is more likely that there were at least two and perhaps more such events. The first probable division comes with the beginning of verse 20. However, the break is not obvious, and, therefore, the whole of the book still might have been a single reminiscent event. We will see evidence for that approach to this record at the beginning of the book of Omni.

### ***Enos 1:3–5***

3 Behold, I went to hunt beasts in the forests; and the words which I had often heard my father speak concerning eternal life, and the joy of the saints, sunk deep into my heart.

4 And my soul hungered; and I kneeled down before my Maker, and I cried unto him in mighty prayer and supplication for mine own soul; and all the day long did I cry unto him; yea, and when the night came I did still raise my voice high that it reached the heavens.

5 And there came a voice unto me, saying: Enos, thy sins are forgiven thee, and thou shalt be blessed.

## *Commentary*

The setting for Enos's struggle before the Lord comes as he is hunting alone in the forests. Before looking at the spiritual aspects, it is important to note that the Nephites had often spoken ill of the Lamanites because they hunted beasts, yet here Enos is hunting. The difference is whether or not hunting was the principle means of sustenance. The ethnocentric slur against the Lamanites was that, unlike the Nephites, they did not primarily farm. Hunting in and of itself was not the problem, simply the social implications of how much hunting needed to be done.

Joseph Smith would later enter woods to be alone and pray. Enos was already in the forests and went there for a different purpose. Nevertheless, both men were alone in nature and sought the God of nature in prayer.

The key for Enos is that "my soul hungered." This may be a play on the reason that he was hunting in the woods. That hunt was for temporal food, but he found that it was his soul that hungered. There is a difference between simply praying and the earnest supplication that comes from a hungry soul. Enos says that he prayed for a long time. We must take him at his words. Even if his statement that he cried all day and into the night were not completely accurate, he nevertheless persisted in prayer a long time. This was because of the hungry soul. A casual prayer doesn't have that much to say in private.

As a result of earnest effort to reach out to Yahweh, Enos is answered. We do not know why he came before the Lord, but the Lord responds that his sins were forgiven. This may have been similar to Jesus healing a man of palsy who could not rise from his bed by saying that sins were forgiven. Jesus indicated that it was no easier to say that one's sins were forgiven than to say arise and walk (see Matthew 9:2–5).

We need not assume that Enos was guilty of major sin. Yahweh was declaring that he atoned for Enos's sins and, therefore, Enos was pure enough to converse with the Lord.

## ***Enos 1:6–8***

6 And I, Enos, knew that God could not lie; wherefore, my guilt was swept away.

7 And I said: Lord, how is it done?

8 And he said unto me: Because of thy faith in Christ, whom thou hast never before heard nor seen. And many years pass away before he shall manifest himself in the flesh; wherefore, go to, thy faith hath made thee whole.

## *Comments*

The suggestion in the previous episode that Yahweh declared Enos's sins forgiven indicated Yahweh's power to atone, which is confirmed in these verses. Enos could legitimately ask how it might be done because no sacrifice had been made. In the law of Moses, sin was conceived communally as much as individually, and was atoned ritually through sacrifice. Enos had not performed sacrifice, but knew that if God declared him forgiven, he was forgiven. What he did not know is how that had been done.



Yahweh declares that it was “because of thy faith in Christ.” This is the reiteration of the essential aspect of the Nephite gospel. Nephi taught that forgiveness from sin would ultimately come through the atoning Messiah. Jacob, Enos’s father, had taught the same thing. Enos had declared in verse 1 that Jacob had taught Enos the gospel. Therefore, Enos theoretically understood. However, he did not fully understand the implication of the current power of the future atonement until Yahweh declared his sins forgiven.

### ***Enos 1:9–10***

9 Now, it came to pass that when I had heard these words I began to feel a desire for the welfare of my brethren, the Nephites; wherefore, I did pour out my whole soul unto God for them.

10 And while I was thus struggling in the spirit, behold, the voice of the Lord came into my mind again, saying: I will visit thy brethren according to their diligence in keeping my commandments. I have given unto them this land, and it is a holy land; and I curse it not save it be for the cause of iniquity; wherefore, I will visit thy brethren according as I have said; and their transgressions will I bring down with sorrow upon their own heads.

### ***Comments***

Enos had received atonement for his own sins. That allowed him to expand his understanding to his brethren. Perhaps it was initially to family, as that would make sense, but when he writes of the experience, it is the whole of the Nephite nation. He desires that they also feel the redemption that Enos had felt.

Yahweh speaks to him again. The nature of that message tells us much of what the Nephites were like at that time. Yahweh reminds Enos that Yahweh has given the Nephites a land with a promise. It would not be cursed save for iniquity. It is the next phrase that is interesting: “I will visit thy brethren according as I have said; and their transgressions will I bring down with sorrow upon their own heads.” One might read this as a reference to when Yahweh really would physically come to the Nephites, as recounted in 3 Nephi.

The final phrase tells us that the “visit” is not necessarily a friendly one. Yahweh states that their transgressions will bring down sorrow on their heads. Nephi had lamented his people’s transgressions at the end of his book. The book of Jacob was entirely concerned with a people wandering from the path of righteousness. While Enos does not say anything about the current Nephites, it is clear from Yahweh’s declaration that they have not sufficiently repented and are still wandering from the true path. The hope at the end of the book of Jacob appears to have waned by his son’s time.

### ***Enos 1:11–14***

11 And after I, Enos, had heard these words, my faith began to be unshaken in the Lord; and I prayed unto him with many long strugglings for my brethren, the Lamanites.

12 And it came to pass that after I had prayed and labored with all diligence, the Lord said unto me: I will grant unto thee according to thy desires, because of thy faith.

13 And now behold, this was the desire which I desired of him—that if it should so be, that my people, the Nephites, should fall into transgression, and by any means be destroyed, and the Lamanites should not be destroyed, that the Lord God would preserve a record of my people, the Nephites; even if it so be by the power of his holy arm, that it might be brought forth at some future day unto the Lamanites, that, perhaps, they might be brought unto salvation—

14 For at the present our strugglings were vain in restoring them to the true faith. And they swore in their wrath that, if it were possible, they would destroy our records and us, and also all the traditions of our fathers.

### *Comments*

Perhaps Enos turns to the topic of the Lamanites because it was the next possible choice. It is also probable that he does so because Yahweh has just said that the Nephites will have sorrow brought upon them. Perhaps that forlorn picture of the future of the Nephites led Enos to dream of hope in the redemption of the Lamanites.

An unusual technique that occurs from time to time in the Book of Mormon is the statement of the conclusion prior to the details behind the conclusion. That is what we have in verse 12. That is the conclusion. Yahweh grants Enos's request. We learn that before we learn what the request was.

Enos does not pray for the salvation of the Nephites, for Yahweh had already declared their fate. What he does, however, is think about the records. He believes that the Lamanites might want to destroy them and that perhaps they could be a future tool for the conversion of the Lamanites. Why, however, would the Lamanites want to destroy the records? This would principally be the brass plates, which had probably become a symbol of Nephite legitimacy as a relic from the Old World, along with the Liahona and the sword of Laban. Those artifacts would be passed down to future kings as we will see with King Benjamin. Destroying the records would destroy a Nephite claim of superior right of rulership over the Lamanites.

### ***Enos 1:15–18***

15 Wherefore, I knowing that the Lord God was able to preserve our records, I cried unto him continually, for he had said unto me: Whatsoever thing ye shall ask in faith, believing that ye shall receive in the name of Christ, ye shall receive it.

16 And I had faith, and I did cry unto God that he would preserve the records; and he covenanted with me that he would bring them forth unto the Lamanites in his own due time.

17 And I, Enos, knew it would be according to the covenant which he had made; wherefore my soul did rest.

18 And the Lord said unto me: Thy fathers have also required of me this thing; and it shall be done unto them according to their faith; for their faith was like unto thine.

### *Comments*

To this point in Enos's prayer, the most important promise he receives is that the records will be preserved. While the concern for the Lamanite destruction of the records would most logically be for the plates of brass, Enos understands that there are other records of the Nephite people. If we understand from his introduction that he read Nephi's record, and as a son, certainly he had read his father's record, he knew that there were things in those records that should be preserved. Therefore, his concern for preservation might have begun with understanding a Lamanite threat against the plates of brass, but he expanded that concern to the official Nephite records, and probably to those upon which he was writing.

Yahweh promises that they would be preserved, and notes that Enos has repeated a request also made by "thy fathers." In the scriptures, "fathers" might have a long time-depth. It could have meant Old Testament prophets. However, in the context of the Nephites, it is most likely that this comment refers to Nephi and Jacob. Nephi, in particular, understood that their records would eventually come forth, and, therefore, Nephi was certainly one of those "fathers."

If the book of Enos were written in more than one writing event, this would have ended the first event. There is a thematic break with the following verse, although it is subtle. Thus, it is possible, but not certain, that Enos wrote the sections at different times.

## **Enos Stereotypes the Lamanites and Nephites**

### ***Enos 1:19–21***

19 And now it came to pass that I, Enos, went about among the people of Nephi, prophesying of things to come, and testifying of the things which I had heard and seen.

20 And I bear record that the people of Nephi did seek diligently to restore the Lamanites unto the true faith in God. But our labors were vain; their hatred was fixed, and they were led by their evil nature that they became wild, and ferocious, and a blood-thirsty people, full of idolatry and filthiness; feeding upon beasts of prey; dwelling in tents, and wandering about in the wilderness with a short skin girdle about their loins and their heads shaven; and their skill was in the bow, and in the cimeter, and the ax. And many of them did eat nothing save it was raw meat; and they were continually seeking to destroy us.

21 And it came to pass that the people of Nephi did till the land, and raise all manner of grain, and of fruit, and flocks of herds, and flocks of all manner of cattle of every kind, and goats, and wild goats, and also many horses.

## *Comments*

These three verses should be seen as the conclusion to Enos's entry about his prayer. They describe the aftermath of his conversation with Yahweh. His impulse was to go among the people of Nephi and prophesy of things to come. This suggests that there was more to the prayer than what he recorded, and that it included a call as a prophet. As with his grandfather, Lehi, he was not a court-appointed prophet or teacher. In the tradition of the Old Testament, Enos was a prophet from the outside who was called to teach the people without official governmental appointment.

In verse 20 Enos says that "the people of Nephi did seek diligently to restore the Lamanites unto the true faith in God." That certainly indicates that there were still righteous Nephites who were attempting to do good, contrary to the implications we have seen from the end of 2 Nephi, the book of Jacob, and the inferences in the book of Enos. That number of righteous Nephites perhaps was the reason that the Nephite destruction came much later, even though Jacob had threatened them with it.

Perhaps the mission, or missions, to the Lamanites were aided by Jacob's indication that the Lamanites were more righteous than the Nephites (see Jacob 3:5). Whatever the motivation, the result was not encouraging. Enos declares that "our labors were vain; their hatred was fixed."

The rest of the catalog of the terrible things the Lamanites did was a standard ethnocentric complaint. The demonstration that this is a cultural description is verified in verse 21. Where the Lamanites are savages, the Nephites are civilized. The proof is in the savage way the Lamanites provide for themselves as opposed to the civilized Nephite agriculture and herding. Lamanites deal with the wild, Nephites with the cultivated.

Even if it were true at one point in time, the larger numbers of the Lamanites and what we see of them later in the text, tells us that this was not an accurate picture.

## ***Enos 1:22–24***

22 And there were exceedingly many prophets among us. And the people were a stiffnecked people, hard to understand.

23 And there was nothing save it was exceeding harshness, preaching and prophesying of wars, and contentions, and destructions, and continually reminding them of death, and the duration of eternity, and the judgments and the power of God, and all these things—stirring them up continually to keep them in the fear of the Lord. I say there was nothing short of these things, and exceedingly great plainness of speech, would keep them from going down speedily to destruction. And after this manner do I write concerning them.

24 And I saw wars between the Nephites and Lamanites in the course of my days.

## *Comments*

These comments are summaries. They do not have the detail of the record of Enos's prayer. Nephi's instruction for these small plates is that they pertain more to the ministry, and Enos followed that

command. The interchange with Yahweh certainly qualified. These events are more historical, although they are the history of efforts at ministering. Because they appear to have been largely failures, Enos does not dwell on them.

The various missions to the Lamanites suggested that there continued to be righteous men and women among the Nephites. This description of the stiff-necked rejection of many prophets indicates that the problems Nephi and Jacob lamented yet remain. The missions to the Lamanites had also failed. Thus, Enos concludes by noting the wickedness of the Nephites, and according to the promise of the land, that should lead to destructive events. Therefore, there were wars with the Lamanites in Enos's lifetime. The promise was, of course, being fulfilled.

## **Enos's Final Testimony**

### ***Enos 1:25–27***

25 And it came to pass that I began to be old, and an hundred and seventy and nine years had passed away from the time that our father Lehi left Jerusalem.

26 And I saw that I must soon go down to my grave, having been wrought upon by the power of God that I must preach and prophesy unto this people, and declare the word according to the truth which is in Christ. And I have declared it in all my days, and have rejoiced in it above that of the world.

27 And I soon go to the place of my rest, which is with my Redeemer; for I know that in him I shall rest. And I rejoice in the day when my mortal shall put on immortality, and shall stand before him; then shall I see his face with pleasure, and he will say unto me: Come unto me, ye blessed, there is a place prepared for you in the mansions of my Father. Amen.

### ***Comments***

Enos uses the standard phrase “began to be old” to indicate that he is about to die. He declared that one hundred and seventy-nine years had passed from the time that Lehi had left Jerusalem. That dating is a question, and one without a clean answer. It is possible that there was a missing generation, but the record is otherwise consistent in listing those caring for the record, such as in the book of Omni, where multiple record-keepers do little more than indicate that they were in the line to do so. We also have the problem of knowing that Jacob's son was named Enos and was charged with the records (Jacob 7:27). There is really no textual room for a missing generation, even if there is time.

The most likely answer is that Enos was born much later in Jacob's life, and that both Jacob and Enos lived to be seventy or eighty. That is still an extended chronology, but possible.

Note that as Enos leaves his final blessing, he returns to the theme of his wrestle before Yahweh to receive forgiveness. Enos says that he must “declare the word according to the truth which is in Christ.” That was what he learned that allowed his sins to be forgiven, and it was the most important message of the Nephite prophets.

The phrase “when my mortal shall put on immortality” echoes the language of 1 Corinthians 15:53. Obviously it could not have been a reference to that verse, and, therefore, the language similarity is the result of the translator’s choice of words. The plates were not in English, so that phrase could not have been on them, even though the concept could have been.

# **The Book of Jarom**





# Jarom 1

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## Jarom Writes on the Small Plates

### *Jarom 1:1–2*

1 Now behold, I, Jarom, write a few words according to the commandment of my father, Enos, that our genealogy may be kept.

2 And as these plates are small, and as these things are written for the intent of the benefit of our brethren the Lamanites, wherefore, it must needs be that I write a little; but I shall not write the things of my prophesying, nor of my revelations. For what could I write more than my fathers have written? For have not they revealed the plan of salvation? I say unto you, Yea; and this sufficeth me.

### *Comments*

Where Enos appeared to have imitated Nephi in the opening of his book, Jarom does not. Jarom begins by saying that he really won't be saying much. In his case, it is not because of unrighteousness, for he had received revelations and had prophesied. What he will write about is that those teachings, as those that Enos had described, do not appear to have been effective. Jarom will continue the theme of his fathers, who lamented the Nephite departure from the path of righteousness.

In verse 1, Jarom makes the interesting statement that his father commanded that the genealogy might be kept. Enos didn't give a genealogy and Jarom will not either. The only time Nephi mentioned the genealogy of his fathers, he specifically said that he would not include it (see 1 Nephi 5:16 and 1 Nephi 6:1).

As with the complicated meanings that appear to surround the idea of being taught *language*, the idea of what *genealogy* meant in this context must be deduced. In this case, it probably indicates the family connection of writing on the plates. These plates passed from father to son, with some instances of brother to brother. That is the genealogy to be kept.

Confirmation that this is the intended meaning could be that the very next thing Jarom speaks about is writing on the plates. Thus, keeping the genealogy and writing on the plates were connected. The only link to family is the responsibility to write.

### ***Jarom 1:3–4***

3 Behold, it is expedient that much should be done among this people, because of the hardness of their hearts, and the deafness of their ears, and the blindness of their minds, and the stiffness of their necks; nevertheless, God is exceedingly merciful unto them, and has not as yet swept them off from the face of the land.

4 And there are many among us who have many revelations, for they are not all stiffnecked. And as many as are not stiffnecked and have faith, have communion with the Holy Spirit, which maketh manifest unto the children of men, according to their faith.

### ***Comments***

The Nephite community is being divided between the righteous and the unrighteous. Jarom understands the promise of the land, and notes that it is only God’s exceeding mercy that has prevented them from being swept from the face of the land. Of course, there were also some who were righteous, and they also entered into God’s mercy in not yet allowing the destruction of the Nephites.

How did this happen so quickly? How does it begin in the lifetime of Nephi and Jacob, who were born in the Old World? In the ancient world there were no such things as religions that one would belong to. Those are more modern concepts. What we call “religion was simply the definition of the way things were. If the Nephites had firmly established the understanding of what was really behind the way of the world, we would not expect it to so quickly disappear. That is, unless they were competing with other ideas about how things ought to be seen.

Understanding the Nephites as a population that included unnamed, but inferred, others—provides the answers. Just as Nephi and Jacob brought with them the ideas of the Old World, these others would have brought their ideas about how things were from their own New World background. As they continued to live in the New World, and were surrounded by peoples holding to competing ideas, it is easy to see how those non-Israelite ideas might influence and tempt away the Nephites who now lived in that environment, and many of whom had been converted from it.

### ***Jarom 1:5–6***

5 And now, behold, two hundred years had passed away, and the people of Nephi had waxed strong in the land. They observed to keep the law of Moses and the sabbath day holy unto the Lord. And they profaned not; neither did they blaspheme. And the laws of the land were exceedingly strict.

6 And they were scattered upon much of the face of the land, and the Lamanites also. And they were exceedingly more numerous than were they of the Nephites; and they loved murder and would drink the blood of beasts.

## *Comments*

Reading verse 5 without also having read verse 3 might indicate that all was well with the Nephites. They observe the law of Moses and attempt to live correctly. Verse 3 had spoken of the hardness of the Nephite hearts and how it was only God's mercy that saved them from destruction. Now, in verse 5, we have Nephites who appear to be faithful. The change occurred in verse 4, where Jarom had indicated "they are not all stiffnecked." It is still a divided people, but there are those who follow the correct path.

The fact that Jarom mentions that they were scattered upon the face of the land is intended to indicate that they have prospered. Since he has already noted that the wicked are alive only through God's mercy, he attributes this success to the righteous mentioned in verse 5.

He is also truthful in reporting that the Lamanites are also spread over the face of the land, and they "were exceedingly more numerous than were they of the Nephites." The comment that the Lamanites loved murder and drank the blood of beasts continues the Nephite ethnocentric characterization of the Lamanites.

The fact that the Lamanites were exceedingly more numerous continues to demonstrate that, when the Nephites arrived, they intermixed with existing populations. None of the descriptions of the population of the Nephites or Lamanites could have existed this early without the infusion of large numbers of people who did not arrive from the Old World.

## **Frequent War between Lamanites and Nephites**

### ***Jarom 1:7–9***

7 And it came to pass that they came many times against us, the Nephites, to battle. But our kings and our leaders were mighty men in the faith of the Lord; and they taught the people the ways of the Lord; wherefore, we withstood the Lamanites and swept them away out of our lands, and began to fortify our cities, or whatsoever place of our inheritance.

8 And we multiplied exceedingly, and spread upon the face of the land, and became exceedingly rich in gold, and in silver, and in precious things, and in fine workmanship of wood, in buildings, and in machinery, and also in iron and copper, and brass and steel, making all manner of tools of every kind to till the ground, and weapons of war—yea, the sharp pointed arrow, and the quiver, and the dart, and the javelin, and all preparations for war.

9 And thus being prepared to meet the Lamanites, they did not prosper against us. But the word of the Lord was verified, which he spake unto our fathers, saying that: Inasmuch as ye will keep my commandments ye shall prosper in the land.

## Comments

The intent of these three verses is summarized in the final sentence of the last of the three. Jarom states: “The word of the Lord was verified, which he spake unto our fathers, saying that: Inasmuch as ye will keep my commandments ye shall prosper in the land.” When Jarom indicated in verse 7 that they were led by “mighty men in the faith of the Lord,” that tells the perceptive reader why they were successful.

Enos had declared in Enos 1:24 that he had seen “wars between the Nephites and Lamanites in the course of my days.” Jarom has also seen them, and perhaps they are becoming worse. The Nephites have had to fortify their cities and had to make all manner of weapons of war.

Perhaps more interesting is that as they spread upon the face of the land, they became rich. Specifically, they became “rich in gold, and in silver and in precious things, and in fine workmanship of wood, in buildings, and in machinery, and also in iron and copper, and brass and steel.” The obvious intent of this list is to demonstrate that their wealth was dependent upon an expertise in metals. As with our discussion of Lehi, it is unlikely that they became wealthy by simply possessing these metals—even those that we modern people esteem as precious. The metals had value, but possessed true value in what was made from them.

The word *machinery* in verse 8 appears to be anachronistic. That is true only if we forget that levers are also machines. The use of the word need not refer to anything anachronistic.

## Jarom 1:10–12

10 And it came to pass that the prophets of the Lord did threaten the people of Nephi, according to the word of God, that if they did not keep the commandments, but should fall into transgression, they should be destroyed from off the face of the land.

11 Wherefore, the prophets, and the priests, and the teachers, did labor diligently, exhorting with all long-suffering the people to diligence; teaching the law of Moses, and the intent for which it was given; persuading them to look forward unto the Messiah, and believe in him to come as though he already was. And after this manner did they teach them.

12 And it came to pass that by so doing they kept them from being destroyed upon the face of the land; for they did prick their hearts with the word, continually stirring them up unto repentance.

## Comments

Verse 9 listed the reason the Nephites had prospered. They understood the promise of the land. Verse 10 follows that declared reason by noting that this is what the prophets preached. It is interesting that for Lehi and Nephi the promise was stated as a positive. The Nephites would prosper if they obeyed the commandments. Here, the prophets warn the people that if they do not keep the commandments, they would

be destroyed. These are the two sides of the same covenant and promise of the land, but apparently the negative statement was more relevant to the Nephites of the time.

What did it mean to live righteously? From the plates of brass, they understood that one part of the answer was to live according to the law of Moses. However, also according to the brass plates, but reinforced by Nephi, Jacob, and other unnamed prophets, was the idea that they should look to the coming atoning Messiah. Following those two teachings would prevent them from being destroyed.

### ***Jarom 1:13–15***

13 And it came to pass that two hundred and thirty and eight years had passed away—after the manner of wars, and contentions, and dissensions, for the space of much of the time.

14 And I, Jarom, do not write more, for the plates are small. But behold, my brethren, ye can go to the other plates of Nephi; for behold, upon them the records of our wars are engraven, according to the writings of the kings, or those which they caused to be written.

15 And I deliver these plates into the hands of my son Omni, that they may be kept according to the commandments of my fathers.

### ***Comments***

All the book of Jarom is clearly written retrospectively. There is not a clear place where we could suggest that at a given point Jarom ended a writing event and started again. It is likely that this was all written as a single event. The fact that verse 14 mentions that he cannot write more, and that the plates are small, echo verse 2 which nearly says the same thing, suggesting that those considerations were there both before and after writing. The statements appear as bookends to the rest of the record.

Jarom has spoken of wars, but only in the context of the promise of the land. There are no details. As one who is obeying Nephi's command for this set of plates, that is to be expected. Jarom knows of the large plates and what they contain, so he would clearly understand the distinction between these small plates and the larger collection, which contained more details of wars and contentions.

These plates are to be passed from father to son, for the most part. Jarom indicates that he will do so when he gives them to his son, Omni, for whom the next book is named.



# **The Book of Omni**





# Omni 1

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## Omni Writes

### *Omni 1:1–3*

1 Behold, it came to pass that I, Omni, being commanded by my father, Jarom, that I should write somewhat upon these plates, to preserve our genealogy—

2 Wherefore, in my days, I would that ye should know that I fought much with the sword to preserve my people, the Nephites, from falling into the hands of their enemies, the Lamanites. But behold, I of myself am a wicked man, and I have not kept the statutes and the commandments of the Lord as I ought to have done.

3 And it came to pass that two hundred and seventy and six years had passed away, and we had many seasons of peace; and we had many seasons of serious war and bloodshed. Yea, and in fine, two hundred and eighty and two years had passed away, and I had kept these plates according to the commandments of my fathers; and I conferred them upon my son Amaron. And I make an end.

### *Comments*

The book of Omni opens much as the book of Jarom did. Jarom 1:1 noted that his father had commanded him to keep the genealogy. Omni 1:1 notes that his father commanded him to preserve the genealogy. As with the Comments on Jarom 1:1, it is probable that the term *genealogy* used in this sense is the father-to-son transmission of the plates and the responsibility to write on them.

The small plates had a very specific command associated with them when Nephi first created them. They were for “the special purpose that there should be an account engraven of the ministry of my people” (1 Nephi 9:3). The large plates contained the “account of the reign of the kings, and the wars and contentions” (1 Nephi 9:4). These commandments concerning the content of the two plate traditions that Nephi created, continued through the existence of both of those traditions. The large plates continued to record the deeds of the kings, or later, chief judges—until Mormon himself wrote on the large plates. The small plates were clearly transmitted with the command that they preserve things of the ministry.

For that reason, Omni notes that he has “fought much with the sword,” and that he had not “kept the statutes and the commandments of the Lord” as he ought. Therefore, he did not believe that he had

anything to add. The wars or battles in which he had participated would have been recorded on the large plates. Apparently, his life was spent on things that were more suited to the other plates, and not the special command for the small plates. Nevertheless, he keeps his father's command that he should preserve the lineage record. He writes a little, and then passes the record to his son, Amaron.

## Amaron Writes

### *Omni 1:4–8*

4 And now I, Amaron, write the things whatsoever I write, which are few, in the book of my father.

5 Behold, it came to pass that three hundred and twenty years had passed away, and the more wicked part of the Nephites were destroyed.

6 For the Lord would not suffer, after he had led them out of the land of Jerusalem and kept and preserved them from falling into the hands of their enemies, yea, he would not suffer that the words should not be verified, which he spake unto our fathers, saying that: Inasmuch as ye will not keep my commandments ye shall not prosper in the land.

7 Wherefore, the Lord did visit them in great judgment; nevertheless, he did spare the righteous that they should not perish, but did deliver them out of the hands of their enemies.

8 And it came to pass that I did deliver the plates unto my brother Chemish.

### *Comments*

The book of Omni was obviously named for Omni, even though he only wrote what we have as three verses. With such a small entry on the plates, his son apparently decided that there was no reason to create a new book, therefore, he wrote in his father's book. That decision would influence the rest of those in the lineage who would write on the small plates. Until the last man wrote, the lineage kept the records, but said little. Ammaron's contribution is in four modern verses, but not much more information than was contained in his father's three.

The theme that Omni broached was that there were wars and contentions, only implying by noting the wars, that the Nephites were not fulfilling their part of the covenant of the land. Amaron was more explicit. There is destruction among the Nephites, which Amaron suggests was the more wicked part. According to the promise of the land, this was expected. Only wickedness would lead to the absence of the Lord's protection, which then led to the destruction. Amaron is very clear, in verses 6 and 7, that the Lord did preserve those who were righteous. Thus, Amaron is verifying that the promise of the land still applied.

As with Omni's record, much of what Amaron has to say is about wars and contentions, and therefore, not the subject to be written in the small plates. Therefore, he has little to say, and passes the plates to his brother, Chemish.

## Chemish Writes

### *Omni 1:9*

9 Now I, Chemish, write what few things I write, in the same book with my brother; for behold, I saw the last which he wrote, that he wrote it with his own hand; and he wrote it in the day that he delivered them unto me. And after this manner we keep the records, for it is according to the commandments of our fathers. And I make an end.

### *Comments*

Chemish is Amaron's brother, not his son. It is probable that Chemish had no son, or at least no living son, who could receive the plates. The plates stay in the lineage, but take a half turn to a brother rather than a son. This transmission of plates, or even of authority, will be seen at various times throughout the Book of Mormon. The preferred transmission was father to son, but in the absence of a son, or perhaps for some other unknown reason, the secondary option was to go through the brother's line.

Chemish has even less to say than his brother or father. That may be the result of receiving the plates later in life. He notes that he saw what his brother wrote. After noting that the transmission is intended to remain in the family, he felt he had accomplished his purpose. Perhaps he was not much younger than his brother and did not have long to keep the records. He doesn't tell us. He ends after this brief statement: "And I make an end".

## Abinadom Writes

### *Omni 1:10–11*

10 Behold, I, Abinadom, am the son of Chemish. Behold, it came to pass that I saw much war and contention between my people, the Nephites, and the Lamanites; and I, with my own sword, have taken the lives of many of the Lamanites in the defence of my brethren.

11 And behold, the record of this people is engraven upon plates which is had by the kings, according to the generations; and I know of no revelation save that which has been written, neither prophecy; wherefore, that which is sufficient is written. And I make an end.

### *Comments*

Abinadom makes explicit the reason that he and his immediate ancestors have written so little. He has been intimately involved with war and contention, and recording those is the purpose of the large plates. Therefore, he has little to say. What he does say touches, if only briefly on the sacred. What he says is that he knows that there are revelations, but they have already been written. Perhaps he was saying that the available scriptures held the gospel, and that there was no new revelation of doctrine.

Throughout history it has been thus with the gospel. The scriptures provide the foundation, and humankind can build their spiritual lives upon that foundation. There is not always change. At times, what has been given is sufficient. In Abinadom's words, "that which is sufficient is written."

## Amaleki Writes

### ***Omni 1:12–13***

12 Behold, I am Amaleki, the son of Abinadom. Behold, I will speak unto you somewhat concerning Mosiah, who was made king over the land of Zarahemla; for behold, he being warned of the Lord that he should flee out of the land of Nephi, and as many as would hearken unto the voice of the Lord should also depart out of the land with him, into the wilderness—

13 And it came to pass that he did according as the Lord had commanded him. And they departed out of the land into the wilderness, as many as would hearken unto the voice of the Lord; and they were led by many preachings and prophesyings. And they were admonished continually by the word of God; and they were led by the power of his arm, through the wilderness until they came down into the land which is called the land of Zarahemla.

### *Comments*

Amaleki has much more to say and finished both the book of Omni as well as finishing the available space on the small plates. With Amaleki, the small plate tradition ended.

Amaleki lived through momentous times. During his lifetime there occurred one of the greatest disruptions in all of Nephite history. That story began with Mosiah<sub>1</sub>, whose story must have been told in Mormon's record, but which was lost with the 116 pages. Much of what we know of the first Mosiah comes from this record that intended to cover the more spiritual aspects of the situation, rather than a full historical account.

The spiritual beginning came when Yahweh warned Mosiah<sub>1</sub> to leave the city of Jerusalem and take all who would hearken unto the voice of the Lord into the wilderness. Amaleki intended to couch this historical event in its spiritual context, much as Nephi had used history for a more religious purpose. Thus, the people were led by preachings and prophesying, and were led to a new land. This becomes the first time we learn of the new location that will become the heart of Nephite society for the next nearly four hundred years.

### ***Omni 1:14–16***

14 And they discovered a people, who were called the people of Zarahemla. Now, there was great rejoicing among the people of Zarahemla; and also Zarahemla did rejoice exceedingly, because the Lord had sent the people of Mosiah with the plates of brass which contained the record of the Jews.

15 Behold, it came to pass that Mosiah discovered that the people of Zarahemla came out from Jerusalem at the time that Zedekiah, king of Judah, was carried away captive into Babylon.

16 And they journeyed in the wilderness, and were brought by the hand of the Lord across the great waters, into the land where Mosiah discovered them; and they had dwelt there from that time forth.

### *Comments*

Mosiah<sub>1</sub> finds the people of Zarahemla. The king of that land was named Zarahemla, and so was the city. The typical practice in the area was to name a city for the founder, as Alma<sub>2</sub> explains about the city and land of Ammonihah in Alma 8:7. This would suggest that the city of Zarahemla had been founded within the current generation. It is possible that Zarahemla was named for a distant king, but Mesoamerican data suggest that there were a people who were of a different language and culture than those who would have been the Nephites and who had moved into that region during that approximate time range.

We will learn later that this people descended from Mulek, but we do not see the name Mulek in Amaleki's account. The history is given, but not the name of the ancestor who left Jerusalem at a similar time to Lehi's family. Just as the Nephite ancestor had come from Jerusalem, so did the people of Zarahemla. This provided one means of creating the merger among two otherwise different people.

Why would the people of Zarahemla not only accept the Nephites, but defer rulership to Mosiah<sub>1</sub>? Verse 14 tells us that the people of Mosiah<sub>1</sub> arrived with the plates of brass. There were other sacred artifacts, but the presence of this particular artifact not only tied the Nephites to the Old World, but did so with a physical authority. Having those relics would have provided a superior claim to leadership. The plates of brass, along with the other artifacts, will be seen being passed through the line of the kings and the chief judges. They became the symbols of an authority that reached to the Old World.

### ***Omni 1:17***

17 And at the time that Mosiah discovered them, they had become exceedingly numerous. Nevertheless, they had had many wars and serious contentions, and had fallen by the sword from time to time; and their language had become corrupted; and they had brought no records with them; and they denied the being of their Creator; and Mosiah, nor the people of Mosiah, could understand them.

### *Comments*

This verse is crucial to understanding the remainder of the Book of Mormon. Much of later Nephite history grew from the seeds planted in this description of the differences between these two peoples who had come from the same place at the same time.

The first is that the people of Zarahemla had been involved in wars and serious contentions. This is Amaleki declaring that the people of Zarahemla were not righteous. The promise of the land was to all who had been led from other countries (2 Nephi 1:5).

The second important point is that their language had become corrupted. That point requires examination. Approximately four hundred years earlier, two peoples left the same place, the same culture, the same religion, and the same language. After that time, they could not communicate with each other. While language certainly changes over time, linguists do not see that amount of time as sufficient to create two unintelligible languages. English has been separated on different continents and has led to different accents and different vocabularies, but not mutual unintelligibility. Therefore, the most likely reason for the mutual unintelligibility is the influence of other languages in the different areas into which the peoples arrived. It is quite possible that the everyday language of the people was that of the surrounding people with whom they had merged.

The idea that they brought no records, and, therefore, there was nothing to prevent language corruption, appears to misread the verse. It does say that they brought no records, but the result of that was that they denied the being of their Creator, not that they couldn't keep their language. This second change was even more important than the language difference. The religious differences will create a tension that will underly divisions among the Nephite up until the time of the destruction at the coming of the Christ.

### ***Omni 1:18–19***

18 But it came to pass that Mosiah caused that they should be taught in his language. And it came to pass that after they were taught in the language of Mosiah, Zarahemla gave a genealogy of his fathers, according to his memory; and they are written, but not in these plates.

19 And it came to pass that the people of Zarahemla, and of Mosiah, did unite together; and Mosiah was appointed to be their king.

### ***Comments***

In spite of the problem of language, it was clearly not absolute. There was some way to communicate, some lingua franca that allowed for at least some understanding. Communication was increased by the teaching of the Nephite language. This was essential to ensure that the records would be able to be read by later generations, and kept. It is unknown what these languages were, although there is evidence in many names, which suggest that there was an ability to write in Hebrew to preserve those meanings for our times.

It is significant that the plates are again mentioned prior to noting that the peoples were united. It is very likely that the possession of the plates was the fulcrum on which the Nephites were lifted as rulers

over the people of Zarahemla. We remember that verse 17 noted that the people of Zarahemla were numerous. While the Nephites would also have been numerous, they had fled their city and probably left many behind. Thus, it was a refugee population that merged with the more numerous people of Zarahemla and that accepted Mosiah<sub>1</sub> as the king over the united peoples.

## A Large Engraved Stone

### ***Omni 1:20–22***

20 And it came to pass in the days of Mosiah, there was a large stone brought unto him with engravings on it; and he did interpret the engravings by the gift and power of God.

21 And they gave an account of one Coriantumr, and the slain of his people. And Coriantumr was discovered by the people of Zarahemla; and he dwelt with them for the space of nine moons.

22 It also spake a few words concerning his fathers. And his first parents came out from the tower, at the time the Lord confounded the language of the people; and the severity of the Lord fell upon them according to his judgments, which are just; and their bones lay scattered in the land northward.

### *Comments*

Here we learn of yet another people. We know those people as the Jaredites, but that name is not given here. At this point, we only learn of their last king, Coriantumr, who lived with the people of Zarahemla for a time. The information about them is contained in a record carved into a stone. We get little of that history, beyond that the people have been destroyed and that they were in a land northward of the land of Zarahemla. The rest of the information we must tease out of the hints.

The first point of interest is that there was a stone brought forth that contained a history. In Mesoamerica, this would not be unusual, although it would have been a large stone, based on common practice. The deeds of the kings were commemorated on stones called stelae. Thus, the basic facts about this story are culturally appropriate in that region.

The next important aspect of the stone is that it required Mosiah<sub>1</sub> to interpret it. He did so by the gift and power of God. That phrase was also applied to the way the Book of Mormon itself was translated. We will later see Mosiah<sub>1</sub>'s grandson, named after him, using the interpreters of stone to read the otherwise unreadable twenty-four plates of Ether. The implication is that Mosiah<sub>1</sub> may have had interpreters of his own. The process of translation through the use of interpreters is repeated twice in the Book of Mormon, before it was repeated again by Joseph Smith Jr.

## The Small Plates Are Given to King Benjamin

### ***Omni 1:23–26***

23 Behold, I, Amaleki, was born in the days of Mosiah; and I have lived to see his death; and Benjamin, his son, reigneth in his stead.

24 And behold, I have seen, in the days of king Benjamin, a serious war and much bloodshed between the Nephites and the Lamanites. But behold, the Nephites did obtain much advantage over them; yea, insomuch that king Benjamin did drive them out of the land of Zarahemla.

25 And it came to pass that I began to be old; and, having no seed, and knowing king Benjamin to be a just man before the Lord, wherefore, I shall deliver up these plates unto him, exhorting all men to come unto God, the Holy One of Israel, and believe in prophesying, and in revelations, and in the ministering of angels, and in the gift of speaking with tongues, and in the gift of interpreting languages, and in all things which are good; for there is nothing which is good save it comes from the Lord: and that which is evil cometh from the devil.

26 And now, my beloved brethren, I would that ye should come unto Christ, who is the Holy One of Israel, and partake of his salvation, and the power of his redemption. Yea, come unto him, and offer your whole souls as an offering unto him, and continue in fasting and praying, and endure to the end; and as the Lord liveth ye will be saved.

### *Comments*

Amaleki retained the small plates from the time he and other Nephites fled the city of Nephi through the seating of Mosiah<sub>1</sub> as king, and through Mosiah<sub>1</sub>'s death and the seating of his son, Benjamin. The small plates do not end with the arrival in Zarahemla, but rather when Amaleki “began to be old.”

In verse 30 Amaleki will note that the plates are full. When he gave the small plates to Benjamin it was a combination of factors. Amaleki had no sons, and perhaps no brother, to whom the plates could be given. That, combined with the physical end of room on the plates, convinced him to complete that record and give it to King Benjamin. Amaleki understands that the small plates were for the things of the ministry, and therefore, he declares his faithfulness to the gospel and to Benjamin's faithfulness. This fulfilled the purpose and also passed them along to a righteous successor.

## A Group of Nephites Returns to the Land of Nephi

### ***Omni 1:27–30***

27 And now I would speak somewhat concerning a certain number who went up into the wilderness to return to the land of Nephi; for there was a large number who were desirous to possess the land of their inheritance.



28 Wherefore, they went up into the wilderness. And their leader being a strong and mighty man, and a stiffnecked man, wherefore he caused a contention among them; and they were all slain, save fifty, in the wilderness, and they returned again to the land of Zarahemla.

29 And it came to pass that they also took others to a considerable number, and took their journey again into the wilderness.

30 And I, Amaleki, had a brother, who also went with them; and I have not since known concerning them. And I am about to lie down in my grave; and these plates are full. And I make an end of my speaking.

### *Comments*

Amaleki ends with a brief note about some who left Zarahemla to return to the land of Nephi. This story will be told from the perspective of the large plates, beginning in Mosiah 7, and more elaborately in Mosiah 9. At this point, we get only the briefest mention of those who left Zarahemla. A group of men wanted to recover the land of Nephi from which they had been driven in king Benjamin's father's time. During that event there was some contentious division among the party, and they turned on each other. Only fifty returned to Zarahemla. However, the desire to return continued, and many left to live in the land rather than conquer it, one of whom was Amaleki's brother. That his brother was one of them is the likely reason that he made sure to add this note, even though he had begun to end his account. This information was an addition to his intention, which was probably to end with verse 26.

It is interesting that Omni 1:27 refers to the purpose of the second expedition, but verse 28 refers to the bloody conclusion to the first one. This suggests that Amaleki had the unofficial story from oral sources, and inadvertently conflated what were two different excursions. It also suggests that Amaleki's brother had gone on the second expedition, but not the first. Had he survived the first, Amaleki would certainly have heard it and it would have been sufficiently impressive that Amaleki would not have conflated the two expeditions into one.

Importantly, Amaleki notes that the plates are full. This suggests that Nephi had created a set of plates that contained a number of blank sheets that later scribes used to write on. This further suggests that the large plates followed that same format. The difference between the two was that the large plates followed the kings or chief judges, who had the resources to create new plates. That ability was apparently not available to Jacob's descendants. They were unable to create new plates, hence the small plates ended, while the large plates continued.



# **Words of Mormon**



# Words of Mormon 1

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## Why Mormon Included the Small Plates

### *Words of Mormon 1:1–2*

1 And now I, Mormon, being about to deliver up the record which I have been making into the hands of my son Moroni, behold I have witnessed almost all the destruction of my people, the Nephites.

2 And it is many hundred years after the coming of Christ that I deliver these records into the hands of my son; and it supposeth me that he will witness the entire destruction of my people. But may God grant that he may survive them, that he may write somewhat concerning them, and somewhat concerning Christ, that perhaps some day it may profit them.

### *Comments*

The book named Words of Mormon is temporally out of place. It sits in between the end of the small plates and Mormon's work abridging the large plates. In addition to being out of sequential order, it is out of writing order. Mormon says that he is about to deliver his record, which is the Book of Mormon, to his son, Moroni. Mormon is clear that it is written after most of the destruction of the Nephites. Since both Mormon and Moroni survived the final battle, it may be assumed that it was written at that time. It is likely the very last thing Mormon wrote for his book.

With a title of "Words of Mormon," it is also a self-declared anomaly. This isn't a named book in Mormon's work. It isn't part of the small plates, although the first half of Words of Mormon speaks of the small plates. This is exactly what it says it is. It is a few words written as an introduction. It was sufficiently hard to classify that when Oliver Cowdery was writing in the chapter numbers; he originally had it as chapter II of Omni, and the first book of Mosiah as chapter III. He realized his mistake and fixed the names. Nevertheless, it highlights this writing's anomalous status.

## Mormon Finds the Small Plates

### *Words of Mormon 1:3*

3 And now, I speak somewhat concerning that which I have written; for after I had made an abridgment from the plates of Nephi, down to the reign of this king Benjamin, of whom Amaleki spake, I searched among the records which had been delivered into my hands, and I found these plates, which contained this small account of the prophets, from Jacob down to the reign of this king Benjamin, and also many of the words of Nephi.

### *Comments*

After the introduction of when he wrote, Mormon indicates that he wants to address what he wrote. In this case, he tells a story. When he was making his abridgement, he came to the story of King Benjamin he must have read about Amaleki giving King Benjamin the small plates. He searched the archive for them and found the set that we know as the small plates of Nephi. There is important information about Mormon's sources contained in this terse description, which we can tease out of that description.

The first is an inference about the state of the various records in the archive. Mormon had hidden the Nephite archive in the hill Shim to preserve them. In the Nephite year AD 375, Mormon removed the records from the hill Shim as they were about to be driven from the land. This suggests that there was some haste in their removal.

The haste of the removal explains why the archive was not well-ordered as Mormon was writing. Because they were hastily retrieved and likely brought to their new location with some haste, they were disorganized. Hence Mormon had to search the archive to find what he wanted because it was not in an easily known location.

The next important aspect of the archive is that the large plates of Nephi is a name that was given to multiple sets of plates. The best guess would be that an archivist made a large number of plates, and that more were made after those were filled, much as we have seen with the small plates. In the case of the story of King Benjamin, some of the record was physically on one set of plates, and the subsequent information was on a separate physical record. That is the reason that Mormon had to go looking for the rest of the information. While logic might tell us that there could not have been a single bound set of plates that was the large plates of Nephi, the multiple bound sets of plates would appear to be confirmed with this information.

### *Words of Mormon 1:4–6*

4 And the things which are upon these plates pleasing me, because of the prophecies of the coming of Christ; and my fathers knowing that many of them have been fulfilled; yea, and I also know that as many things as have been prophesied concerning us down to this day have been fulfilled, and as many as go beyond this day must surely come to pass—

5 Wherefore, I chose these things, to finish my record upon them, which remainder of my record I shall take from the plates of Nephi; and I cannot write the hundredth part of the things of my people.  
6 But behold, I shall take these plates, which contain these prophesyings and revelations, and put them with the remainder of my record, for they are choice unto me; and I know they will be choice unto my brethren.

### *Comments*

It is hardly surprising that the contents of the plates impressed Mormon. Although he had the large plates record what Nephi had created, here was another record written by the founder of the Nephite nation providing a different perspective. It was perhaps the equivalent of finding a second book of Mark that covered the events of Jesus's life from a different perspective, offering new information and new contexts. Of course Mormon was impressed.

More difficult to understand is when Mormon says, "I chose these things, to finish my record upon them, which remainder of my record I shall take from the plates of Nephi." The problematic word is *remainder*. The first impression we have when reading that is that Mormon will put these plates with his record and then continue writing. That cannot be correct because Mormon has already indicated that his record is essentially finished, and he is about to give it to Moroni. What might he mean?

First, we should accept Mormon's declaration that he is writing *after* the destruction of his people and that he will finish his record with these small plates. He will add them at the end of his record, and then give them to Moroni. What then of the statement that the *remainder* of his record would be from the large plates? The first definition of this word in Webster's 1828 dictionary is "any thing left after the separation and removal of a part." That might make sense if the translation is suggesting that the *remainder* is what is left after the small plates are removed. Thus, for a modern reader, *remainder* might indicate *the rest*.

The next problem is the verb tense of "I shall take from the plates of Nephi." This is probably influenced by what will be the second half of Words of Mormon, discussed beginning in the next verses.

### ***Words of Mormon 1:7–9***

7 And I do this for a wise purpose; for thus it whispereth me, according to the workings of the Spirit of the Lord which is in me. And now, I do not know all things; but the Lord knoweth all things which are to come; wherefore, he worketh in me to do according to his will.

8 And my prayer to God is concerning my brethren, that they may once again come to the knowledge of God, yea, the redemption of Christ; that they may once again be a delightsome people.

9 And now I, Mormon, proceed to finish out my record, which I take from the plates of Nephi; and I make it according to the knowledge and the understanding which God has given me.

### *Comments*

The addition of the small plates came not only because they impressed Mormon, but because he was impressed that there was a greater purpose that he did not understand. We have that purpose in our Book of Mormon, for the small plates provide the beginning history of the Nephites. Mormon had written that story just as he wrote about kings Mosiah<sub>1</sub>, and Benjamin—and Mosiah<sub>2</sub>, and Alma<sub>1</sub>, and so on. The beginning of Mormon's book was lost, and the small plates provided a substitute, an alternate version, of that beginning.

Verse 9 is the transition from the discussion of the small plates into a section of Words of Mormon that bridges the short gap between the small plate history and the remaining text from Mormon's work.

### ***Words of Mormon 1:10–11***

10 Wherefore, it came to pass that after Amaleki had delivered up these plates into the hands of king Benjamin, he took them and put them with the other plates, which contained records which had been handed down by the kings, from generation to generation until the days of king Benjamin.

11 And they were handed down from king Benjamin, from generation to generation until they have fallen into my hands. And I, Mormon, pray to God that they may be preserved from this time henceforth. And I know that they will be preserved; for there are great things written upon them, out of which my people and their brethren shall be judged at the great and last day, according to the word of God which is written.

### *Comments*

Mormon's final comments about the small plates place them in the context of the Nephite archive. Amaleki gave them to Benjamin, and Benjamin then added them to the collection of records kept in the Nephite archive. His final testimony of them is that they contain great things, and that they should be preserved. Mormon did not understand the purpose in the Lord's command to include them, but perhaps Mormon saw that as one of the ways that they would be preserved. He had prophetic revelation that his record would remain, but perhaps concomitant with that understanding was that the rest of the Nephite archive would not survive. Thus, the small plates were preserved because they were included with Mormon's record.

## **Reprise of Mosiah<sub>1</sub>'s History**

### ***Words of Mormon 1:12–14***

12 And now, concerning this king Benjamin—he had somewhat of contentions among his own people.



13 And it came to pass also that the armies of the Lamanites came down out of the land of Nephi, to battle against his people. But behold, king Benjamin gathered together his armies, and he did stand against them; and he did fight with the strength of his own arm, with the sword of Laban.

14 And in the strength of the Lord they did contend against their enemies, until they had slain many thousands of the Lamanites. And it came to pass that they did contend against the Lamanites until they had driven them out of all the lands of their inheritance.

### *Comments*

What was retained of the book of Mosiah begins with King Benjamin enjoying a time of peace. The context of his speech requires the history of the contentions that had recently ended, else we might not fully understand why he gave that discourse. Verse 12 notes that King Benjamin “had somewhat of contentions among his own people.” Contentions are internal, and wars external. We don’t get the specifics but understanding the nature of the confluence of the Nephites with the people of Zarahemla, we can reasonably understand that the contentions arose over issues surrounding that merger, and probably the different politico-religious beliefs that accompanied it. In the ancient world, there was no significant difference between religion and politics, hence those two elements would have been combined in the contention.

After the internal contentions, King Benjamin had to contend with Lamanite armies. Verse 13 declares that he wielded the sword of Laban. It is highly likely that this was a symbolic gesture since the sword was over four hundred years old and a sacred relic. It would not have seen actual combat. The intent of the war was the expulsion of the invading Lamanites.

### ***Words of Mormon 1:15***

15 And it came to pass that after there had been false Christs, and their mouths had been shut, and they punished according to their crimes;

### *Comments*

Modern readers might read that there were false Christs and miss what that meant in the Nephite cultural context. At one and the same time, there are several “false Christs.” What might they have been? They were certainly not the expected atoning Messiah. That Christ was not expected for around two hundred more years according to Nephite prophecy.

In a Mesoamerican context, we may see the false Christs by understanding both the Nephite understanding of who this Messiah would be, and what the surrounding culture understood. For the Nephites, it was God himself who would come down to earth as the atoning Messiah (see Mosiah 13:34). Therefore, a Christ appearing on earth was the same as God appearing on earth.

In Mesoamerican cultures, there was a concept of God impersonators. These were men, at least typically men, who donned the regalia that was distinctive of a particular god and represented the presence of that god on earth. Thus, a false Christ would be one who falsely attempted to appear as a god on the earth. Based on what was the probable religion of the people of Zarahemla, such god impersonators would be a natural representation of that older religion and would have influence over the older elements of the newly combined people.

### ***Words of Mormon 1:16–18***

16 And after there had been false prophets, and false preachers and teachers among the people, and all these having been punished according to their crimes; and after there having been much contention and many dissensions away unto the Lamanites, behold, it came to pass that king Benjamin, with the assistance of the holy prophets who were among his people—

17 For behold, king Benjamin was a holy man, and he did reign over his people in righteousness; and there were many holy men in the land, and they did speak the word of God with power and with authority; and they did use much sharpness because of the stiffneckedness of the people—

18 Wherefore, with the help of these, king Benjamin, by laboring with all the might of his body and the faculty of his whole soul, and also the prophets, did once more establish peace in the land.

### ***Comments***

The discussion of the state of King Benjamin's people began with contention. It is probable that what we see in these ending verses is either a continuation of the same contention, or a new instance of a contention with similar causes in the divided community. After defeating an external enemy, King Benjamin had to deal with several internal contentions. Finally, with great effort, King Benjamin is able to quell the internal contention. This preface of external and internal conflict is the essential historical stage upon which King Benjamin will give his important discourse.

# **The Book of Mosiah**



# Mosiah 1

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## ***Mosiah: Introduction***

Only at this point do modern readers begin to read Mormon's masterwork. His introduction was lost, and the history covered by that beginning was replaced by the small plates. Even though they covered the same time period, they did so with a different purpose, and with different motivations behind what they wrote. Only beginning with Mosiah do we get to read the work that Mormon spent so much time and effort on to create for us.

The beginning of the book of Mosiah has been lost. It has been suggested that there are two lost chapters based on the numbering in the printer's manuscript, but that numbering begins with the book of Omni and an erroneous numbering of Words of Mormon as chapter II of Omni, with Mosiah becoming chapter III. Oliver Cowdery created those numbers after the fact, and, therefore, that cannot tell us how many chapters we are missing.

The way that Mormon created chapters tells us that we are unlikely to know how many chapters might have been missing, but we can know what content was missing. The book of Mosiah is named for Mosiah, who became king in the land of Zarahemla. It is probable that the book began with his seating as king. Whether or not the exodus from the city of Nephi and finding the people of Zarahemla would have been included in the book of Mosiah, or at the end of the book of Nephi (which is the only other named book that we know of), cannot be known. Speculation would suggest that it came at the end of the book of Nephi as Mormon typically begins named books with the seating of the ruler for whom the book is named. Presumably, that followed large plate conventions.

Because the beginning of the book of Mosiah was lost along with the rest of the content on the 116 pages, we do not have a book header for the book of Mosiah. It is the only book that Mormon edited which does not have a book header. The reason would be that it was lost, not that he did not include it. Mormon's consistency clearly indicates that it was originally included.

Because what we have retained of the book of Mosiah begins with Benjamin, we have lost the entirety of what Mormon might have wanted to say about the reign of his father.

## King Benjamin Educates His Sons

### *Mosiah 1:1*

1 And now there was no more contention in all the land of Zarahemla, among all the people who belonged to king Benjamin, so that king Benjamin had continual peace all the remainder of his days.

### *Comments*

The phrase “there was no more contention in all the land” typically comes as a conclusion rather than a beginning. It is probable that this really was a concluding sentiment and referred to the lost descriptions of the wars and contentions that king Benjamin had to deal with that were recorded at the end of Words of Mormon.

This verse has an unusual doubling of the idea that there is no contention. The first looks backwards to the resolution of conflict: “And now there was no more contention.” The second looks forward to the end of Benjamin’s reign: “King Benjamin had continual peace all the remainder of his days.” Unlike similar statements in the small plates, this foreshadowing cannot tell us anything about when the original book of Mosiah was written. The phrase is Mormon’s, and Mormon clearly wrote long after the events.

Why would Mormon double this idea of a lack of contention? We can understand it best if we remember the promise of the land. Righteousness and safety, or peace, go hand-in-hand. Mormon is telling his readers that king Benjamin was righteous. He defeated contentions and wars, and that ushered in not only a righteous people, but also a peaceful time.

The next reason for the peace will be demonstrated in the event that Mormon elected to describe next, which was the gathering of the people of Nephi in Zarahemla for a major discourse from the king to all of his remaining people.

### *Mosiah 1:2–3*

2 And it came to pass that he had three sons; and he called their names Mosiah, and Helorum, and Helaman. And he caused that they should be taught in all the language of his fathers, that thereby they might become men of understanding; and that they might know concerning the prophecies which had been spoken by the mouths of their fathers, which were delivered them by the hand of the Lord.

3 And he also taught them concerning the records which were engraven on the plates of brass, saying: My sons, I would that ye should remember that were it not for these plates, which contain these records and these commandments, we must have suffered in ignorance, even at this present time, not knowing the mysteries of God.

## *Comments*

Verse 2 introduces Benjamin's sons. Mosiah<sub>2</sub> will become the next king. We know little about Helorum, and nothing specific about Helaman. However, it is interesting that both the name Nephi and the name Helaman are used for three individuals in the Nephite record, both tying for the most appearances of the same name for different people.

Verse 2 also notes that they were "taught in all the language of his fathers, that they might become men of understanding." Where the similar language used by Nephi and Enos was somewhat ambiguous, it appears to be less so here. They learn "all the language of their fathers." They do so that "they might become men of understanding; and that they might know concerning the prophecies." That last statement appears to be directed toward the ability to read the plates of brass. In this case, therefore, learning all the language was required to be able to read the plates of brass.

That understanding is emphasized in verse 3 where, in addition to language, they are specifically taught about the records on the plates of brass. These were the foundation of their understanding of God, so it was imperative that a true person of learning must know concerning Yahweh and his commandments and prophecies as contained on the plates of brass.

## ***Mosiah 1:4***

4 For it were not possible that our father, Lehi, could have remembered all these things, to have taught them to his children, except it were for the help of these plates; for he having been taught in the language of the Egyptians therefore he could read these engravings, and teach them to his children, that thereby they could teach them to their children, and so fulfilling the commandments of God, even down to this present time.

## *Comments*

Nephi spends much of a chapter on the important event of returning to Jerusalem for the plates of brass. It is certain that some version of that account was on the record that Mormon created to describe the Nephite origin story. This verse presupposes the value, not only the current value, but the blessing of the possession of this set of plates. Benjamin is echoing the reason that the Lord commanded Lehi's sons to return for them, an echo that would not have been easily understood without having already been written in Mormon's abridgement.

Most interesting is that he brings up teaching and language again. This time, Benjamin says of Lehi: "he having been taught in the language of the Egyptians therefore he could read these engravings." This suggests that the plates of brass, a record kept in Egypt, was written in Egyptian and the ability to read Egyptian was required to read the plates of brass. This, therefore, suggests that when Benjamin's

sons are taught “all the language of [their] fathers” (in verse 2), it specifically referred to learning to read the Egyptian text on the plates of brass.

### ***Mosiah 1:5–8***

5 I say unto you, my sons, were it not for these things, which have been kept and preserved by the hand of God, that we might read and understand of his mysteries, and have his commandments always before our eyes, that even our fathers would have dwindled in unbelief, and we should have been like unto our brethren, the Lamanites, who know nothing concerning these things, or even do not believe them when they are taught them, because of the traditions of their fathers, which are not correct.

6 O my sons, I would that ye should remember that these sayings are true, and also that these records are true. And behold, also the plates of Nephi, which contain the records and the sayings of our fathers from the time they left Jerusalem until now, and they are true; and we can know of their surety because we have them before our eyes.

7 And now, my sons, I would that ye should remember to search them diligently, that ye may profit thereby; and I would that ye should keep the commandments of God, that ye may prosper in the land according to the promises which the Lord made unto our fathers.

8 And many more things did king Benjamin teach his sons, which are not written in this book.

### ***Comments***

When Benjamin says: “were it not for these things,” he means the plates of brass. They were acquired by miracle and represent both the connection to the ancient house of Israel and also to their authority to teach Yahweh’s commandments. Without the scriptures, the Nephites would not have been able to use the unchanging text to clarify and interpret the law according to their circumstances. They would have had to adopt more and more of the customs of the surrounding lands, something that had already happened to the people of Zarahemla before the Nephites merged with them.

Benjamin speaks first of the plates of brass, but then added the plates of Nephi. For Benjamin, this was the large plates. Even though he had the small plates by this time, the record of the kings and, therefore, the one most on the mind of kings, was the large plates of Nephi, not the small plates. There is little evidence that the small plates were read by subsequent record keepers, and less evidence that they quoted from them. We remember that Mormon was surprised to find them. He did not appear to know that they existed.

The admonition to study the scriptures diligently and to keep the commandments will become very relevant when we read Benjamin’s discourse. Mormon adds these instructions to Benjamin’s sons, precisely because they fit into the context of the reason for the public discourse.



## The Kingdom Is Conferred upon Mosiah

### *Mosiah 1:9–10*

9 And it came to pass that after king Benjamin had made an end of teaching his sons, that he waxed old, and he saw that he must very soon go the way of all the earth; therefore, he thought it expedient that he should confer the kingdom upon one of his sons.

10 Therefore, he had Mosiah brought before him; and these are the words which he spake unto him, saying: My son, I would that ye should make a proclamation throughout all this land among all this people, or the people of Zarahemla, and the people of Mosiah who dwell in the land, that thereby they may be gathered together; for on the morrow I shall proclaim unto this my people out of mine own mouth that thou art a king and a ruler over this people, whom the Lord our God hath given us.

### *Comments*

Benjamin waxes old, but he hasn't begun to be old. That seems like a strange distinction, but "began to be old" is used to describe one about to die. For Benjamin, it may mean that he was aged, but we will learn that he lives for three more years. Where the transfer of kingship would typically come as the previous king is dying, Benjamin will instead abdicate. Because this description comes from Mormon, it may be his reasoning of why Benjamin would have called his son to be king. However, there are other elements that we will see which suggest that there was perhaps a different motivation.

Mosiah<sub>2</sub> is brought before the king, who declares that Mosiah<sub>2</sub> will be announced as the king and ruler over the people of the land of Zarahemla. This is to occur during a gathering of the people. That the gathering and transference of the title had an even greater reason can be seen when we understand that Benjamin did much more than seat his son as the next king.

### *Mosiah 1:11–12*

11 And moreover, I shall give this people a name, that thereby they may be distinguished above all the people which the Lord God hath brought out of the land of Jerusalem; and this I do because they have been a diligent people in keeping the commandments of the Lord.

12 And I give unto them a name that never shall be blotted out, except it be through transgression.

### *Comments*

As we read Benjamin's discourse, it will be this event that becomes more fully discussed, and which provides a greater impact than the change in the ruler. The question is why it is needed. What might a name do?

In the ancient world names were often descriptive of the person, particularly collective names. The identification with the name indicated who one was. Knowing that one was of the house of Israel meant

that those people were distinguished against all of those who were not of that lineage. However, it wasn't the lineage, but rather the religion and the practices involved.

The name that Benjamin would give them was specifically to distinguish his people from all the people which Yahweh had brought from the land of Jerusalem. This is very specific. It does not refer to the existing populations into which the early children of Jerusalem had merged. It did not designate the Jaredites. It refers to only two peoples, both of whom were living side by side in the city of Zarahemla. The division between the two peoples had created the contentions that preceded this event. Benjamin is suggesting that they abandon their divisive loyalties to the past and join into a newly unified people. It is a tremendous effort, especially at the end of a difficult internal dissention. It will work, but only for a little while.

### ***Mosiah 1:13–14***

13 Yea, and moreover I say unto you, that if this highly favored people of the Lord should fall into transgression, and become a wicked and an adulterous people, that the Lord will deliver them up, that thereby they become weak like unto their brethren; and he will no more preserve them by his matchless and marvelous power, as he has hitherto preserved our fathers.

14 For I say unto you, that if he had not extended his arm in the preservation of our fathers they must have fallen into the hands of the Lamanites, and become victims to their hatred.

### ***Comments***

These verses become more poignant when we realize that they describe the recent past. This is not a generalized comment about the promise of the land. Benjamin is discussing what has recently happened. Benjamin declares that their recent victory follows the evidence of the past where Yahweh had preserved the Nephites. Had Yahweh not fulfilled his part of the covenant of the land's promise, then the Lamanites would surely have been victorious.

On the heels of his statement that he would give the people a new name (from verse 11) this discussion of what would happen if the Nephites were not righteous becomes the reason that the new name is desirable. The division had led to contention and therefore unrighteousness. With a new name, they could become a new people and therefore be one. If they are one people, there will not be internal divisions. If that new name is accompanied by a rededication to follow the commandments, then they would not have the temptation to become weak as part of their own society, rather than only the world around them.

### ***Mosiah 1:15–18***

15 And it came to pass that after king Benjamin had made an end of these sayings to his son, that he gave him charge concerning all the affairs of the kingdom.

16 And moreover, he also gave him charge concerning the records which were engraven on the plates of brass; and also the plates of Nephi; and also, the sword of Laban, and the ball or director, which led our fathers through the wilderness, which was prepared by the hand of the Lord that thereby they might be led, every one according to the heed and diligence which they gave unto him.

17 Therefore, as they were unfaithful they did not prosper nor progress in their journey, but were driven back, and incurred the displeasure of God upon them; and therefore they were smitten with famine and sore afflictions, to stir them up in remembrance of their duty.

18 And now, it came to pass that Mosiah went and did as his father had commanded him, and proclaimed unto all the people who were in the land of Zarahemla that thereby they might gather themselves together, to go up to the temple to hear the words which his father should speak unto them.

### *Comments*

Mormon has completed the important message of this part of the event, so he turns to synopsisizing the events. Mormon moves through them quickly. Benjamin stops speaking of what he will do during the meeting before the gathered people and instructs Mosiah in the things of kingship.

Benjamin also transfers to Mosiah<sub>2</sub> the physical objects that represent the Nephite ability to rule. These include the plates of brass, the large plates of Nephi, the sword of Laban, and the Liahona (although the text has not given us that name yet). These sacred objects will continue to be passed from ruler to ruler. They become the physical image of the right to rule, connecting the New World to the legacy of the Old World, and the mystique and mystery of having crossed the ocean to come to this new place to rule.

Although we have a chapter ending here in our current editions, there was no chapter ending at this location in the 1830 edition.



# Mosiah 2

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## King Benjamin's Speech (Mosiah 2–5)

### *Mosiah 2:1–4*

1 And it came to pass that after Mosiah had done as his father had commanded him, and had made a proclamation throughout all the land, that the people gathered themselves together throughout all the land, that they might go up to the temple to hear the words which king Benjamin should speak unto them.

2 And there were a great number, even so many that they did not number them; for they had multiplied exceedingly and waxed great in the land.

3 And they also took of the firstlings of their flocks, that they might offer sacrifice and burnt offerings according to the law of Moses;

4 And also that they might give thanks to the Lord their God, who had brought them out of the land of Jerusalem, and who had delivered them out of the hands of their enemies, and had appointed just men to be their teachers, and also a just man to be their king, who had established peace in the land of Zarahemla, and who had taught them to keep the commandments of God, that they might rejoice and be filled with love towards God and all men.

### *Comments*

Mosiah<sub>2</sub> delivers the proclamation for the people to gather. While they had been invited to hear the king speak to them, it is probable that the invitation was an additional invitation to a festival that was to have been celebrated in any case. What we know of this occasion is that all the people come, and they bring firstlings of the flocks for sacrifice and burnt offerings. That additional piece of information suggests that this was a holy occasion made more important by the king's announcement. It is doubtful that all would come with sacrifices if they had only recently been notified of the king's speech, and the seating of a new king did not require sacrifices under the law of Moses.

The idea that this was more than just the occasion of seating a new king will come in following verses. It is also important to remember that this comes at the end of many tribulations, so there are thanks offerings to be given, and perhaps offerings of atonement occasioned by actions during the previous conflicts.

## ***Mosiah 2:5–6***

5 And it came to pass that when they came up to the temple, they pitched their tents round about, every man according to his family, consisting of his wife, and his sons, and his daughters, and their sons, and their daughters, from the eldest down to the youngest, every family being separate one from another.

6 And they pitched their tents round about the temple, every man having his tent with the door thereof towards the temple, that thereby they might remain in their tents and hear the words which king Benjamin should speak unto them;

### *Comments*

The description of the event has families coming to the temple and surrounding the area while they stayed in their tents. Scholars have suggested that this is sufficiently similar to the Feast of Tabernacles, that it may have been that holy day that king Benjamin used as the springboard for his abdication.

The Feast of Tabernacles looked back to Yahweh's protection while Israel wandered in the wilderness. The tents, or booths, represented temporary dwellings meant to invoke that time. The idea that families would be together in them fits with the nature of the festival.

An interesting possibility is that while the festival looked backward, it may have also signaled a looking forward to a future time of salvation by Yahweh, a time of a future Messiah. In the New Testament, John 7:37–38, Jesus uses the great feast day to preach of himself as the living water, declaring himself the Messiah.

If there was such a tangential understanding that the feast would look forward to the Messiah, it makes an even stronger platform for the subject of king Benjamin's speech.

## ***Mosiah 2:7***

7 For the multitude being so great that king Benjamin could not teach them all within the walls of the temple, therefore he caused a tower to be erected, that thereby his people might hear the words which he should speak unto them.

### *Comments*

Building a tower allowed Benjamin to be better seen. The implication, however, is that he could be better heard as well. If we accept a Mesoamerican setting for the Book of Mormon, there is an interesting possible context for building this tower.

The first is that many Mesoamerican builders paid attention to acoustics. Someone speaking from one temple could be heard in the accompanying courtyard. Since the people had come with their sacrifices, it is logical that there was already some type of temple or sacrificial structure available. For some reason, however, it was not sufficient and, therefore, a tower was built.

A second interesting aspect of building this tower is that when Benjamin's son Mosiah<sub>2</sub> spoke to an even larger gathering, there is no mention of a tower being built. This leads to speculation that may or may not be relevant to the text.

In the location of Santa Rosa which John L. Sorenson has suggested might have been Zarahemla, a new temple was constructed about the time period when Benjamin's speech would have been given. In that temple the underlying structural foundation had two types of rocks in the fill: one, smooth river rocks, and the second, rocks with sharp edges. The two types were clearly divided into east-west parts with no river rock mixing with the sharp stone. The whole was then plastered over and the temple built above. The non-Latter-day Saint archaeologist doing the work suggested that it symbolized two peoples joining together into one new people.

While it may be only coincidence, the idea that Benjamin builds a tower on the site, where a new temple was to be built to commemorate the unification of the people of Zarahemla and the Nephites into the new people, is tempting, particularly since that is the theme of Benjamin's speech.

### ***Mosiah 2:8***

8 And it came to pass that he began to speak to his people from the tower; and they could not all hear his words because of the greatness of the multitude; therefore he caused that the words which he spake should be written and sent forth among those that were not under the sound of his voice, that they might also receive his words.

### ***Comments***

Even with the tower, there were enough people gathered that they could not clearly hear. This particular message was going to be essential for Benjamin's people. Therefore, all needed to know what was being said. There is so little information in the text that we cannot know if the account was written afterwards, or if there was a version of it written before Benjamin began to speak. It would conform better with typical ancient practice if Benjamin's speech were spontaneous, and the written version captured it.

Combining an understanding of ancient cultures and hints in the text, we can say that Nephite culture was heavily oral. Even their written records tend to follow oral styles. This suggests that while there were certainly literate Nephites, they, like most of the ancient world, were mostly nonliterate.

If that were the case, then, what about the written version of Benjamin's speech? First, the process of production itself limits the number of copies. There were no printing presses, so it would be a monumental task to produce hundreds of copies. It is most likely that what happened was similar to other ancient cultures, where a messenger brought the message and read it to a gathered people. The hints of the clan structures suggest that the messenger would go to a location where the clan lived in the vicinity, and meet with them separately to read the message.

The very fact that the effort was taken to make copies and send messengers underscores the importance of this message for the people.

## King Benjamin Addresses His People

### *Mosiah 2:9*

9 And these are the words which he spake and caused to be written, saying: My brethren, all ye that have assembled yourselves together, you that can hear my words which I shall speak unto you this day; for I have not commanded you to come up hither to trifle with the words which I shall speak, but that you should hearken unto me, and open your ears that ye may hear, and your hearts that ye may understand, and your minds that the mysteries of God may be unfolded to your view.

### *Comments*

As Benjamin begins, he sets up a stylistic theme for the way he will construct the argument he will present. He uses a contradiction that begins with what he has not done, and then emphasizes what he has done. The introduction confirms the importance of this occasion by saying that he did not command them to come and trifle with his words, but that they would understand them, implying that they would have something to do as a result.

This should suggest that this is a different occasion. The people have gathered in what appears to have been a ritual occasion, perhaps the Feast of Tabernacles. It is possible that there would have been some traditional speech by the king, and perhaps it might have been the kind of speech that Jacob's people had come to hear on the occasion when he also had to tell them that they would not hear those pleasing words.

The signal of the opening is that this was not a common ritual with standard blessings. Something different was coming. That difference begins with the "this is what it is not, this is what it is" type of introduction. That method of setting the scene continues as Benjamin sets his scene.

### *Mosiah 2:10–11*

10 I have not commanded you to come up hither that ye should fear me, or that ye should think that I of myself am more than a mortal man.

11 But I am like as yourselves, subject to all manner of infirmities in body and mind; yet I have been chosen by this people, and consecrated by my father, and was suffered by the hand of the Lord that I should be a ruler and a king over this people; and have been kept and preserved by his matchless power, to serve you with all the might, mind and strength which the Lord hath granted unto me.



## *Comments*

This particular contradiction is unusual from a modern perspective, but much more understandable in the Book of Mormon’s ancient context. Benjamin declares that his people should not fear him or think him more than a mortal man. Modern readers are used to understanding that our leaders are mortal men with specific callings, but that has not always been the case.

Even in the tradition of European kings, there was a reverence and a suggestion that they were somehow endowed by the divine with something more. In ancient Mesoamerica, kings were personifications of deities in life, becoming deities of some sort after their death. This suggestion that the people might have thought Benjamin “more than a mortal man” is a direct reflection of the common assumptions of people of the region.

The reversal statement reaffirms Benjamin’s essential mortality, a mortality that is subject to common infirmities. The point is to define the type of king that Benjamin is, and to create that definition in contrast to cultural expectations. Benjamin is king because he was consecrated by his father, not because he was divinely appointed.

## ***Mosiah 2:12–14***

12 I say unto you that as I have been suffered to spend my days in your service, even up to this time, and have not sought gold nor silver nor any manner of riches of you;

13 Neither have I suffered that ye should be confined in dungeons, nor that ye should make slaves one of another, nor that ye should murder, or plunder, or steal, or commit adultery; nor even have I suffered that ye should commit any manner of wickedness, and have taught you that ye should keep the commandments of the Lord, in all things which he hath commanded you—

14 And even I, myself, have labored with mine own hands that I might serve you, and that ye should not be laden with taxes, and that there should nothing come upon you which was grievous to be borne—and of all these things which I have spoken, ye yourselves are witnesses this day.

## *Comments*

In the previous verse (11), Benjamin introduced the idea that he had been made king so that he could serve the people. He expands that concept. He has performed his service and contrasts an implicit expectation for what kings do. It would have been expected in most cultures that the king would enrich himself. It was sufficiently common throughout the world that the king would be considered the wealthiest, and that much of the labor of the people would be sent to the king to enrich him. Benjamin declares that he has not done that.

The phrase “neither have I suffered that ye should be confined in dungeons” begins a series of things that Benjamin has not done. The only reason for stating what he has not done is to contrast the implicit understanding that these are things that the people would know that kings do. There is no reason to suggest

that he hadn't thrown people in dungeons if that never happened anywhere. There is no reason to declare that they should not make slaves of one another unless that was a possibility that was known and understood.

His conclusion is that in contrast to expectations, he has even "labored with mine own hands that I might serve you." Whatever he had done, it allowed him to decrease the potential tax burden. Thus, Benjamin could show that he, himself, had labored for their benefit, rather than the expectation that the people labored to support a king.

## Service to God and Man

### *Mosiah 2:15–18*

15 Yet, my brethren, I have not done these things that I might boast, neither do I tell these things that thereby I might accuse you; but I tell you these things that ye may know that I can answer a clear conscience before God this day.

16 Behold, I say unto you that because I said unto you that I had spent my days in your service, I do not desire to boast, for I have only been in the service of God.

17 And behold, I tell you these things that ye may learn wisdom; that ye may learn that when ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God.

18 Behold, ye have called me your king; and if I, whom ye call your king, do labor to serve you, then ought not ye to labor to serve one another?

### *Comments*

Benjamin makes a neat turn in the discourse. He shifts the emphasis from himself to God. Benjamin has declared that he himself is mortal. Nevertheless, his message will be about one who is clearly not mortal. What Benjamin is setting up is an understanding of the relationship of a people and their king, and then shifting that relationship to God as the ultimate king. In that relationship, even Benjamin, an earthly king, is a subject to the highest king—God.

That is the reason that he declares that while he has served his people, that service was part of a larger service to God. That relationship is then imposed upon the people. Just as Benjamin served God by serving his people, when Benjamin's people serve each other, they serve God.

### *Mosiah 2:19–21*

19 And behold also, if I, whom ye call your king, who has spent his days in your service, and yet has been in the service of God, do merit any thanks from you, O how you ought to thank your heavenly King!

20 I say unto you, my brethren, that if you should render all the thanks and praise which your whole soul has power to possess, to that God who has created you, and has kept and preserved you, and has caused that ye should rejoice, and has granted that ye should live in peace one with another—

21 I say unto you that if ye should serve him who has created you from the beginning, and is preserving you from day to day, by lending you breath, that ye may live and move and do according to your own will, and even supporting you from one moment to another—I say, if ye should serve him with all your whole souls yet ye would be unprofitable servants.

### *Comments*

Benjamin established that he has worked for the benefit of his people and provided them with an experience that was demonstrably better for them than was perhaps available in surrounding cultures where the king was enriched on the backs of his people and they were subject to dungeons and enslavement. If they, therefore, would have reason to thank him for those benefits, they should recognize that they had a similar relationship to Yahweh, and that Yahweh provided them with much more.

More than the benefits that Benjamin provided, Yahweh created them and has granted them the promise of the land. That they had been preserved in the preceding war and during the internal contentions becomes a witness that they are under the protection of the promise of the land.

What ancient people understood is that there was a covenant between people and king whereby the people would provide support and the king would provide protection. This was seen as reciprocal and perhaps, at least in the ideal case, balanced. However, Benjamin declares that they are under a similar covenant with Yahweh, and that Yahweh has provided so much that it is an inherently unbalanced relationship. They are unprofitable servants in that they cannot be worth what they receive in exchange.

### ***Mosiah 2:22–25***

22 And behold, all that he requires of you is to keep his commandments; and he has promised you that if ye would keep his commandments ye should prosper in the land; and he never doth vary from that which he hath said; therefore, if ye do keep his commandments he doth bless you and prosper you.

23 And now, in the first place, he hath created you, and granted unto you your lives, for which ye are indebted unto him.

24 And secondly, he doth require that ye should do as he hath commanded you; for which if ye do, he doth immediately bless you; and therefore he hath paid you. And ye are still indebted unto him, and are, and will be, forever and ever; therefore, of what have ye to boast?

25 And now I ask, can ye say aught of yourselves? I answer you, Nay. Ye cannot say that ye are even as much as the dust of the earth; yet ye were created of the dust of the earth; but behold, it belongeth to him who created you.

## *Comments*

In spite of the fact that Yahweh has provided for so much that the people could never be worth the exchange of value, Yahweh requires very little. This creates the contrast between what would be expected and what is provided. Once again, it is immensely inequitable. Yahweh, who offers so much value that it could not possibly be balanced, requires very little in return. All he asks is that “ye do keep his commandments.”

Benjamin has moved the more understandable covenant between a people and their king to the covenant with the heavenly king. The heavenly king provides so much that even when the people do keep the commandments, they are blessed for that effort and the imbalance continues.

The people cannot boast of themselves. They cannot balance the scales. The interesting comparison is to the dust of the earth, a common and less than valuable substance. Yet even the dust of the earth is part of Yahweh’s creation. Everything they know ultimately comes from Yahweh. They cannot, of themselves, ever boast that they have earned Yahweh’s blessings. Even doing the simple request of obeying the commandments is insufficient to balance the scales. They cannot earn what Yahweh provides. While not stated in the terms of the New Testament concept of Grace, it is the Grace of God that is being described.

## **Mosiah<sub>2</sub> Seated as King**

### ***Mosiah 2:26–30***

26 And I, even I, whom ye call your king, am no better than ye yourselves are; for I am also of the dust. And ye behold that I am old, and am about to yield up this mortal frame to its mother earth.

27 Therefore, as I said unto you that I had served you, walking with a clear conscience before God, even so I at this time have caused that ye should assemble yourselves together, that I might be found blameless, and that your blood should not come upon me, when I shall stand to be judged of God of the things whereof he hath commanded me concerning you.

28 I say unto you that I have caused that ye should assemble yourselves together that I might rid my garments of your blood, at this period of time when I am about to go down to my grave, that I might go down in peace, and my immortal spirit may join the choirs above in singing the praises of a just God.

29 And moreover, I say unto you that I have caused that ye should assemble yourselves together, that I might declare unto you that I can no longer be your teacher, nor your king;

30 For even at this time, my whole frame doth tremble exceedingly while attempting to speak unto you; but the Lord God doth support me, and hath suffered me that I should speak unto you, and hath commanded me that I should declare unto you this day, that my son Mosiah is a king and a ruler over you.

## *Comments*

Benjamin declares that he is growing old and that due to age and perhaps infirmity, he is relinquishing the throne to his son Mosiah<sub>2</sub>. He will live for three more years. We cannot tell from what little evidence is in the text what sort of infirmity befell him, but the important point is that where most transitions occur at the death of the king, this one is an abdication. Even when a king was weak, there were advisors to continue the rule, so it is not improbable that this abdication is a special case.

The nature of this speech is to create a newly named people that will be different from the former divided population. Perhaps as a signal of that change, or an emphasis on the newness, there is a change in the king. That ensures that this speech will create a new beginning, symbolically and psychologically.

## ***Mosiah 2:31***

31 And now, my brethren, I would that ye should do as ye have hitherto done. As ye have kept my commandments, and also the commandments of my father, and have prospered, and have been kept from falling into the hands of your enemies, even so if ye shall keep the commandments of my son, or the commandments of God which shall be delivered unto you by him, ye shall prosper in the land, and your enemies shall have no power over you.

## *Comments*

The assembled people whom king Benjamin addressed were those who remained after both a war and a civil conflict that appears to have escalated to a war. In Words of Mormon (1:16) we are informed that there had been “much contention and many dissensions away unto the Lamanites.” This suggests that those who remained were statistically unified in their support of both Benjamin and of the Nephite religion. It is important to remember that in the ancient world there was no real difference between religion and political systems. God’s laws were the laws of the land and the king represented God’s authority.

When Benjamin says that “I would that ye should do as ye have hitherto done,” he is speaking to those who had previously supported the Nephite religion and political system. Those who could not do so, or at least most who could not do so, had dissented away to the Lamanites. Therefore, it was true that they had been faithful to the commandments.

King Benjamin reiterates the Nephite foundational promise that they would prosper if they kept the commandments. Clearly, there had been times during which they prospered, and Benjamin is promising that blessing for the future. This, in spite of the obvious devastation of war and contention that had recently ended. That clearly non-peaceful event was the result of the unfaithfulness of those who left. Benjamin is contrasting those who remain with those who rejected the Nephite religion and political system and dissented away to the Lamanites. The faithfulness of those present is subtly given credit for the fact that they have survived and that they still have a city and a people.

## ***Mosiah 2:32–33***

32 But, O my people, beware lest there shall arise contentions among you, and ye list to obey the evil spirit, which was spoken of by my father Mosiah.

33 For behold, there is a wo pronounced upon him who listeth to obey that spirit; for if he listeth to obey him, and remaineth and dieth in his sins, the same drinketh damnation to his own soul; for he receiveth for his wages an everlasting punishment, having transgressed the law of God contrary to his own knowledge.

### ***Comments***

Verse 32 is extremely important for our understanding of the Nephite world at this point in time. King Benjamin has just commended the people on their righteousness in the previous verse, but here he specifically warns them “lest there shall arise contentions among you.” Benjamin is not suggesting that there be no squabbles between family members, or that no one should argue with another. In the Book of Mormon, contentions are much more serious. Most of them fall into a category we would recognize as apostasy from the established religion, though the confluence of religion and politics made Book of Mormon contentions even more serious and divisive.

The destructive nature of that type of contention would have been painfully clear after the events that are only briefly described in Words of Mormon. Even though the people currently accept the Nephite religion and political system, later events will clearly demonstrate that Benjamin’s admonition against those contentions was warranted. They will come again, and they will continue to be destructive to the fabric of Nephite society.

Benjamin links contentions with listening to the evil spirit. He references a discourse his father, Mosiah, had given. We do not have that sermon, and it may have been recorded in the lost pages of the first part of the Book of Mormon translation. From this snippet we can tell that Mosiah, contrasted listening to Yahweh, the representative of good, with listening to the evil spirit. There are consequences of following the two opposite influences. Listening to the evil spirit removes one from the benefits of the reconciliation with God. Interestingly, it is phrased as “having transgressed the law of God contrary to [one’s] knowledge.” They have been taught correctly, and it would be the opposite influence that would remove them from what they had been taught, and which Benjamin reiterated was true.

## ***Mosiah 2:34–35***

34 I say unto you, that there are not any among you, except it be your little children that have not been taught concerning these things, but what knoweth that ye are eternally indebted to your heavenly Father, to render to him all that you have and are; and also have been taught concerning the records

which contain the prophecies which have been spoken by the holy prophets, even down to the time our father, Lehi, left Jerusalem;

35 And also, all that has been spoken by our fathers until now. And behold, also, they spake that which was commanded them of the Lord; therefore, they are just and true.

### *Comments*

Benjamin expands on his reference to his father, Mosiah<sub>1</sub>'s, discourse. He had referenced his father speaking of those who follow the evil spirit. The last phrase of the previous verse (33) noted that those who followed the evil spirit contradicted what they knew to be true. In these verses, Benjamin brings that speech forward in time to apply it to his current audience.

When he says, “there are not any among you, except it be your little children that have not been taught concerning these things,” he picks up on the idea that those who would follow the evil spirit go against those teachings. This people have been taught from true sources, from the prophets recorded on the plates of brass and all the righteous Nephite fathers until the current time. Benjamin testifies that these are true teachings.

They have listened to those true teachings, and they should continue to listen to the good spirit and true teachings. They should beware of the contentions that recently led so many away.

### ***Mosiah 2:36–37***

36 And now, I say unto you, my brethren, that after ye have known and have been taught all these things, if ye should transgress and go contrary to that which has been spoken, that ye do withdraw yourselves from the Spirit of the Lord, that it may have no place in you to guide you in wisdom's paths that ye may be blessed, prospered, and preserved—

37 I say unto you, that the man that doeth this, the same cometh out in open rebellion against God; therefore he listeth to obey the evil spirit, and becometh an enemy to all righteousness; therefore, the Lord has no place in him, for he dwelleth not in unholy temples.

### *Comments*

The contrast to the statement in the previous verses that this people had been taught truly from the holy prophets is indication of what happens should they go contrary to those teachings. This returns to the reference to Mosiah<sub>1</sub>'s discourse about listening to the evil spirit. Benjamin repeats the key phrase about listening to obey the evil spirit in verse 37 to make the connection to his earlier reference explicit.

Remembering that the contentions were not only political, but also religious, it is important that Benjamin reiterate both the overall covenant between Israel and Yahweh, but explicitly the newer covenant of protection upon righteousness. That new covenant provides benefits only upon the conditions of keeping

the covenant. Thus, if the people should ever listen to the evil spirit, personified as the opposite of Yahweh, then they are no longer part of the covenant. Being opposed to the covenant, they then become an enemy to righteousness. Since the covenant allows Yahweh to dwell in holy temples, rejecting the covenant creates unholy temples where Yahweh cannot dwell.

It is possible that the reason for noting that Yahweh does not dwell in unholy temples is a reference to the existence of other temples where other gods are deemed to have a presence. Benjamin began by contrasting himself with the unstated other kings, and in this case, we have the contrast with the holy temple in which Yahweh can dwell in Zarahemla as opposed to the competing temples which might be considered temples, but where Yahweh, their covenant God, cannot dwell.

### ***Mosiah 2:38–39***

38 Therefore if that man repenteth not, and remaineth and dieth an enemy to God, the demands of divine justice do awaken his immortal soul to a lively sense of his own guilt, which doth cause him to shrink from the presence of the Lord, and doth fill his breast with guilt, and pain, and anguish, which is like an unquenchable fire, whose flame ascendeth up forever and ever.

39 And now I say unto you, that mercy hath no claim on that man; therefore his final doom is to endure a never-ending torment.

### ***Comments***

King Benjamin mentions a topic in passing that will be the subject of a larger treatment later in the book of Alma. He mentions justice and mercy. Dr. Avram Shannon of Brigham Young University has explained the Hebrew underpinnings of these two concepts in Hebrew thought. Both are part of what Yahweh is, and that is represented in and through his covenant with his people. Justice is bound into the covenant, and in administering the conditions of the covenant, Yahweh is just in his keeping of the covenant, and in administering the penalties associated with its violation. His mercy is also bound to the covenant. When he applies the blessings promised, that becomes his mercy. Since his mercy is integrally bound to the obedience to the covenant, we can better understand what Benjamin has said.

Benjamin ends by stating that “mercy hath no claim on that man; therefore his final doom is to endure a never-ending torment.” That does not feel very merciful. Indeed, Yahweh’s mercy has no claim. Why? The person in question “repenteth not, and remaineth and dieth an enemy to God.” This person has rejected the covenant and removed him or herself from the covenant. Thus, justice places the person outside of the promises, and mercy cannot provide the blessings to one who has actively rejected the foundation upon which mercy could be provided.

Mercy is not the opposite of justice, but rather an integral part of justice. Justice is defined according to the covenant, and within the covenant are abundant blessings that witness the mercy of Yahweh toward



his people. Even mercy, however, comes through the covenant and is aligned with the requirements of the covenant. Repentance certainly works. It is the unrepentant rejection of the covenant that creates the conditions whereby mercy has no claim.

### ***Mosiah 2:40–41***

40 O, all ye old men, and also ye young men, and you little children who can understand my words, for I have spoken plainly unto you that ye might understand, I pray that ye should awake to a remembrance of the awful situation of those that have fallen into transgression.

41 And moreover, I would desire that ye should consider on the blessed and happy state of those that keep the commandments of God. For behold, they are blessed in all things, both temporal and spiritual; and if they hold out faithful to the end they are received into heaven, that thereby they may dwell with God in a state of never-ending happiness. O remember, remember that these things are true; for the Lord God hath spoken it.

### ***Comments***

The domination of patriarchal thought in Nephite society is underscored in verse 40's address to three groups: "all ye old men, and also ye young men, and you little children." Perhaps we might imagine girls among the children, but it is clear that the address is to males, and is made explicit to be males of different ages. That should not be read to exclude women from the benefits of the covenant, but, instead, that Nephite society was a continuation of the old Hebrew system of patriarchy.

In such a system, the men were responsible for the women, not just that they were caretakers, but that they were at fault if the women did not follow the covenant. Thus, the whole discourse implicitly included the women, although modern readers would wish more recognition and understanding of the more unique roles that the women played.

The important aspect here is not that the women are invisible in the language, but rather that they are to be considered implicit and completely present in the language. When the blessed and happy state of those who keep the commandments is declared, that blessing applies to both men and women, even if the women are not mentioned.

Although these verses end our chapter 2, there was no chapter division at this point in the 1830 edition. Orson Pratt made a division here because there is a thematic change, but the discourse continued uninterrupted. The conclusion to this particular theme is that the witness of the holy prophets in the scriptures and as recorded in Nephite tradition is true. There is a covenant with God, and that covenant provides blessings as the covenant is kept, and curses when it is broken.



# Mosiah 3

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## Coming of Messiah Revealed by Angel

### *Mosiah 3:1–4*

1 And again my brethren, I would call your attention, for I have somewhat more to speak unto you; for behold, I have things to tell you concerning that which is to come.

2 And the things which I shall tell you are made known unto me by an angel from God. And he said unto me: Awake; and I awoke, and behold he stood before me.

3 And he said unto me: Awake, and hear the words which I shall tell thee; for behold, I am come to declare unto you the glad tidings of great joy.

4 For the Lord hath heard thy prayers, and hath judged of thy righteousness, and hath sent me to declare unto thee that thou mayest rejoice; and that thou mayest declare unto thy people, that they may also be filled with joy.

### *Comments*

The 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon did not begin a chapter with these verses. However, verse one clearly shows a shift in king Benjamin’s discourse. The “and again” phrase signals something different, after which he very specifically says “I would call your attention.” This is not just a new theme, it is important.

The previous part of Benjamin’s speech declared that Yahweh still covenanted with this people. Benjamin had repeated the promise of the land, and discussed faithfulness to the covenant and the cursing on those who would separate from it. Most recently, he dealt with justice and mercy. Undoubtedly, that was intended to set the stage for the next part of the discourse. Benjamin declares: “I have things to tell you concerning that which is to come.”

That concern with “that which is to come” in the Book of Mormon refers to the earthly mission of the Messiah. That is precisely what the topic will be as Benjamin continues. He opens by noting that this information came from an angel. For the Nephites, this was evidence that Benjamin was, as tradition would expect, in communication with Yahweh. This is presented as a new revelation, in spite of the fact that modern readers are familiar with the information on the Messiah’s mission from the small plates. Those small plates were given to Benjamin as recorded at the end of the book of Omni, but we cannot know if it

was before or after this discourse. Since Benjamin is nearing the end of his life, we may suspect that they were given earlier. Nevertheless, they are not used as the substantiation of the truth of this message. This is a newer revelation given directly to Benjamin.

### ***Mosiah 3:5–8***

5 For behold, the time cometh, and is not far distant, that with power, the Lord Omnipotent who reigneth, who was, and is from all eternity to all eternity, shall come down from heaven among the children of men, and shall dwell in a tabernacle of clay, and shall go forth amongst men, working mighty miracles, such as healing the sick, raising the dead, causing the lame to walk, the blind to receive their sight, and the deaf to hear, and curing all manner of diseases.

6 And he shall cast out devils, or the evil spirits which dwell in the hearts of the children of men.

7 And lo, he shall suffer temptations, and pain of body, hunger, thirst, and fatigue, even more than man can suffer, except it be unto death; for behold, blood cometh from every pore, so great shall be his anguish for the wickedness and the abominations of his people.

8 And he shall be called Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Father of heaven and earth, the Creator of all things from the beginning; and his mother shall be called Mary.

### ***Comments***

For modern readers, it is important to recognize the significance of Benjamin's declaration that "the Lord Omnipotent who reigneth, who was, and is from all eternity to all eternity, shall come down from heaven among the children of men, and shall dwell in a tabernacle of clay." Yahweh was the Nephite God, and Yahweh himself would condescend to leave behind the heavens to become mortal, to "dwell in a tabernacle of clay." Modern questions about the distinctions between Christ and God the Father are not Nephite questions. There is no apparent understanding of any distinction between the coming Messiah and God until the time Christ makes an appearance at Bountiful. While in his mortal state he will speak of his Father, and that will probably begin the Nephite understanding of a separation between God the Father and Yahweh. That has not happened yet.

This part of the discourse is about the amazing revelation, or confirmation, that God himself would become mortal. While he would do divine things, such as cast out devils, he would also be subject to temptations. He would be human, with human frailties in body.

Verse 8 not only provides a name for Yahweh on earth, but also for his mother. The name is given as Jesus Christ, which is a bit of a translation conflation of the name, Jesus, and the title, Christ (from the Greek rather than the Hebrew for the anointed one).

The title "father of heaven and earth" is interesting. Matthew 11:25 describes Christ as the "Lord of heaven and earth," but not explicitly as the father. That title occurs here, in 2 Nephi 25:12, Mosiah 15:4,

Alma 11:39, and Helaman 14:12 and 16:18. The fatherhood of the Messiah is emphasized in the Book of Mormon, but not in the New Testament. In the New Testament, it is Christ who speaks of his Father in heaven, not of his being the Father in Heaven.

### ***Mosiah 3:9–11***

9 And lo, he cometh unto his own, that salvation might come unto the children of men even through faith on his name; and even after all this they shall consider him a man, and say that he hath a devil, and shall scourge him, and shall crucify him.

10 And he shall rise the third day from the dead; and behold, he standeth to judge the world; and behold, all these things are done that a righteous judgment might come upon the children of men.

11 For behold, and also his blood atoneth for the sins of those who have fallen by the transgression of Adam, who have died not knowing the will of God concerning them, or who have ignorantly sinned.

### ***Comments***

In verse 9, the phrase “he cometh unto his own” repeats John 1:11. Rather than just stating that his own did not receive him, as in John, Benjamin highlights the dramatic rejection not only of his teaching but of his divinity. He was not only rejected but crucified. It is unknown whether the concept of crucifixion would have been well understood in the New World Nephite setting, around four hundred years after Lehi left Jerusalem. It is possible that it is part of the translation because the translator understood the history.

The mission of the Messiah is to atone, or to reconcile humanity to the justness of Yahweh. Benjamin quickly reiterates the need for this atonement. The very fact that it is so concise should indicate that it is not a brand new teaching. The people should understand, and they are only being reminded. For a people accustomed to the law of Moses and a blood sacrifice providing the reconciliation between Yahweh and humankind, the emphasis on the Messiah shedding his blood in atonement would have resonated with the people and been understood that they needed to apply the law of Moses’ ritual context to this future action of Yahweh in a mortal state.

### ***Mosiah 3:12–14***

12 But wo, wo unto him who knoweth that he rebelleth against God! For salvation cometh to none such except it be through repentance and faith on the Lord Jesus Christ.

13 And the Lord God hath sent his holy prophets among all the children of men, to declare these things to every kindred, nation, and tongue, that thereby whosoever should believe that Christ should come,

the same might receive remission of their sins, and rejoice with exceedingly great joy, even as though he had already come among them.

14 Yet the Lord God saw that his people were a stiffnecked people, and he appointed unto them a law, even the law of Moses.

### *Comments*

Benjamin declares “wo unto him who knoweth that he rebelleth against God!” That condition of intentional rebellion harkens to the earlier statement in Mosiah 2:38–39 that the unrepentant have no claim to God’s mercy. There is one covenant way to be saved, and it requires obedience to the covenant, as well as to the atonement of the coming Messiah.

Just as Benjamin indicated in Mosiah 2:34–35, these things have been taught by the holy prophets. Therefore, they have been taught to this people and they are under the requirements of the law. They know the law and the prophecies, therefore, they must willingly reject them if they are to deny them.

The law is the guide to salvation. Benjamin returns to the beginning of the law as the means to enact the covenant. When the Israelites were in a state where they might not live according to the covenant after their time in Egypt, the law was given to them to guide them in the right way to live in order to obtain the blessings of the covenant. While explaining the mission of the Messiah, Benjamin is careful to place that mission inside the covenant.

### ***Mosiah 3:15–16***

15 And many signs, and wonders, and types, and shadows showed he unto them, concerning his coming; and also holy prophets spake unto them concerning his coming; and yet they hardened their hearts, and understood not that the law of Moses availeth nothing except it were through the atonement of his blood.

16 And even if it were possible that little children could sin they could not be saved; but I say unto you they are blessed; for behold, as in Adam, or by nature, they fall, even so the blood of Christ atoneth for their sins.

### *Comments*

Benjamin makes an interesting argument at this point. He has declared that the law of Moses was instituted to show how to live according to Yahweh’s covenant, but now he will argue that it was insufficient to accomplish redemption, or atonement. In addition to the law, the people of Israel were given “signs, and wonders, and types, and shadows,” but they managed to misunderstand or ignore them. Apparently, they assumed that the law of Moses was sufficient to make reconciliation. Benjamin declares that it was not.

The image Benjamin uses is important. Note that he says: “the law of Moses availeth nothing except it were through the atonement of his blood.” Part of the law of Moses included blood sacrifices for atonement. Thus, Benjamin links the law to the Messiah’s earthly mission through the parallel symbolism of the blood sacrifice. This does not end the law but places the Messiah’s mission as integral to the law.

The insertion of the verse concerning the salvation of little children suggests that the community has had some issues with whether or not children might be saved. They appear to believe that they were saved, and Benjamin confirms that they are blessed. However, Benjamin does not exclude them from the law. Note that he says: “even if it were possible that little children could sin they could not be saved.” That phrase is somewhat complex because it appears to declare that children are not subject to sin. Nevertheless, what Benjamin declares is that even children cannot be saved. Then he explains the reason that this does not happen. The great atonement of the Messiah’s blood will reconcile them. Even those without sin still exist in the world after the Fall, and those conditions must be, and are, reconciled in the atoning Messiah’s mortal mission.

### ***Mosiah 3:17***

17 And moreover, I say unto you, that there shall be no other name given nor any other way nor means whereby salvation can come unto the children of men, only in and through the name of Christ, the Lord Omnipotent.

#### ***Comments***

As a conclusion to the section describing the importance of the law to the covenant, and the mortal mission of the Messiah to the law, we get this simple statement: “there shall be no other name given.” That particular phrase occurs only in king Benjamin’s speech, and occurs twice: here, and in Mosiah 5:8. What does it mean that no other name is given? In the ancient world, names were more than identifications. They were part of the essence of the person. While the subject is far from Benjamin’s intent here, we retain some understanding of this more ancient meaning in the phrase; “speak of the devil and he appears,” most commonly shortened to “speak of the devil,” and used when a person who has been spoken of enters a room or comes into a conversation. That is a remnant of the belief in the power of the name. Thus, when the name is given, it is a name of power. No other being can perform what the atoning Messiah can perform.

This is strengthened by the rest of the sentence: “nor any other way nor means.” No other name holds the power. No other belief and no other practice can perform this particular salvation. That includes the way of the law and the means of sacrifice under the law. In addition to the law, the atoning blood sacrifice of the mortal Messiah will be required.

## ***Mosiah 3:18***

18 For behold he judgeth, and his judgment is just; and the infant perisheth not that dieth in his infancy; but men drink damnation to their own souls except they humble themselves and become as little children, and believe that salvation was, and is, and is to come, in and through the atoning blood of Christ, the Lord Omnipotent.

### *Comments*

Verse 18 continues with the discussion of infants that Benjamin broached in verse 17. The question is the standing of children and the law. The previous verse indicated that the law condemns children, but the atonement saves them with no change on their part. That concept requires an explanation.

The very first part of the explanation is the affirmation that Yahweh is just. His justice comes from the creation of the covenant and the law. When he pronounces judgment according to the covenant and the law, he is eminently just. The difference in the application of the law has to do with agency and intent. Benjamin contrasts an infant who dies with grown men. The first part of that comparison is certainly the amount of time a person lives, but it also underscores the dependency of infancy. The infant is being raised and trained, but it is dependent upon others. There are, for the very young, few agentive actions. They respond but do not intentionally act.

Those who are grown, on the other hand, are expected to act. It is those actions that condemn them. They elect to act in ways that drink damnation to their souls. The interesting solution Benjamin suggests is that they must “become as little children.” That does not mean giving up their agency but rather using it to return to an inculpable state. Through repentance all may return to a state of just alignment with the covenant and the law.

This ability to repent and be cleansed from sin depends upon the promise of the coming atonement of the Messiah. Note again the emphasis on the blood of the Messiah, which is an intentional connection to atoning sacrifices under the law of Moses.

## ***Mosiah 3:19***

19 For the natural man is an enemy to God, and has been from the fall of Adam, and will be, forever and ever, unless he yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, and putteth off the natural man and becometh a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord, and becometh as a child, submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon him, even as a child doth submit to his father.

### *Comments*

Mosiah 3:19 is so often quoted by itself that we miss the important context for which it forms a conclusion. Two previous threads combine in this conclusion. The first is the state of humanity after the Fall.



The second is the contrast to the fallen state of humanity and the tabula rasa of the infant. Benjamin has explained that little children, as those who do not have sufficient culpability to intentionally obey or disobey, are not guilty. Yet, they would be condemned under the law.

For both examples, atonement occurs through the Messiah's sacrifice. While the law itself might condemn an innocent child for the mere fate of being a human in a fallen state, the atoning act of the Messiah, the blood of the Lamb, will reconcile the law with the blessings of mercy. Similarly, the sacrificial blood of the Messiah will provide the way whereby humankind, who are culpable through their agency, will have the ability to have their sins removed and return to the covenant.

The image of the child is that of the child who is learning, but not yet responsible for their sins. Through the remission of sin, humankind may return to that more innocent state and, in effect, start over in learning to obey our Heavenly Father.

### ***Mosiah 3:20–22***

20 And moreover, I say unto you, that the time shall come when the knowledge of a Savior shall spread throughout every nation, kindred, tongue, and people.

21 And behold, when that time cometh, none shall be found blameless before God, except it be little children, only through repentance and faith on the name of the Lord God Omnipotent.

22 And even at this time, when thou shalt have taught thy people the things which the Lord thy God hath commanded thee, even then are they found no more blameless in the sight of God, only according to the words which I have spoken unto thee.

### ***Comments***

This particular argument is another contrast. It contraposes the future with the present. The reason is that it argues that there will come a time when the knowledge of the Messiah's earthly mission will be so well known that all humankind will be responsible for their understanding and application of that atonement to their personal lives.

That future well-known atonement contrasts with the current situation of the people of Zarahemla. It would appear that they are the only ones who have had the teaching, or who have, as a people, accepted it. At this point, some four hundred years after Lehi's family had left Jerusalem, even though Laman and Lemuel may have originally been taught of the coming Messiah, that understanding had been lost in their descendants, and certainly among all those who are now called Lamanites—peoples who may not have any genetic links with the original family.

Benjamin's people have been taught, and therefore they are as those of the distant future when all would know of the atoning Messiah. Just as those future people will not be held blameless, unless they

accept the atonement and repent, so too the current people of Zarahemla cannot be found blameless, unless they also repent and accept the atonement which is to come.

## A Testimony against the People

### *Mosiah 3:23–27*

23 And now I have spoken the words which the Lord God hath commanded me.

24 And thus saith the Lord: They shall stand as a bright testimony against this people, at the judgment day; whereof they shall be judged, every man according to his works, whether they be good, or whether they be evil.

25 And if they be evil they are consigned to an awful view of their own guilt and abominations, which doth cause them to shrink from the presence of the Lord into a state of misery and endless torment, from whence they can no more return; therefore they have drunk damnation to their own souls.

26 Therefore, they have drunk out of the cup of the wrath of God, which justice could no more deny unto them than it could deny that Adam should fall because of his partaking of the forbidden fruit; therefore, mercy could have claim on them no more forever.

27 And their torment is as a lake of fire and brimstone, whose flames are unquenchable, and whose smoke ascendeth up forever and ever. Thus hath the Lord commanded me. Amen.

### *Comments*

In verse 2 of this chapter, Benjamin declared that an angel had come to give him the message that he should reinforce the teaching of the coming mortal mission of the Messiah. Now he declares that he has done so. Verses 24 through 27 repeat the Lord's words, which form his testimony of the message he was required to declare. Both as king and the spiritual leader of the people, this declaration of the divine desire stands as a witness to the people. It is, in Benjamin's words, "a bright testimony against this people, at the judgment day."

Why is it a testimony *against* his people? It is a matter of emphasis of the importance of the message. It is against the people only if they reject it. Only if they do not accept the atonement will they be in a state where a just God could no longer exercise mercy, because they would have rejected the foundations upon which the mercy might be given.

Why couch the final testimony in these words? It probably returns to the dramatic events of the war and the contentions which had led to so many dissensions by the Lamanites. There had been many who had rejected the testimony, and this is a warning for those who might still have some sympathy with them.

The very last sentence, ending in *amen*, sealed that final testimony, and also created the need to end the chapter on that point. Our current chapters 1 through 3 were all part of the original chapter I of Mosiah, which ended with this testificatory *amen*.

# Mosiah 4

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## The People React to Benjamin's Words

### *Mosiah 4:1–3*

1 And now, it came to pass that when king Benjamin had made an end of speaking the words which had been delivered unto him by the angel of the Lord, that he cast his eyes round about on the multitude, and behold they had fallen to the earth, for the fear of the Lord had come upon them.

2 And they had viewed themselves in their own carnal state, even less than the dust of the earth. And they all cried aloud with one voice, saying: O have mercy, and apply the atoning blood of Christ that we may receive forgiveness of our sins, and our hearts may be purified; for we believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who created heaven and earth, and all things; who shall come down among the children of men.

3 And it came to pass that after they had spoken these words the Spirit of the Lord came upon them, and they were filled with joy, having received a remission of their sins, and having peace of conscience, because of the exceeding faith which they had in Jesus Christ who should come, according to the words which king Benjamin had spoken unto them.

### *Comments*

In Mosiah 2:1–8, Mormon narrated the setting for Benjamin's speech. At this temporary break in the discourse, Mormon narrates again. While he quoted the speech itself, whatever information was on the plates that gave the information about the circumstances surrounding the speech was not copied, but rather told in Mormon's own words.

The nature of the discourse was designed to generate a response from the gathered people. They had come with animals for sacrifice, indicating that they had come with the expectation of a religious event. They certainly received that, and more.

It is important to remember the social context of this speech. There had been a contention that appears to have become a civil war. The people were gathered after that difficult time, and the speech preached salvation through the Messiah who was to come. In the light of what we will see later in the Book of Mormon's history of Zarahemla, the understanding of the coming Messiah must have been a point of contention, as it will become a dividing point for that same society in the years that will follow Benjamin's speech.

Therefore, Benjamin is preaching the Messiah to them not simply for the religious understanding, but for the unification of the people under the umbrella of the divine revelation of the coming Messiah.

Benjamin pauses in his discourse because he needs to assess how well the speech has motivated the people. It has succeeded. The people see themselves as needing atonement. This would not be surprising in the aftermath of a civil war. They seek atonement, now understanding that it will come not from the symbolic blood sacrifice of an animal, but through the atoning blood of Christ. Forgiveness of their sins allows them to renew themselves within Yahweh's covenant with the people. They accept that forgiveness and appear to pledge themselves to the unifying belief in the coming atoning Messiah.

## King Benjamin Explains the Means of Salvation

### *Mosiah 4:4–7*

4 And king Benjamin again opened his mouth and began to speak unto them, saying: My friends and my brethren, my kindred and my people, I would again call your attention, that ye may hear and understand the remainder of my words which I shall speak unto you.

5 For behold, if the knowledge of the goodness of God at this time has awakened you to a sense of your nothingness, and your worthless and fallen state—

6 I say unto you, if ye have come to a knowledge of the goodness of God, and his matchless power, and his wisdom, and his patience, and his long-suffering towards the children of men; and also, the atonement which has been prepared from the foundation of the world, that thereby salvation might come to him that should put his trust in the Lord, and should be diligent in keeping his commandments, and continue in the faith even unto the end of his life, I mean the life of the mortal body—

7 I say, that this is the man who receiveth salvation, through the atonement which was prepared from the foundation of the world for all mankind, which ever were since the fall of Adam, or who are, or who ever shall be, even unto the end of the world.

### *Comments*

Benjamin begins again, using the phrase “I would again call your attention.” This is the same phrase he used in Mosiah 3:1, as he began to discuss the message the angel gave him. These are the only times the phrase is used and means more than a modern reader would associate with the phrase. For modern readers, we are used to “call your attention” to mean that something is being pointed out. In Benjamin's case, it is not a reference to a thing or thought, but it is literally a call for attention. Something important is coming, and the natural tendency of crowds to speak among themselves is to be halted to properly concentrate on the coming message.

Verses 5 and 6 consist of a long “if” clause. Benjamin is speaking to an audience that has responded that they believe, and now Benjamin leads them to the result of that belief. He begins not with an “if” that indicates doubt but indicates the beginning of a new condition. Benjamin is not doubting but is rather describing.

If they have done as they say they have done, including all the conditions he lists, then (as verse 7 indicates), then “this is . . . who receiveth salvation, through the atonement.” Benjamin had set the stage to indicate that the atonement would occur no matter what. However, for it to be applied to a given person required personal repentance. Benjamin tells his people that if they have repented, then the atonement is applied. Unstated is that the atonement applies immediately for the people, even though the actual act of atonement lay in the future.

### ***Mosiah 4:8–10***

8 And this is the means whereby salvation cometh. And there is none other salvation save this which hath been spoken of; neither are there any conditions whereby man can be saved except the conditions which I have told you.

9 Believe in God; believe that he is, and that he created all things, both in heaven and in earth; believe that he has all wisdom, and all power, both in heaven and in earth; believe that man doth not comprehend all the things which the Lord can comprehend.

10 And again, believe that ye must repent of your sins and forsake them, and humble yourselves before God; and ask in sincerity of heart that he would forgive you; and now, if you believe all these things see that ye do them.

### ***Comments***

Benjamin declared that there was no other name through which salvation would come. After describing the need for repentance in order to access the atonement, he declares that there is no other means by which salvation comes. Not only no other being, but no other method. This is the only way in which humankind can be reconciled to Yahweh and the covenant.

The reason that this statement leads directly to the command “believe in God; believe that he is, and that he created all things,” is because the name through which salvation is to come identifies the mortal mission of Yahweh on earth. There is a direct correlation. Nephite understanding was that Yahweh was their God, and that Yahweh himself would come to earth as the mortal who history will know as Jesus.

Thus, after commanding that they believe in God, or Yahweh, Benjamin reemphasizes that they “must repent of your sins and forsake them, and humble yourselves before God.” These are the actions that they must take to make the atoning Messiah’s mission applicable to their own lives.

## ***Mosiah 4:11–12***

11 And again I say unto you as I have said before, that as ye have come to the knowledge of the glory of God, or if ye have known of his goodness and have tasted of his love, and have received a remission of your sins, which causeth such exceedingly great joy in your souls, even so I would that ye should remember, and always retain in remembrance, the greatness of God, and your own nothingness, and his goodness and long-suffering towards you, unworthy creatures, and humble yourselves even in the depths of humility, calling on the name of the Lord daily, and standing steadfastly in the faith of that which is to come, which was spoken by the mouth of the angel.

12 And behold, I say unto you that if ye do this ye shall always rejoice, and be filled with the love of God, and always retain a remission of your sins; and ye shall grow in the knowledge of the glory of him that created you, or in the knowledge of that which is just and true.

### ***Comments***

Benjamin has turned the subject from the need for atonement to the Messiah through whom it would be accomplished, to now discussing the personal results of atonement with God. Benjamin states that “as ye have come to the knowledge of the glory of God,” which might sound like simply understanding that there is a God; however, that is not his context. He commanded that they believe in God, and the context has been in God’s merciful condescension to become mortal and effect the atonement. Thus, this description of coming to the knowledge of God is integrally connected to accepting the atoning Messiah as that God, as Yahweh.

Benjamin describes the conditions of repentance, and the need to remain humble before the glory of God. Note that he specifically says that they could continue “standing steadfastly in the faith of that which is to come.” The atonement has not yet happened, yet they should act as though it has, steadfastly believing that it not only will, but that its benefits can also be applied to them in this life, even before that specific act.

The benefit is that “if ye do this ye shall always rejoice.” The promise of the land was that they would prosper. Benjamin extends that covenant to the individual. Their prospering would not be physical, but more importantly, spiritual. Benjamin declares that the knowledge of the glory of God is the same as the knowledge of “that which is just and true.” Yahweh is the very definition of that which is just and true.

## **All Are Beggars before God**

### ***Mosiah 4:13–16***

13 And ye will not have a mind to injure one another, but to live peaceably, and to render to every man according to that which is his due.

14 And ye will not suffer your children that they go hungry, or naked; neither will ye suffer that they transgress the laws of God, and fight and quarrel one with another, and serve the devil, who is the

master of sin, or who is the evil spirit which hath been spoken of by our fathers, he being an enemy to all righteousness.

15 But ye will teach them to walk in the ways of truth and soberness; ye will teach them to love one another, and to serve one another.

16 And also, ye yourselves will succor those that stand in need of your succor; ye will administer of your substance unto him that standeth in need; and ye will not suffer that the beggar putteth up his petition to you in vain, and turn him out to perish.

### *Comments*

Right after Benjamin declares that by coming to know God, they would know what is just and true, he begins to describe what being just and true would mean in their own lives. Specifically, he is interested in how the people of Zarahemla would treat each other. Again, we remember the conditions preceding this speech. The severe internal contention was a recent reminder of how the community should not treat others in that community.

Perhaps it is in that light that we note Benjamin suggesting that parents should not suffer their children to fight and quarrel one with another. Note that right after that comes the declaration that neither should they suffer their children to serve the devil, or the evil spirit. Benjamin had noted that their contentions had come from their listening to obey the evil spirit in Mosiah 2:32 and 37. Thus, it seems that Benjamin is not counseling that children should not quarrel in the way that children in families might but is concerned with the kinds of contentions that had recently divided the community.

### ***Mosiah 4:17–19***

17 Perhaps thou shalt say: The man has brought upon himself his misery; therefore I will stay my hand, and will not give unto him of my food, nor impart unto him of my substance that he may not suffer, for his punishments are just—

18 But I say unto you, O man, whosoever doeth this the same hath great cause to repent; and except he repenteth of that which he hath done he perisheth forever, and hath no interest in the kingdom of God.

19 For behold, are we not all beggars? Do we not all depend upon the same Being, even God, for all the substance which we have, for both food and raiment, and for gold, and for silver, and for all the riches which we have of every kind?

### *Comments*

Benjamin spends more time discussing the beggar than the other social interactions because it will be an important transition for his discussion of their relationship to God. He will move from the relationship of one with another in the community to each person's relationship to God.

First, he notes that we are obligated to help those in need, rather than judge them. The background for this part of the speech depends upon the social interactions of a primarily agricultural community. Even though Zarahemla was a city, it was not a modern city. Its people were overwhelmingly agrarian. They had to come to the city with their sacrificial animals. The nature of an agrarian society places a different understanding of how they should treat the beggar. In a society where all grew their own food, a beggar was most likely one who had suffered misfortune and his crops had failed. The United States had a similar ethic of helping the needy when it was also primarily agricultural and rural. It was accepted that a stranger might come to the door looking for food and shelter, and there was an understanding that they should be assisted.

Benjamin asks, “are we not all beggars?” That would echo with those who understood that through the vagaries of nature, each person would understand that it might be themselves who next needed assistance. Benjamin turns that understanding of the horizontal ethics of helping the needy in the community to becoming the needy who present themselves to God.

Just as there might be times when we are hungry in a worldly sense, there will be a time when we are spiritually hungry. Then we turn to God, and God nourishes us. Yahweh covenants that we are his people, and Yahweh blesses us spiritually. According to the covenant of the land, he also allows the Nephites to prosper in the land.

### ***Mosiah 4:20–21***

20 And behold, even at this time, ye have been calling on his name, and begging for a remission of your sins. And has he suffered that ye have begged in vain? Nay; he has poured out his Spirit upon you, and has caused that your hearts should be filled with joy, and has caused that your mouths should be stopped that ye could not find utterance, so exceedingly great was your joy.

21 And now, if God, who has created you, on whom you are dependent for your lives and for all that ye have and are, doth grant unto you whatsoever ye ask that is right, in faith, believing that ye shall receive, O then, how ye ought to impart of the substance that ye have one to another.

### ***Comments***

Benjamin continues to reinforce the nature of the relationship of humankind and their God. Although we spiritual beggars do not merit Yahweh’s blessings, yet blessings are freely given. Benjamin does not emphasize the covenant here because it is assumed. He will later make a new covenant within the known one.

Using the relationship to God as the model, Benjamin returns to his people. This is a speech whose focus is on transforming his people. Although that means that they need to accept their unique understanding of the atoning Messiah, it also means that they are to alter their behavior. Certainly, Benjamin intends to prevent the kind of disastrous contentions from which they are probably still recovering.



Thus, God becomes the model for social interaction. If God provides when we are unworthy, then merit should not factor into our willingness to share. With what we have seen of the development of Nephite society in the book of Jacob, and of things which will be clear later, the tendency for the Nephite people to fall prey to the thought that they were better than others of their own community was one of the most persistent evils that beset the Nephite nation.

### ***Mosiah 4:22–25***

22 And if ye judge the man who putteth up his petition to you for your substance that he perish not, and condemn him, how much more just will be your condemnation for withholding your substance, which doth not belong to you but to God, to whom also your life belongeth; and yet ye put up no petition, nor repent of the thing which thou hast done.

23 I say unto you, wo be unto that man, for his substance shall perish with him; and now, I say these things unto those who are rich as pertaining to the things of this world.

24 And again, I say unto the poor, ye who have not and yet have sufficient, that ye remain from day to day; I mean all you who deny the beggar, because ye have not; I would that ye say in your hearts that: I give not because I have not, but if I had I would give.

25 And now, if ye say this in your hearts ye remain guiltless, otherwise ye are condemned; and your condemnation is just for ye covet that which ye have not received.

### ***Comments***

The Book of Mormon establishes social equality as an ideal. This is not social equalness. There is no suggestion that all people are the same, only that we should not act as though we are superior to others. The damage is not in the difference, but in the attitude of separation. Therefore, Benjamin notes that if one does not share his or her substance because of selfishness, their “substance shall perish with [them].” Of course, that is true of all, but the point is that when one thinks of oneself as valuable because of their possessions, when they leave those possessions behind in death, there is nothing left of value because of the poverty of character.

This is emphasized by noting that it is even possible for those without means to be selfish. The solution is that when one is asked for help, the desire to help even in the absence of ability is superior. That development of character cannot be removed through death.

### ***Mosiah 4:26–27***

26 And now, for the sake of these things which I have spoken unto you—that is, for the sake of retaining a remission of your sins from day to day, that ye may walk guiltless before God—I would that ye

should impart of your substance to the poor, every man according to that which he hath, such as feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and administering to their relief, both spiritually and temporally, according to their wants.

27 And see that all these things are done in wisdom and order; for it is not requisite that a man should run faster than he has strength. And again, it is expedient that he should be diligent, that thereby he might win the prize; therefore, all things must be done in order.

### *Comments*

The emphasis on giving substance to the poor is stronger in this sermon than anywhere else in the Book of Mormon. It is worth considering why that might have been. Knowing that social inequality was beginning even in Jacob's day, and that whenever we see the Nephites wearing costly apparel as a sign of their wealth, we know that apostasy is on the way; this tells us that the probable reason for the contention that split apart Nephite society must have been fed by desires for social stratification. The reason Benjamin speaks so strongly about fostering social equality is precisely because it had been one of the root causes of the recent contentions. Similarly, the emphasis on the atoning Messiah suggests that the particular Nephite understanding of Yahweh's future earthly mission must have been another of the reasons for the division.

Remembering that Zarahemla consisted of two peoples who had developed religion differently, even though they began from the same location and culture, tells us that the divisiveness that will plague Nephite society in future years was a continuation of the differences that created the civil war that preceded Benjamin's speech.

### ***Mosiah 4:28–30***

28 And I would that ye should remember, that whosoever among you borroweth of his neighbor should return the thing that he borroweth, according as he doth agree, or else thou shalt commit sin; and perhaps thou shalt cause thy neighbor to commit sin also.

29 And finally, I cannot tell you all the things whereby ye may commit sin; for there are divers ways and means, even so many that I cannot number them.

30 But this much I can tell you, that if ye do not watch yourselves, and your thoughts, and your words, and your deeds, and observe the commandments of God, and continue in the faith of what ye have heard concerning the coming of our Lord, even unto the end of your lives, ye must perish. And now, O man, remember, and perish not.

### *Comments*

This concludes a chapter in the 1830 Book of Mormon and appears to represent a break in Benjamin's speech. Benjamin has been speaking of the need for social equality, not in sameness, but in respect. Returning what

was borrowed is part of that respect for others. Even though Benjamin had listed many things, he notes that he cannot describe them all. The point was to provide examples from which they could extract the principles.

Benjamin had declared that the people could beg salvation of Yahweh, who was uniquely able to provide it. Qualifying for that grace required action on their part that showed that they were willing to keep their part of the covenant. If they would do so, they would have the promised blessings. If not, neither law nor mercy could apply, as was discussed in Mosiah 2:38–39.



# Mosiah 5

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## The People Enter a Covenant

### *Mosiah 5:1–2*

1 And now, it came to pass that when king Benjamin had thus spoken to his people, he sent among them, desiring to know of his people if they believed the words which he had spoken unto them.

2 And they all cried with one voice, saying: Yea, we believe all the words which thou hast spoken unto us; and also, we know of their surety and truth, because of the Spirit of the Lord Omnipotent, which has wrought a mighty change in us, or in our hearts, that we have no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually.

### *Comments*

The specifics of how this event worked are unclear. King Benjamin pauses, and waits. The text says that “he sent among them,” suggesting that people were dispatched into the various parts of the crowd. It is probable that they were already in place, knowing that the question would be asked.

One question that arises is how these separate inquiries might yield people crying with one voice. That might appear to be an exaggeration, but in the ancient world this kind of thing happened. There would be those in the crowd who might coach the specific words. Perhaps like unified clapping, it would begin in disunity, but would become one voice. This is not to suggest that there was no agreement with the words. That agreement is the essential part of this section of Benjamin’s discourse. However, it does help to understand that this is not a fanciful description, but rather one that is entirely plausible in ancient group dynamics.

Benjamin has spoken of the important underpinnings of how they should be as a society. Religion was an important, and, typically, almost a universal aspect of those interactions. The people accept what he has to say. Most importantly, they say that there has been a change in their hearts. It is easy to read this from a modern perspective and see that they gave up sins, but that is simply a different color on the same question. Of what did they repent?

Once again, the previous civil war is the missing clue. There had been severe divisions over both religion and the nature of politics. There had been many who had espoused social inequality and desired to

exalt themselves over others. These were the social ills that Benjamin was countering. Hence, this people recognized that message, and vowed to change their hearts so that they did not retain those elements that had recently so divided the people.

### ***Mosiah 5:3–5***

3 And we, ourselves, also, through the infinite goodness of God, and the manifestations of his Spirit, have great views of that which is to come; and were it expedient, we could prophesy of all things.

4 And it is the faith which we have had on the things which our king has spoken unto us that has brought us to this great knowledge, whereby we do rejoice with such exceedingly great joy.

5 And we are willing to enter into a covenant with our God to do his will, and to be obedient to his commandments in all things that he shall command us, all the remainder of our days, that we may not bring upon ourselves a never-ending torment, as has been spoken by the angel, that we may not drink out of the cup of the wrath of God.

### ***Comments***

When the people proclaim that they have “great views of that which is to come,” the reference is to the atoning mission of the Messiah. Benjamin explicitly declared, in Mosiah 3:1, that “I have things to tell you concerning that which is to come.” Benjamin spoke of the mortal mission of the Messiah. The people are echoing that focus.

The important part of their unified verbal declaration is that they are “willing to enter into a covenant with our God to do his will.” This is an interesting concept for the descendants of Israel. There was a covenant in place. That covenant continued. What is suggested here is that there is a new covenant being instated. There is an explicit desire to redefine their community. Perhaps it only reinforces the Israelite covenant, but the nature of this covenant will focus not only on Yahweh as God, but Yahweh as the Messiah.

## **Benjamin Gives the People a New Name**

### ***Mosiah 5:6–8***

6 And now, these are the words which king Benjamin desired of them; and therefore he said unto them: Ye have spoken the words that I desired; and the covenant which ye have made is a righteous covenant.

7 And now, because of the covenant which ye have made ye shall be called the children of Christ, his sons, and his daughters; for behold, this day he hath spiritually begotten you; for ye say that your

hearts are changed through faith on his name; therefore, ye are born of him and have become his sons and his daughters.

8 And under this head ye are made free, and there is no other head whereby ye can be made free. There is no other name given whereby salvation cometh; therefore, I would that ye should take upon you the name of Christ, all you that have entered into the covenant with God that ye should be obedient unto the end of your lives.

### *Comments*

Benjamin accepts their declaration of a willingness to enter into a new covenant. He provides a little more definition of that covenant. They are no longer just the children of Israel, they are children of the Messiah. Their understanding of the future atoning mission has given them a larger view that the children of Israel, and, therefore, Benjamin, extends the covenant to cover this new understanding. They are spiritually born through their acceptance of the covenant, and the covenant requires understanding and acceptance of the future mission of the Messiah.

Just as seeing the word *Christ* in this verse tells us that it was translated in a Christian world, so may the presence of the word *faith*. That concept is elaborated in the New Testament, but translates the older understanding of *allegiance*, or perhaps *faithfulness*. Thus, they are changed through faith in that they have accepted, and declared allegiance to, a new covenant.

The two phrases in verse 8, “under this head,” and “no other name,” echo Benjamin in Mosiah 3:17, where he declared that there was “no other name given, nor any other way nor means whereby salvation can come.” Benjamin had earlier explained that there was only one other way, and now repeats that declaration as part of the acceptance of the covenant they have made.

### ***Mosiah 5:9–12***

9 And it shall come to pass that whosoever doeth this shall be found at the right hand of God, for he shall know the name by which he is called; for he shall be called by the name of Christ.

10 And now it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall not take upon him the name of Christ must be called by some other name; therefore, he findeth himself on the left hand of God.

11 And I would that ye should remember also, that this is the name that I said I should give unto you that never should be blotted out, except it be through transgression; therefore, take heed that ye do not transgress, that the name be not blotted out of your hearts.

12 I say unto you, I would that ye should remember to retain the name written always in your hearts, that ye are not found on the left hand of God, but that ye hear and know the voice by which ye shall be called, and also, the name by which he shall call you.

## *Comments*

In the Comments on Mosiah 3:17, the concept of the bonding between the name and the essence of the person was discussed. It becomes relevant here because the name of the Messiah is now applied to a people covenanting with and through that Messiah. Benjamin declares that his people shall be known with a new name, and that implies a new beginning, and a new character infused with the principles Benjamin outlined in his speech.

Why does Benjamin rename his people? The change in the name is intended to provide a change in identity. There were people of Nephi and people of Zarahemla. It would hardly be surprising to find that much of the internal division was along lines following the previous religious and political understandings of those two separate peoples. Benjamin is anxious for a new beginning after that terrible civil disruption. He attempts to change the discourse from separate Nephites and Zarahemlites to a single new people where all follow, and are named, for the coming Messiah.

Benjamin desires that they “should remember to retain the name written always in your hearts.” It is an ambitious political move and a very optimistic one. Unfortunately, Benjamin’s desire that they always remember their new identity as one people dissolves during his son’s reign.

## ***Mosiah 5:13–15***

13 For how knoweth a man the master whom he has not served, and who is a stranger unto him, and is far from the thoughts and intents of his heart?

14 And again, doth a man take an ass which belongeth to his neighbor, and keep him? I say unto you, Nay; he will not even suffer that he shall feed among his flocks, but will drive him away, and cast him out. I say unto you, that even so shall it be among you if ye know not the name by which ye are called.

15 Therefore, I would that ye should be steadfast and immovable, always abounding in good works, that Christ, the Lord God Omnipotent, may seal you his, that you may be brought to heaven, that ye may have everlasting salvation and eternal life, through the wisdom, and power, and justice, and mercy of him who created all things, in heaven and in earth, who is God above all. Amen.

## *Comments*

Benjamin had earlier used the social concept of master and servant to describe his relationship to his people. He then moved that relationship to describe the relationship between Yahweh and his people. Here, Benjamin has declared that they have covenanted to have a renewed relationship to Yahweh as their master. They now have obligations. That obligation is service, for they will not understand Yahweh’s covenant with them if they do not serve Yahweh, the same as any other servant attempting to master the relationship with which they have been acquainted.



Right after stating that they should serve Yahweh, Benjamin returns to the statement that “when ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God” (Mosiah 2:17). He describes how they are to serve their master, and the descriptions are of their service to one another.

In verse 15 he asks the people to be ‘steadfast and immovable.’ These are covenant words and meanings which later will be described as *faith*. Here the clear meaning is more “demanding of action.”

In the end, this new covenant provides benefits: “that you may be brought to heaven, that ye may have everlasting salvation and eternal life.” The testificatory *Amen* closes the chapter and the record of the speech. From here, Mormon moves to a narration of the aftermath of the speech.



# Mosiah 6

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## End of Benjamin's Reign

### *Mosiah 6:1–2*

1 And now, king Benjamin thought it was expedient, after having finished speaking to the people, that he should take the names of all those who had entered into a covenant with God to keep his commandments.

2 And it came to pass that there was not one soul, except it were little children, but who had entered into the covenant and had taken upon them the name of Christ.

### *Comments*

The new covenant was not only an important religious occasion, but the inseparability of religion and politics made it a singularly important political occasion as well. In the aftermath of first a war with the Lamanites, then a civil war, Benjamin was not only asking for unity, but making people accountable for their decision to be united under this new name and new type of covenant.

The taking of the names was not simply a roster, but it was an indication of commitment. One might participate in a vocal exclamation as part of a crowd, but the individual accounting made it very personal. With the exception of the children who appear to have been exempted from the covenant, all had agreed. Benjamin had accomplished his goal. He had proposed that they become a new people, and each person committed to that new social contract.

The exception of the little children interestingly returns to comments made earlier. In Mosiah 2:34, Benjamin had indicated that all had been taught of the Messiah, save the little children. In Mosiah 3:18, he noted that “the infant perisheth not that dieth in his infancy.” Therefore, even at this early time in Nephite history, there was a doctrine of sin, or of culpability for sin, that excluded little children. This suggests that the idea is not that the little children did not desire to enter into the covenant, but rather they, according to their theology, were not sufficiently accountable to make that decision with proper individual agency.

## ***Mosiah 6:3***

3 And again, it came to pass that when king Benjamin had made an end of all these things, and had consecrated his son Mosiah<sub>2</sub> to be a ruler and a king over his people, and had given him all the charges concerning the kingdom, and also had appointed priests to teach the people, that thereby they might hear and know the commandments of God, and to stir them up in remembrance of the oath which they had made, he dismissed the multitude, and they returned, every one, according to their families, to their own houses.

### ***Comments***

Surely the seating of Mosiah<sub>2</sub> as the new king was filled with ceremony. The people had gathered for an occasion, and they had been given a spectacular occasion, with a new name for their people, and a new king to usher in the new covenant. That certainly provided the conditions for celebration. Mormon doesn't mention them. Mormon doesn't say much at all about the coronation. He simply indicates that Benjamin finished, made Mosiah<sub>2</sub> the king, made sure there were teachers to reinforce the new covenant, and then everyone went home.

It continues to be an important social statement that they returned home "according to their families." There continues to be an underlying kinship organization in Nephite society, probably underscoring the continued use of the lineages of the tribes of Lehi as an organizational structure, even while they were among the people of Zarahemla.

This information would have been the ending of the previous chapter according to modern thematic definitions of chapters. For Mormon, the testificatory *Amen* meant that the chapter ended, even though the event had not. Thus, here, and in other places, information that modern readers might think belonged in the previous chapter had to be added to the beginning of the next.

## **Mosiah<sub>2</sub>'s Reign Begins**

### ***Mosiah 6:4–7***

4 And Mosiah began to reign in his father's stead. And he began to reign in the thirtieth year of his age, making in the whole, about four hundred and seventy-six years from the time that Lehi left Jerusalem.

5 And king Benjamin lived three years and he died.

6 And it came to pass that king Mosiah did walk in the ways of the Lord, and did observe his judgments and his statutes, and did keep his commandments in all things whatsoever he commanded him.

7 And king Mosiah did cause his people that they should till the earth. And he also, himself, did till the earth, that thereby he might not become burdensome to his people, that he might do according to that which his father had done in all things. And there was no contention among all his people for the space of three years.

## *Comments*

Our modern chapter 6 in the book of Mosiah was a chapter in the 1830 edition. It is rather unusual in that it is so short and covers so little information. When the next chapter begins, it will begin telling the deeds of Mosiah<sub>2</sub>. In this chapter, Mosiah<sub>2</sub> is mentioned, but nothing of what he did, other than that he “did observe [the Lord’s] judgments and his statutes, and did keep his commandments.” That is very generic information.

There is no simple marker to tell us why Mormon created a chapter break at this point, but it appears that this was the intended ending for the events Mormon discussed in chapter 5, but which were separated from that chapter due to the testificatory *Amen*.

The key to the conclusion is the last sentence. “And there was no contention among all his people for the space of three years.” The entire purpose of Benjamin’s speech and abdication was to counter the contention that had gone on before. This sentence functions as a testimony that it worked. In the time-frame of peace in the Book of Mormon, three years was a respectable amount of time. Years of peace will continue to be marked and are often shorter than these three years.



# Mosiah 7

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## An Expedition to the Land of Nephi

### *Mosiah 7:1–3*

1 And now, it came to pass that after king Mosiah had had continual peace for the space of three years, he was desirous to know concerning the people who went up to dwell in the land of Lehi-Nephi, or in the city of Lehi-Nephi; for his people had heard nothing from them from the time they left the land of Zarahemla; therefore, they wearied him with their teasings.

2 And it came to pass that king Mosiah granted that sixteen of their strong men might go up to the land of Lehi-Nephi, to inquire concerning their brethren.

3 And it came to pass that on the morrow they started to go up, having with them one Ammon, he being a strong and mighty man, and a descendant of Zarahemla; and he was also their leader.

### *Comments*

After the repetition that there had been three years of peace, Mormon begins a completely different story. To this point, he has discussed Benjamin's speech and noted that Mosiah<sub>2</sub> was seated as king, but he has given nothing of Mosiah<sub>2</sub>'s actions. The very first event that he records for Mosiah<sub>2</sub> picks up a story that had been lost with the first part of the book of Mosiah: the people from Zarahemla who had returned to the land of Nephi. We know the beginnings of this story only from the book of Omni, where Amaleki gave the basics of the story, perhaps because his brother was one of those to go (see Omni 1:27–30).

We do not have any textual dating to know when they left, but between the time they left and this indication three years after the seating of Mosiah<sub>2</sub> as king, there was sufficient time for Zeniff to create his colony and pass away, for his son Noah to expand the city with large building projects, and for Limhi to take over after his father, Noah, had been killed. Later evidence will suggest that they left during Benjamin's reign, which only serves to let us know that Benjamin had a relatively long reign.

King Mosiah<sub>2</sub> picks sixteen men to go. If we accept a Mesoamerican background for the Book of Mormon, it is possible that the usage of the specific number sixteen (representing 4x4, with the number 4 being a sacred number) is intentional. Why mention the number rather than generically say that several men left, unless there was some meaning to the number?

This begins a complicated section of the Book of Mormon. It involves actions in the land of Nephi, not Zarahemla, and will cover both events in the narrative's current timeline as well as extended flashbacks before both time and events return to Zarahemla in our chapter 25 of the book of Mosiah.

### ***Mosiah 7:4–6***

4 And now, they knew not the course they should travel in the wilderness to go up to the land of Lehi-Nephi; therefore they wandered many days in the wilderness, even forty days did they wander.

5 And when they had wandered forty days they came to a hill, which is north of the land of Shilom, and there they pitched their tents.

6 And Ammon took three of his brethren, and their names were Amaleki, Helem, and Hem, and they went down into the land of Nephi.

### ***Comments***

Verse 4 begins with the group not knowing the precise way, and therefore wandering forty days. The presence of forty days strongly suggests that the purpose of this sentence is to link it to the wanderings of Israel in the wilderness. This is certainly not a parallel experience, but it is intended to show that it is under Yahweh's guidance, as the forty years wandering was directly due to Yahweh's command. Perhaps there is some correlation as well to the rebelliousness of Israel that caused the forty-year journey in the wilderness to the rebelliousness of the former people from Zarahemla who returned to the land of Nephi.

When they arrive, we get the name of Ammon and his three brothers. We do not hear of these brothers again, which seems unusual. Why would Mormon make sure to mention them if they were never to be heard from again? There is no answer to that question. A speculation is that it isn't the names, but the number four that is important. Sixteen men were chosen, including Ammon and his three brothers from the assumed leadership core.

### ***Mosiah 7:7–8***

7 And behold, they met the king of the people who were in the land of Nephi, and in the land of Shilom; and they were surrounded by the king's guard, and were taken, and were bound, and were committed to prison.

8 And it came to pass when they had been in prison two days they were again brought before the king, and their bands were loosed; and they stood before the king, and were permitted, or rather commanded, that they should answer the questions which he should ask them.



### *Comments*

The four brothers approach the city that they understand to be the city with the people who left Zarahemla. How they know that is not mentioned. The four probably come as a less threatening number than the full sixteen.

They happen to arrive when the king is outside his city. Even though there were only four, they were still surrounded and imprisoned. After two days they came before the king. In Mesoamerican art there are many representations of captives brought before the king, so this aspect of the story rings true. Similarly, the representations show the prisoners bound. Some are also unbound. Once in the presence of the king, the prisoners had no weapons and were certainly surrounded by the king's guards, so it would have been safe to loosen their bands.

## **Meeting King Limhi**

### ***Mosiah 7:9–11***

9 And he said unto them: Behold, I am Limhi, the son of Noah, who was the son of Zeniff, who came up out of the land of Zarahemla to inherit this land, which was the land of their fathers, who was made a king by the voice of the people.

10 And now, I desire to know the cause whereby ye were so bold as to come near the walls of the city, when I, myself, was with my guards without the gate?

11 And now, for this cause have I suffered that ye should be preserved, that I might inquire of you, or else I should have caused that my guards should have put you to death. Ye are permitted to speak.

### *Comments*

The first order of business is the declaration of the name of the king and his authority through his lineage. This will be followed by Ammon's declaration of name and lineage in verse 13.

The circumstances of Ammon and his brothers' arrival at the time the king was outside of the walls of his city created this particular confrontation. Had they arrived at a different time they might have had a very different type of introduction to the city. It would likely have been much more difficult to obtain an audience with the king.

The reason for the caution is the protection of the leader. The modern world continues this tradition. Kings and other leaders are to be protected. The second reason will be part of the unfolding story. At this point, the only thing that is certain is that Ammon and his brothers approached a guarded king, and that, in and of itself, might have been punishable by death.

Fortunately for Ammon and his brothers, king Limhi allows them to explain themselves.

## ***Mosiah 7:12–14***

12 And now, when Ammon saw that he was permitted to speak, he went forth and bowed himself before the king; and rising again he said: O king, I am very thankful before God this day that I am yet alive, and am permitted to speak; and I will endeavor to speak with boldness;

13 For I am assured that if ye had known me ye would not have suffered that I should have worn these bands. For I am Ammon, and am a descendant of Zarahemla, and have come up out of the land of Zarahemla to inquire concerning our brethren, whom Zeniff brought up out of that land.

14 And now, it came to pass that after Limhi had heard the words of Ammon, he was exceedingly glad, and said: Now, I know of a surety that my brethren who were in the land of Zarahemla are yet alive. And now, I will rejoice; and on the morrow I will cause that my people shall rejoice also.

### ***Comments***

Ammon begins to speak and explain why they are there. The important part of the beginning is to declare who he is. He gives his name, and then he notes that he is a descendant of Zarahemla, coming from the land of Zarahemla. This introduction is intended to provide a kinship link to Limhi. Even if Limhi were, as is likely, more a descendant of Nephi than Zarahemla, Limhi was still tied to a heritage that included the land of Zarahemla. There were probably those among Limhi's people who had also been descendants of Zarahemla.

In the ancient world, kinship was an important means of determining how one was treated. Kin were to be considered part of one's group, even if they were unknown. Thus, as strangers in the land, Ammon and his brothers could call upon the kinship ties to assure that they would be treated well, rather than be treated as enemies. This declaration of kin relationships fits well into the known customs of interaction for most ancient peoples.

Limhi's reaction is immediate. Upon hearing that they are a type of kin, the imprisonment ends. In fact, Limhi declares that he will throw a party the next day. This is a very large family reunion, but one with overtones that will be discovered as the story is told.

## **King Limhi Speaks to His People**

### ***Mosiah 7:15–17***

15 For behold, we are in bondage to the Lamanites, and are taxed with a tax which is grievous to be borne. And now, behold, our brethren will deliver us out of our bondage, or out of the hands of the Lamanites, and we will be their slaves; for it is better that we be slaves to the Nephites than to pay tribute to the king of the Lamanites.

16 And now, king Limhi commanded his guards that they should no more bind Ammon nor his brethren, but caused that they should go to the hill which was north of Shilom, and bring their brethren into the city, that thereby they might eat, and drink, and rest themselves from the labors of their journey; for they had suffered many things; they had suffered hunger, thirst, and fatigue.

17 And now, it came to pass on the morrow that king Limhi sent a proclamation among all his people, that thereby they might gather themselves together to the temple, to hear the words which he should speak unto them.

### *Comments*

The release of the brothers is recorded in verses 15 and 16, where those who were left on the hill are also brought to the city to join in the celebration. Limhi does indeed proclaim a gathering and requires that his people gather to the temple. This is another touch that conforms to Mesoamerican practice. The Mesoamerican temples were accompanied by a courtyard space in front of them where the people might gather to witness events on the temple. In many cases, these areas were acoustically designed to improve the ability of the gathered people to hear.

The most important information in these verses comes in verse 15, where Limhi gives the reason that they are so happy to connect with Zarahemla again. They are currently burdened with heavy taxes from the Lamanites and see the connection to Zarahemla as their salvation. The conditions are sufficiently bad that they assume that even being slaves among the Nephites would be better than their current conditions. That statement is probably hyperbole. We have learned that Benjamin had not suffered that the Nephites have slaves (see Mosiah 2:13), so Limhi could have been aware that there were no slaves among the Nephites.

### ***Mosiah 7:18–20***

18 And it came to pass that when they had gathered themselves together that he spake unto them in this wise, saying: O ye, my people, lift up your heads and be comforted; for behold, the time is at hand, or is not far distant, when we shall no longer be in subjection to our enemies, notwithstanding our many strugglings, which have been in vain; yet I trust there remaineth an effectual struggle to be made.

19 Therefore, lift up your heads, and rejoice, and put your trust in God, in that God who was the God of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob; and also, that God who brought the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt, and caused that they should walk through the Red Sea on dry ground, and fed them with manna that they might not perish in the wilderness; and many more things did he do for them.

20 And again, that same God has brought our fathers out of the land of Jerusalem, and has kept and preserved his people even until now; and behold, it is because of our iniquities and abominations that he has brought us into bondage.

## *Comments*

The people were commanded to gather near the temple. This is most likely a standard practice for public declarations. We have already seen Benjamin do it, and we will see Mosiah<sub>2</sub> do the same. Limhi addresses his people. In both verses 18 and 19 he tells the people to “lift up your heads.” Firstly, they lift their heads to be comforted, and then they rejoice. This is a reference to their difficulties with the bondage to the Lamanites.

Limhi sees Ammon and his brethren as their salvation, and it is a salvation that will require (or perhaps enable), an exodus from the land of Nephi to the land of Zarahemla. Limhi likens this salvation to Yahweh’s saving Israel from Egypt. He expects Yahweh’s hand to provide perhaps miraculous intervention, noting that Israel passed through the Red Sea on dry land. Limhi declares “that same God has brought our fathers out of the land of Jerusalem, and has kept and preserved his people even until now.” Yahweh has watched over his covenant people, and Yahweh continues to watch over this branch of Israel. However, just as Israel wandered forty years to learn to repent of their sins and perhaps to learn Egyptian practices, so the Limhites have had to suffer for their sins. They have been in bondage to Lamanites, rather than to Egyptians. Nevertheless, that same God will save them.

## ***Mosiah 7:21–23***

21 And ye all are witnesses this day, that Zeniff, who was made king over this people, he being over-zealous to inherit the land of his fathers, therefore being deceived by the cunning and craftiness of king Laman, who having entered into a treaty with king Zeniff, and having yielded up into his hands the possessions of a part of the land, or even the city of Lehi-Nephi, and the city of Shilom; and the land round about—

22 And all this he did, for the sole purpose of bringing this people into subjection or into bondage. And behold, we at this time do pay tribute to the king of the Lamanites, to the amount of one half of our corn, and our barley, and even all our grain of every kind, and one half of the increase of our flocks and our herds; and even one half of all we have or possess the king of the Lamanites doth exact of us, or our lives.

23 And now, is not this grievous to be borne? And is not this, our affliction, great? Now behold, how great reason we have to mourn.

## *Comments*

Limhi recounts a very brief account of the history of his people. It becomes a type of public confession of sins that will be forgiven and reconciled through the renewed connection to the people of Zarahemla. This is history that will be recounted in greater detail later, but Mormon gives it from Limhi’s perspective, where it is accomplished history, before he takes a flashback to pull information from different documents which give the information as it occurred. One of the reasons that we have this particular duplication is that Mormon is using three discernible sources for this story. The first is the large plates.

On that record, we may assume that he found Ammon's record. Thus, the events that Ammon would have participated in are recorded from the large plate source into which they were certainly entered after they returned to the city of Zarahemla.

The next two sources come from the land of Nephi. The first is the record of Zeniff. Mormon quotes what Zeniff wrote but narrates what must have been the official additions to that record which tell of Noah and Limhi. Finally, there is a separate record Alma<sub>1</sub> kept, and Mormon similarly quotes from that. It is possible that all these records were written into the large plate record, but the way that Mormon uses them suggests that they were indeed separate records.

The result of history led to the need to pay tribute to the king of the Lamanites. This condition of paying tribute is considered bondage. It is also called "robbing" in later texts. This relationship between a conquering king and a defeated one is also very typical of the Mesoamerican economic system. Conquests typically did not create incorporation of the conquered people. The conquered people were allowed to continue with their separate government but were required to pay tribute. The flow of goods to the conqueror was the desired effect, not the annexation of land.

### ***Mosiah 7:24–28***

24 Yea, I say unto you, great are the reasons which we have to mourn; for behold how many of our brethren have been slain, and their blood has been spilt in vain, and all because of iniquity.

25 For if this people had not fallen into transgression the Lord would not have suffered that this great evil should come upon them. But behold, they would not hearken unto his words; but there arose contentions among them, even so much that they did shed blood among themselves.

26 And a prophet of the Lord have they slain; yea, a chosen man of God, who told them of their wickedness and abominations, and prophesied of many things which are to come, yea, even the coming of Christ.

27 And because he said unto them that Christ was the God, the Father of all things, and said that he should take upon him the image of man, and it should be the image after which man was created in the beginning; or in other words, he said that man was created after the image of God, and that God should come down among the children of men, and take upon him flesh and blood, and go forth upon the face of the earth—

28 And now, because he said this, they did put him to death; and many more things did they do which brought down the wrath of God upon them. Therefore, who wondereth that they are in bondage, and that they are smitten with sore afflictions?

### ***Comments***

The Nephite promise of the land is not specifically invoked, but it is the underlying assumption of Limhi's discussion. They are under bondage because they have sinned against Yahweh's law. Note that Limhi says:

“if this people had not fallen into transgression the Lord would not have suffered this great evil should come upon them.” The promise of the land is protection and prosperity upon being faithful to that covenant, but the negative aspect of the promise is that a cursing would fall upon the people were they to breach the covenant. Limhi lists some of the important ways in which they have breached their covenant.

The most important of these transgressions was the killing of a prophet. This refers to Abinadi, whose story is yet to come. At this point, Limhi mentions that fact without any explanation, just as he should. At this point in their story, the people were well aware of what he meant and did not need an explanation. Mormon thought that the explanation was very important, and so he will add that information as a flashback, using different sources.

It is important that Limhi mentioned that the problem with the here unnamed prophet is that he preached that the Messiah was Yahweh in a mortal mission. This had been a Nephite teaching, but one that was most frequently challenged by apostates. The evidence that we will see for Noah’s reign is that this was also denied by Noah’s priests.

### ***Mosiah 7:29–33***

29 For behold, the Lord hath said: I will not succor my people in the day of their transgression; but I will hedge up their ways that they prosper not; and their doings shall be as a stumbling block before them.

30 And again, he saith: If my people shall sow filthiness they shall reap the chaff thereof in the whirlwind; and the effect thereof is poison.

31 And again he saith: If my people shall sow filthiness they shall reap the east wind, which bringeth immediate destruction.

32 And now, behold, the promise of the Lord is fulfilled, and ye are smitten and afflicted.

33 But if ye will turn to the Lord with full purpose of heart, and put your trust in him, and serve him with all diligence of mind, if ye do this, he will, according to his own will and pleasure, deliver you out of bondage.

### ***Comments***

The phrase “hedge up their ways” echoes the language from Hosea 2:6. Hosea was a prophet from the brass plates, and Limhi appears to expect that many in the audience will associate that phrase with scripture. This continues to link their experience to scripture and to Yahweh’s covenant with them.

The parallelism in verses 30 and 31 also uses phrases from scripture. The chaff in the whirlwind probably echoes Hosea 13:3. There is a similar phrase in Isaiah 17:13, but since Hosea was the previous reference, it is probably the reference here as well.

The east wind is an Old Testament phrase indicating the source of misfortune. Dr. Kerry Hull examined that metaphor and found that it would also resonate with Mesoamerican peoples. This was not a dead metaphor, but one that would continue to hold a similar meaning.

Verses 32 and 33 provide a contrasting parallel, but one that has both sides of the contrast being supported by the statement that “the promise of the Lord is fulfilled.” The first is that the people are “smitten and afflicted,” because they have not been faithful. The reversal is that the Lord will deliver them, if the people “put [their] trust in him, and serve him with all diligence of mind.”

The original chapter did not end here, but continued immediately to the next verse, now separated into chapter 8.





# Mosiah 8

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## *Mosiah 8:1–4*

1 And it came to pass that after king Limhi had made an end of speaking to his people, for he spake many things unto them and only a few of them have I written in this book, he told his people all the things concerning their brethren who were in the land of Zarahemla.

2 And he caused that Ammon should stand up before the multitude, and rehearse unto them all that had happened unto their brethren from the time that Zeniff went up out of the land even until the time that he himself came up out of the land.

3 And he also rehearsed unto them the last words which king Benjamin had taught them, and explained them to the people of king Limhi, so that they might understand all the words which he spake.

4 And it came to pass that after he had done all this, that king Limhi dismissed the multitude, and caused that they should return every one unto his own house.

## *Comments*

Mormon has finished quoting Limhi. He now simply narrates the basic information that followed. He lets his readers know that he is making a change by specifically interjecting himself in verse 1: “he spake many things unto them and only a few of them have I written in this book.” The reference for “this book” is the book that Mormon is writing.

The next event is Limhi’s invitation to Ammon to speak. Just as Ammon has come on this mission because people in Zarahemla had wondered what became of the people of Zeniff, the people of Zeniff wondered about what had happened in Zarahemla since they left. One of the important things that Ammon discussed was Benjamin’s “last words.” While Benjamin certainly taught of the coming Messiah, Limhi had already indicated that his people knew to believe in the Messiah, based on Abinadi’s testimony. The importance, therefore, was not to emphasize the atoning Messiah, but rather the new covenant. This was critical because it was assumed that the people of Limhi would accept that covenant when they returned, as it was then the governing covenant in Zarahemla.

When the people were dismissed, Limhi “caused that they should return every one unto his own house.” This is so similar to the ending of Benjamin’s speech that we can be justified in assuming that the

reasons were similar. This is not simply a note that they were to go home, but that they were probably socially separated into lineage houses. Those lineages would not have reflected the classic Nephite lineages but would still have been the salient social divisions. Thus, the *house* was the collective term for the kin group, not the term simply for the individual dwelling place.

## Seers, Prophets, and Translation

### ***Mosiah 8:5–6***

5 And it came to pass that he caused that the plates which contained the record of his people from the time that they left the land of Zarahemla, should be brought before Ammon, that he might read them.

6 Now, as soon as Ammon had read the record, the king inquired of him to know if he could interpret languages, and Ammon told him that he could not.

### *Comments*

Two things are interesting in verse 5's description of Limhi bringing records to Ammon. The first is that there was a continuous record kept of the people. Mormon will begin quoting from that record in the next chapter. He calls it the record of Zeniff, and he will quote what Zeniff wrote. However, the record clearly continued after Zeniff. Based on the evidence we have from the large plates, the books changed names with changes in dynasties. It is probable that the people of Zeniff continued that tradition. Therefore, the record of Zeniff would have been similar to naming a record the book of Zeniff, and the records of Noah and Limhi would have been on that same record.

The second interesting aspect is that Limhi expects that Ammon could read. It may be that Ammon had some royal or otherwise high-class blood. Literacy was rare in the ancient world and would have been confined to the higher classes.

The ability of Ammon to read leads directly to the question in the next verse. This question about whether Ammon could interpret languages will be the first time Mormon tells the story of Ether's plates. Mormon will repeat aspects of the story about the plates twice in coming chapters. It was important to Mormon's underlying thesis for the eventual destruction of the Nephite people, a thesis that will be explored later as more information is accumulated.

### ***Mosiah 8:7–8***

7 And the king said unto him: Being grieved for the afflictions of my people, I caused that forty and three of my people should take a journey into the wilderness, that thereby they might find the land of Zarahemla, that we might appeal unto our brethren to deliver us out of bondage.

8 And they were lost in the wilderness for the space of many days, yet they were diligent, and found not the land of Zarahemla but returned to this land, having traveled in a land among many waters, having discovered a land which was covered with bones of men, and of beasts, and was also covered with ruins of buildings of every kind, having discovered a land which had been peopled with a people who were as numerous as the hosts of Israel.

### *Comments*

Limhi tells an important story. Because of the burdens placed on his people, he sent forty-three men in an attempt to find the land of Zarahemla and to beg their assistance. They wander in the wilderness and find, not Zarahemla, but a land with many waters, covered with the bones of men and beasts and ruins of buildings. One of the important factors in this discovery is not mentioned in this description. This is a land northward. Although the text doesn't mention it here, it is implied because Zarahemla is also northward of the land of Nephi, and they were attempting to find Zarahemla.

The inability to find Zarahemla is curious. While there might have been some issue in arriving at the appropriate pass through the mountains, the instructions should have been simple. Zarahemla lay along the Sidon, and the Sidon had its headwaters in the higher elevation (typically mountains) to the south of Zarahemla. There must have been either some alive who had made the journey, or it was in the stories or their fathers. The instructions must have been to go to the mountains, find the river and follow it to Zarahemla. They must have done so, yet they missed Zarahemla. How could that happen?

If we accept a Mesoamerican setting, there are two rivers which begin not too far distant from each other in the Cuchumatanes mountains. The difficult part of the journey appears to have been between the headwaters of the river and the land of Zarahemla. Even Ammon's party had wandered for a while, which had to be after they left the river.

The best explanation for Limhi's party is that they wandered to the mountains, found the headwaters of a river and followed it. It was the wrong river. At the end of the river, they found the remains of a civilization. Following the second river would have led them to lands northward that had once been Jaredite lands.

### ***Mosiah 8:9–11***

9 And for a testimony that the things that they had said are true they have brought twenty-four plates which are filled with engravings, and they are of pure gold.

10 And behold, also, they have brought breastplates, which are large, and they are of brass and of copper, and are perfectly sound.

11 And again, they have brought swords, the hilts thereof have perished, and the blades thereof were cankered with rust; and there is no one in the land that is able to interpret the language or the engravings that are on the plates. Therefore I said unto thee: Canst thou translate?

## *Comments*

Verse 9 begins: “for a testimony that the things that they had said are true.” There follows a listing of artifacts that they found and brought back as that witness of the land that they found. While bringing back breastplates and swords might have been scavenged from a living people, the presence of plates with engravings would have signaled a dead people. The reason is that a living people would have considered them sacred and protected them with their lives. Such was the power of documents that they became one of the sacred symbols of the Nephites, being passed from ruler to ruler. The same could have been expected of these plates.

The import of these finds is that there is not only tangible evidence of this lost people, but there is a record, and the assumption that the record might tell something about that people. Therefore, there is interest in reading it. Thus, Limhi asks: “Canst thou translate?” Clearly, no one in Limhi’s city could do that.

## ***Mosiah 8:12–13***

12 And I say unto thee again: Knowest thou of any one that can translate? For I am desirous that these records should be translated into our language; for, perhaps, they will give us a knowledge of a remnant of the people who have been destroyed, from whence these records came; or, perhaps, they will give us a knowledge of this very people who have been destroyed; and I am desirous to know the cause of their destruction.

13 Now Ammon said unto him: I can assuredly tell thee, O king, of a man that can translate the records; for he has wherewith that he can look, and translate all records that are of ancient date; and it is a gift from God. And the things are called interpreters, and no man can look in them except he be commanded, lest he should look for that he ought not and he should perish. And whosoever is commanded to look in them, the same is called seer.

## *Comments*

Perhaps Ammon provided some response indicating that Ammon himself could not translate. Therefore, the question becomes whether Ammon knew of anyone who could. The answer is important. Not only does Ammon answer that the Nephite king could translate, but he does so without knowing anything about the language encoded in the engravings. The question might have been implicitly about this particular set of plates, but the answer included any ancient language encoded as a script.

The means by which the Nephite king could translate is that he possessed “wherewith that he can look, and translate all records that are of ancient date, and it is a gift from God.” The first question we should ask is how Ammon would know that. The answer is Mosiah<sub>1</sub> (Benjamin’s father) had already used those interpreters to read a large stone the people of Zarahemla brought to him not long after the Nephites arrived in Zarahemla (see Omni 1:20–22). Although it isn’t discussed at this point, it is important to note

that Mosiah<sub>1</sub>'s translation of the stone also told of a people who had been destroyed and whose bones lay in the lands northward. Although that information comes from Omni's record, which Mormon did not use as he wrote his book, it is probably an event that Mormon would have told precisely because it spoke of a destroyed people in the lands northward.

One who used interpreters was called a seer, clearly because the user saw something when they were being used. It was a term with which the Book of Mormon's 19<sup>th</sup> Century audience was familiar. The question many have asked about the interpreters that Mosiah<sub>1</sub> used is where they came from." The question is typically asked because there is an assumption that there was only a single set of interpreters. There is no reason to make that assumption. Mesoamerican shamans, even to this day, use items, sometimes stones, as a means of seeing what otherwise could not be seen. The importance that will be emphasized concerns the seer, not the specific mechanism the seer uses. Joseph Smith used various seer stones in addition to the interpreters that were buried with the plates. There is no need to suppose any reason that the ancient Nephites could not have had their own stones without waiting upon Jaredite stones.

### ***Mosiah 8:14–18***

14 And behold, the king of the people who are in the land of Zarahemla is the man that is commanded to do these things, and who has this high gift from God.

15 And the king said that a seer is greater than a prophet.

16 And Ammon said that a seer is a revelator and a prophet also; and a gift which is greater can no man have, except he should possess the power of God, which no man can; yet a man may have great power given him from God.

17 But a seer can know of things which are past, and also of things which are to come, and by them shall all things be revealed, or, rather, shall secret things be made manifest, and hidden things shall come to light, and things which are not known shall be made known by them, and also things shall be made known by them which otherwise could not be known.

18 Thus God has provided a means that man, through faith, might work mighty miracles; therefore he becometh a great benefit to his fellow beings.

### ***Comments***

Ammon continues to explain what a seer is. He declares that a seer is greater than a prophet. How could that be? Ammon explains that both prophets and seers have the ability to reveal things. The concept of revealing things is to bring to light that which is otherwise hidden. Both prophets and seers are able to reveal things hidden to most humankind. The difference is that a seer can see the past, as well as things to come. In this case, the seer can see the past in written language that necessarily encodes the past, since whatever is recorded becomes the past as soon as it is read, and certainly before it is read.

Thus, the seer can not only display Yahweh's future plans, but can see into the past to reveal both events and the meaning of texts. Why is the past important? Both in Israel and in Mesoamerican society, time was considered to be cyclical rather than an unbending straight line. Thus, the past instructed the future, as the cyclical nature of humanity would bring those same conditions to new people. That past would provide the solutions to apply to past problems, or at least show the solutions that would not work. Thus, the seer saw a wider range of important details that could help a current population.

### ***Mosiah 8:19–21***

19 And now, when Ammon had made an end of speaking these words the king rejoiced exceedingly, and gave thanks to God, saying: Doubtless a great mystery is contained within these plates, and these interpreters were doubtless prepared for the purpose of unfolding all such mysteries to the children of men.

20 O how marvelous are the works of the Lord, and how long doth he suffer with his people; yea, and how blind and impenetrable are the understandings of the children of men; for they will not seek wisdom, neither do they desire that she should rule over them!

21 Yea, they are as a wild flock which fleeth from the shepherd, and scattereth, and are driven, and are devoured by the beasts of the forest.

### ***Comments***

Ammon ends his discussion of how the Nephite king could translate the plates. Limhi declares that he has found the way to understand the mystery of this destroyed people, which is precisely the reason he had hoped to gain a translation. The final verse of this chapter says of humankind: "they are as a wild flock which fleeth from the shepherd, and scattereth, and are driven, and are devoured by the beasts of the forest." Without knowing the contents of the record, Limhi does know that they are about a destroyed people. He appears to expect that the lessons of the past will help his people avoid future mistakes. They have made their own, and they hope for salvation in the marvelous works of the Lord.

It might be noted that there is a consistent reference to the king of the Nephites without specifying which king might be involved. There will come a verse where there is some confusion over the particular king, and the discussion will be revisited at that time. At this point, it is best to refer to the position, rather than the specific person.

# Mosiah 9

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## ***Mosiah 9: Header***

*The Record of Zeniff—An account of his people, from the time they left the land of Zarahemla until the time that they were delivered out of the hands of the Lamanites.*

## ***Comments***

This is the first time we have seen Mormon’s record have a chapter header. There are two probable chapter headers in 1 Nephi that were not typeset that way, one before 1 Nephi 1, and the second before 2 Nephi 6. John Gilbert, the compositor for the first edition of the Book of Mormon, and the one who created the sentences and paragraphs, recognized this one as a header and set it off. He was clearly correct.

Mormon announces that he is taking his account from the record of Zeniff. As we saw in the Comments on Mosiah 8:5, the record of Zeniff appears to cover the records of Zeniff, Noah, and Limhi. Mormon only notes that he is beginning with the record of Zeniff.

As is typical for Mormon, he announces when he takes material from a non-large plates source. However, he does not similarly mark the return to the large plates as a source. The book of Mosiah will be an excellent demonstration of how Mormon handles his movements between his standard large plates source and the secondary sources he uses as supplements.

## **Zeniff Resettles the Land of Nephi**

### ***Mosiah 9:1***

1 I, Zeniff, having been taught in all the language of the Nephites, and having had a knowledge of the land of Nephi, or of the land of our fathers’ first inheritance, and having been sent as a spy among the Lamanites that I might spy out their forces, that our army might come upon them and destroy them—but when I saw that which was good among them I was desirous that they should not be destroyed.

## *Comments*

Mormon typically narrates the material he takes from the large plates. When he uses secondary sources, as he does in this case, he will sometimes copy, and other times narrate. We will see both methods as he works through the story of the people of Zeniff in the land of Nephi.

At the beginning we find the declaration that it is “I, Zeniff” who is writing. Mormon is copying the record of Zeniff, and as far as can be known from what he copied, it is the full record that Zeniff created. The much shorter version of this story is found in Omni 1:27–31. We have much more information in this account. While Zeniff notes that he was not the leader of the expedition, he does identify himself as one of perhaps several expedition members who wanted to change the mission from one of destructive revenge to one of reclaiming the lost land. Interestingly, the shortened version in Omni notes that the group wanted to possess the land, which refers to the second expedition rather than the first. As suggested in the comments on Omni 1:27–30, this difference appears to be due to the type of information Amaleki had available to him, which was more hearsay than what we get in Zeniff’s firsthand account.

## ***Mosiah 9:2–3***

2 Therefore, I contended with my brethren in the wilderness, for I would that our ruler should make a treaty with them; but he being an austere and a blood-thirsty man commanded that I should be slain; but I was rescued by the shedding of much blood; for father fought against father, and brother against brother, until the greater number of our army was destroyed in the wilderness; and we returned, those of us that were spared, to the land of Zarahemla, to relate that tale to their wives and their children.

3 And yet, I being over-zealous to inherit the land of our fathers, collected as many as were desirous to go up to possess the land, and started again on our journey into the wilderness to go up to the land; but we were smitten with famine and sore afflictions; for we were slow to remember the Lord our God.

## *Comments*

A division occurs between the original, but unnamed, leader of the first expedition and Zeniff (and those who sided with him). The leader intended to continue in his vindictive purpose, but Zeniff and others wanted to return to the land and take up residence. They would not be able to do that after a bloody raid on the Lamanites. Therefore, the group first erupted into two parties, then erupted into bloodshed.

Zeniff says that he was overzealous to inherit the land. At this early stage, the idea that he was overzealous appears to refer to the haste that led to them being spiritually unprepared for the task. He notes that they were “smitten with famine and sore afflictions; for we were slow to remember the Lord our God.” The promise of the land still applied to them, and perhaps in being overzealous, Zeniff and the others did not pay sufficient attention to their covenant with Yahweh. Therefore, they suffered consequences.



## ***Mosiah 9:4–6***

4 Nevertheless, after many days' wandering in the wilderness we pitched our tents in the place where our brethren were slain, which was near to the land of our fathers.

5 And it came to pass that I went again with four of my men into the city, in unto the king, that I might know of the disposition of the king, and that I might know if I might go in with my people and possess the land in peace.

6 And I went in unto the king, and he covenanted with me that I might possess the land of Lehi-Nephi, and the land of Shilom.

### ***Comments***

As the people of Zeniff return to the land of Nephi, they camp outside the city. As Ammon would do later (although it is a story that has already been told), Zeniff took four men into the city, intending to meet with the king.

When Zeniff comes into the city there is no indication that they are detained. There is no indication that there is a language barrier. This is the land from which the Nephites had fled not too many years earlier, and there were certainly many who remained in the area who continued to speak the Nephite language.

One of the things that may have eased the possible fears of having this particular group return is that many of the people of Nephi who had remained with Mosiah<sup>1</sup>, had fled. That meant that there were cultural and linguistic traditions in place which Zeniff's people would find comfortable, and which the ruling Lamanites would not find that different. It is also important to remember that at this point in Nephite history, the word *Lamanite* was no longer used primarily as a lineage designation, but rather with the definition of *non-Nephite*. Therefore, there may not have been an assumption of enmity solely based on ancient history.

## ***Mosiah 9:7–9***

7 And he also commanded that his people should depart out of the land, and I and my people went into the land that we might possess it.

8 And we began to build buildings, and to repair the walls of the city, yea, even the walls of the city of Lehi-Nephi, and the city of Shilom.

9 And we began to till the ground, yea, even with all manner of seeds, with seeds of corn, and of wheat, and of barley, and with neas, and with sheum, and with seeds of all manner of fruits; and we did begin to multiply and prosper in the land.

### ***Comments***

The offer from the Lamanite king is remarkable. His own people abandon their lands to allow Zeniff and his people to come in and settle. The fact that people were displaced, as well as the information in verse 8

that they began to build buildings and repair walls, suggest that they were given an area that had perhaps fallen into disuse. The idea that the Nephites from Zarahemla were given their old homeland of the city of Nephi cannot be supported by the textual evidence.

The city is called Lehi-Nephi, which may or may not have been the name at the time the people of Zeniff arrived. It is certainly more of a Nephite name, and so specific to Nephite interests that it would have been unlikely to have been preserved under a Lamanite regime.

After the people of Zeniff arrive, they plant and “did begin to multiply and prosper in the land.” We saw this type of comment in 1 Nephi 18:24 and 25, where Nephi similarly marks the new prosperity by noting that they had the means to live. That is similar to what happens in this verse. The new people were able to grow the crops needed in order to live.

The fact of the planting is more important than finding references to wheat and barley, or to determining the meaning of neas and sheum. There is no accepted correlation between neas, sheum, and known grains. We may only speculate that they are consumable grains based on the rest of the list in which they are included.

## **Conflict between Zeniff’s People and the Lamanites**

### ***Mosiah 9:10–12***

10 Now it was the cunning and the craftiness of king Laman, to bring my people into bondage, that he yielded up the land that we might possess it.

11 Therefore it came to pass, that after we had dwelt in the land for the space of twelve years that king Laman began to grow uneasy, lest by any means my people should wax strong in the land, and that they could not overpower them and bring them into bondage.

12 Now they were a lazy and an idolatrous people; therefore they were desirous to bring us into bondage, that they might glut themselves with the labors of our hands; yea, that they might feast themselves upon the flocks of our fields.

### ***Comments***

All three of these verses are clearly written long after the events. They corroborate Zeniff’s declaration that he was overzealous to obtain the lands, and these verses begin to explain the reason. They are certainly written about an enemy and are not intended to be objective. Zeniff could only assume that the reason that king Laman allowed Zeniff’s people into the land was to subjugate them. While possible, it required great effort in relocating people who had already been there, and then waiting a long time for the benefit. On the other hand, king Laman must have seen a benefit, else he would not have gone through the effort. Still, it took twelve years for the Lamanite plan to begin to be effective.

Verse 12 suggests that the Lamanites were lazy and idolatrous. That they were idolatrous was quite probable. That they were lazy could not have been true. An agricultural people could not survive on laziness. What Zeniff means is that they desired to receive tribute payments from dependent cities. For the Lamanite king, it is very possible that this was the intent, and it was likely mirrored in the purely Lamanite settlements that were also beholden to the Lamanite king. Perhaps taxation was what it was called when one's own people paid to support the government. When other cities paid to support the overking, it was tribute, or in the word that Zeniff's people will use, bondage.

The statement that "they might glut themselves with the labors of our hands; yea, that they might feast themselves upon the flocks of our fields" is a rather accurate description of the effect of tribute payments from a dependent city to the ruling city.

### ***Mosiah 9:13–16***

13 Therefore it came to pass that king Laman began to stir up his people that they should contend with my people; therefore there began to be wars and contentions in the land.

14 For, in the thirteenth year of my reign in the land of Nephi, away on the south of the land of Shilom, when my people were watering and feeding their flocks, and tilling their lands, a numerous host of Lamanites came upon them and began to slay them, and to take off their flocks, and the corn of their fields.

15 Yea, and it came to pass that they fled, all that were not overtaken, even into the city of Nephi, and did call upon me for protection.

16 And it came to pass that I did arm them with bows, and with arrows, with swords, and with cimeters, and with clubs, and with slings, and with all manner of weapons which we could invent, and I and my people did go forth against the Lamanites to battle.

### ***Comments***

Zeniff attributes official Lamanite sanction to what is described as a raid on a soft target. Whether or not King Laman was behind this raid, the results were clear. There was a raid and Lamanites fell upon farmers in the field and killed them. Their flocks and harvest were taken.

The result is that the people who survived come to Zeniff for aid. This is certainly what was expected, and it was expected that Zeniff would need to retaliate. That retaliation is understandably deadly.

The list of armaments includes both distance and close combat weapons. The bow was certainly known later in Mesoamerica, but it might be a translation term for the atlatl, or spear-thrower. The arrows used in an atlatl are certainly similar to arrows, although longer. The slings were a common distance weapon. Recent finds in Guatemala have found forts with piles of smooth stones clearly ready for the defenders on the wall to use in their slings.

The Mesoamerican sword was an obsidian-lined club that was incredibly sharp. One story from the Conquest tells of a Quiché warrior decapitating a horse with a single blow from his obsidian-bladed sword. Artistic representations of curved weapons that might have been described as cimeters have also been found.

### ***Mosiah 9:17–19***

17 Yea, in the strength of the Lord did we go forth to battle against the Lamanites; for I and my people did cry mightily to the Lord that he would deliver us out of the hands of our enemies, for we were awakened to a remembrance of the deliverance of our fathers.

18 And God did hear our cries and did answer our prayers; and we did go forth in his might; yea, we did go forth against the Lamanites, and in one day and a night we did slay three thousand and forty-three; we did slay them even until we had driven them out of our land.

19 And I, myself, with mine own hands, did help to bury their dead. And behold, to our great sorrow and lamentation, two hundred and seventy-nine of our brethren were slain.

### ***Comments***

Zeniff leads his people against the Lamanites. It is unknowable whether Zeniff was aware of who was responsible for the raid. Since all enemies were designated Lamanites, his retaliation could have been against anyone who might have been called an enemy. Ironically, this same mistake of blaming a whole people for what some of them did will happen again in the story of the priests of Noah and the daughters of the Lamanites.

In this case, the people of Zeniff are successful in their retaliation. They suffered significant loss, but even worse was that this appears to begin the rapid deterioration of the originally peaceable relationship between the people of Zeniff and the local Lamanites.

There is no break at this point in the original edition of the Book of Mormon. All of Zeniff's personal writings formed a single chapter.

# Mosiah 10

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## *Mosiah 10:1–5*

1 And it came to pass that we again began to establish the kingdom and we again began to possess the land in peace. And I caused that there should be weapons of war made of every kind, that thereby I might have weapons for my people against the time the Lamanites should come up again to war against my people.

2 And I set guards round about the land, that the Lamanites might not come upon us again unawares and destroy us; and thus I did guard my people and my flocks, and keep them from falling into the hands of our enemies.

3 And it came to pass that we did inherit the land of our fathers for many years, yea, for the space of twenty and two years.

4 And I did cause that the men should till the ground, and raise all manner of grain and all manner of fruit of every kind.

5 And I did cause that the women should spin, and toil, and work, and work all manner of fine linen, yea, and cloth of every kind, that we might clothe our nakedness; and thus we did prosper in the land—thus we did have continual peace in the land for the space of twenty and two years.

## *Comments*

The aftermath of the retaliation is that the people of Zeniff are able to assert their independence but were required to remain diligent. Having retaliated, it was always possible that another raid would come, perhaps seen as retaliation from the Lamanite perspective. The people of Zeniff are placed into a more militaristic stance, needing to post guards.

The result, however, is a return to prosperity. That is signaled, as usual, by the statement that they did “raise all manner of grain and all manner of fruit of every kind.” In the 1830 edition, this statement of growing foodstuffs followed the previous statement of growing grains by only five paragraphs. The examples of prosperity are expanded here by noting that the women were able to produce cloth. These are common tasks for a pre-industrial people and are not particularly different from any other people in their area. They are, however, evidence that “we did prosper in the land.” They have peace for twenty-two years after the retaliation.

## ***Mosiah 10:6–9***

6 And it came to pass that king Laman died, and his son began to reign in his stead. And he began to stir his people up in rebellion against my people; therefore they began to prepare for war, and to come up to battle against my people.

7 But I had sent my spies out round about the land of Shemlon, that I might discover their preparations, that I might guard against them, that they might not come upon my people and destroy them.

8 And it came to pass that they came up upon the north of the land of Shilom, with their numerous hosts, men armed with bows, and with arrows, and with swords, and with cimeters, and with stones, and with slings; and they had their heads shaved that they were naked; and they were girded with a leathern girdle about their loins.

9 And it came to pass that I caused that the women and children of my people should be hid in the wilderness; and I also caused that all my old men that could bear arms, and also all my young men that were able to bear arms, should gather themselves together to go to battle against the Lamanites; and I did place them in their ranks, every man according to his age.

### *Comments*

After twenty-two years of peace, King Laman dies and his son takes a different and more militaristic stance against this people living within his overall lands. The Lamanites prepare for war. Zeniff discovers this because he has been on alert. Twenty-two years earlier he had set guards around his people, and that practice was continued. Thus, the Lamanite preparations were discovered and Zeniff was able to prepare his people.

The catalogue of weaponry is very similar to what was recorded in Mosiah 9:16, but this time the list describes the Lamanite weaponry rather than the Zeniffite list of arms. Because it describes Lamanites, the addition is that the Lamanites have shaved their heads. This suggests that the Lamanites were not typically without hair but shaved their heads in this military context.

The Zeniffite defense is twofold. The women and children are removed from direct harm's way and hidden in the wilderness. Then all available males, including old men who were able, were conscripted into the defensive force. This strongly suggests that the Zeniffite people were significantly fewer than the force coming against them. When Zeniff places the young and old men into ranks, he does so by age, rather than intermingle all the troops. It is probable that this was to have the ranks of the youngest and the oldest behind those of warrior age, so that they would be used only in as a final extreme.

## ***Mosiah 10:10–13***

10 And it came to pass that we did go up to battle against the Lamanites; and I, even I, in my old age, did go up to battle against the Lamanites. And it came to pass that we did go up in the strength of the Lord to battle.

11 Now, the Lamanites knew nothing concerning the Lord, nor the strength of the Lord, therefore they depended upon their own strength. Yet they were a strong people, as to the strength of men.

12 They were a wild, and ferocious, and a blood-thirsty people, believing in the tradition of their fathers, which is this—Believing that they were driven out of the land of Jerusalem because of the iniquities of their fathers, and that they were wronged in the wilderness by their brethren, and they were also wronged while crossing the sea;

13 And again, that they were wronged while in the land of their first inheritance, after they had crossed the sea, and all this because that Nephi was more faithful in keeping the commandments of the Lord—therefore he was favored of the Lord, for the Lord heard his prayers and answered them, and he took the lead of their journey in the wilderness.

### *Comments*

The Nephites stereotyped the Lamanites. In spite of the fact that the term Lamanite had become a generic term for all non-Nephites (see Jacob 1:13–14), the stereotypes were applied to all. When the people of Zeniff returned to the land of Nephi, they could speak the language, suggesting that there were many previous Nephites who remained and became Lamanites by switching allegiance. The newly entered rulers were Lamanites by Jacob’s definition of those who “seek to destroy the people of Nephi,” but it is unknown how they might have been related to Laman or Lemuel.

Nevertheless, the description of Lamanites as wild and ferocious occurs in Enos 1:20, here in Mosiah 10:12, later in Mosiah 17:17, Alma 17:14, and Helaman 3:6. Zeniff had called them lazy in Mosiah 9:12, and Mormon will later call them indolent in Alma 37:36. This stereotyping leads directly to the imputation of the motives for the Lamanite hatred. They were wronged in the Old World wilderness and while crossing the sea. They rejected Nephi. In Zeniff’s writing, the events of the beginnings of the Nephites continued to fuel Lamanite hatred. We will see this accusation again.

These are all Nephite descriptions and part of typical ethnocentrism, which sees one’s own people as the most important group, and outsiders only in reaction to one’s group. The Nephite records will clearly advance the Nephite perspective, and their perspective created stereotypes of lazy and blood-thirsty Lamanites that will persist through to the end of the Nephite nation.

### ***Mosiah 10:14–18***

14 And his brethren were wroth with him because they understood not the dealings of the Lord; they were also wroth with him upon the waters because they hardened their hearts against the Lord.

15 And again, they were wroth with him when they had arrived in the promised land, because they said that he had taken the ruling of the people out of their hands; and they sought to kill him.

16 And again, they were wroth with him because he departed into the wilderness as the Lord had commanded him, and took the records which were engraven on the plates of brass, for they said that he robbed them.

17 And thus they have taught their children that they should hate them, and that they should murder them, and that they should rob and plunder them, and do all they could to destroy them; therefore they have an eternal hatred towards the children of Nephi.

18 For this very cause has king Laman, by his cunning, and lying craftiness, and his fair promises, deceived me, that I have brought this my people up into this land, that they may destroy them; yea, and we have suffered these many years in the land.

### *Comments*

The ethnocentric explanation for the Lamanite hatred of the Nephites, and by extension, the Zeniffites, continues. All the wrongs that originally divided the brothers will continue to be used as the reason for violence for over four hundred years. Zeniff indicates that the Lamanites have taught these things to their children. Zeniff could not know that. However, he could certainly extrapolate that information from what the Nephites had clearly taught their children. Whatever the Lamanite reasons, the Nephite justifications returned to the very origins of their people.

Verse 17 adds a motivation for Lamanite actions that are not related to the origins of the Nephites and Lamanites. Lamanites desire to murder, rob, and plunder the Nephites. The three basic concepts of murder, robbing, and plunder are repeated twenty times in the Book of Mormon. That number focuses on the terms *murder* and *plunder*. Sometimes the term *rob* is exchanged for *steal*, but clearly the theme is the same. That consistent repetition of the description suggests a stereotype. However, like many stereotypes, it conceals some element of truth. In this case, these are terms that are used in conjunction with actions that we would see as one city dominating another and establishing a tribute system with the conquered city.

### ***Mosiah 10:19–22***

19 And now I, Zeniff, after having told all these things unto my people concerning the Lamanites, I did stimulate them to go to battle with their might, putting their trust in the Lord; therefore, we did contend with them, face to face.

20 And it came to pass that we did drive them again out of our land; and we slew them with a great slaughter, even so many that we did not number them.

21 And it came to pass that we returned again to our own land, and my people again began to tend their flocks, and to till their ground.

22 And now I, being old, did confer the kingdom upon one of my sons; therefore, I say no more. And may the Lord bless my people. Amen.



### *Comments*

The result of this conflict is that the Zeniffites are able to defend their homes. We get no information about the battle. There is the long introduction, including the justification of fighting against the Lamanite hatred, but of the battle and the aftermath we are told only that it happened and that, when they finished, they went home and “again began to tend their flocks, and to till their ground.” There is a return to normalcy, and a repetition of the events that have previously been used to show prosperity.

Without stating it, Zeniff implies that his people were worthy of the promise of the land. Although attacked, they have been spared and they return to the things that provide them prosperity. Yahweh has fulfilled his part of the covenant and protected the Zeniffites and allowed them to prosper.

This ends Zeniff’s personal writing. The *Amen* at the end closes his record, and Mormon closes the chapter. Mormon has been quoting Zeniff but will return to making selections from his source record and narrating the events starting in the next chapter. It is probable that the record of Zeniff also includes the record of Noah, just as Nephite books include more than one person’s record. Mormon simply treats the material differently, even though it comes from the same source.



# Mosiah 11

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## Noah Leads the People

### *Mosiah 11:1–2*

1 And now it came to pass that Zeniff conferred the kingdom upon Noah, one of his sons; therefore Noah began to reign in his stead; and he did not walk in the ways of his father.

2 For behold, he did not keep the commandments of God, but he did walk after the desires of his own heart. And he had many wives and concubines. And he did cause his people to commit sin, and do that which was abominable in the sight of the Lord. Yea, and they did commit whoredoms and all manner of wickedness.

### *Comments*

Although Mormon does not specifically say that he continues to use the record of Zeniff as his source, that is clearly the case. As with other official records, the record of Zeniff's people would have been recorded on a record named for the beginning of the dynasty, and subsequent rulers' records would have been included in the same book. Therefore, although Mormon ceases quoting from the record of Zeniff, he continues to use that source for his information.

Why does Mormon stop quoting? A plausible answer is that an official record would put the next king, Noah, in a favorable light, and Mormon doesn't see him favorably at all. Mormon narrates so that he can paint his own picture of Noah.

That picture begins in the first verse where Mormon notes that Noah "did not walk in the ways of his father." Mormon then creates a catalog of the things that Noah has done contrary to the commandments of God. The first is that he had many wives and concubines. This is contrary to the law given to the Nephites, as recorded in Jacob 2:26–27. As noted in the comments on Jacob 3:12–14, one of the mechanisms for gaining wealth was based on family production that was enhanced by larger families, including more wives.

The idea for how this might work was likely the result of witnessing other peoples in the land. Thus, the people of Zeniff had moved into a very Lamanite land and would have had the examples of both wealth and how to obtain it all around them. The desire for multiple wives and concubines is more likely to have been related to wealth and prestige than to any other motivation.

### ***Mosiah 11:3–4***

3 And he laid a tax of one fifth part of all they possessed, a fifth part of their gold and of their silver, and a fifth part of their ziff, and of their copper, and of their brass and their iron; and a fifth part of their fatlings; and also a fifth part of all their grain.

4 And all this did he take to support himself, and his wives and his concubines; and also his priests, and their wives and their concubines; thus he had changed the affairs of the kingdom.

#### ***Comments***

The first problem is that Noah lays upon his people what Mormon considers a heavy tax. A 20% tax on income doesn't seem excessive for modern taxpayers in the United States, and even less excessive compared to other modern states. For Mormon, it was not simply that the taxes were levied, but that they were levied in support of a system supporting social inequality. The taxes were not directly beneficial to all but were to support the socially inequitable lifestyles of the elite.

That is the reason that Mormon mentions that this tax was to support himself and his wives and concubines. Contrast this use of public funds to king Benjamin's declaration that he had not sought riches from his people (Mosiah 2:12). The fundamental issue is the use of the funds, not the level of taxation. In the case of king Noah, taxation was not used to improve all lives, but to specifically enhance the social segregation into at least an upper and a lower class.

### ***Mosiah 11:5–7***

5 For he put down all the priests that had been consecrated by his father, and consecrated new ones in their stead, such as were lifted up in the pride of their hearts.

6 Yea, and thus they were supported in their laziness, and in their idolatry, and in their whoredoms, by the taxes which king Noah had put upon his people; thus did the people labor exceedingly to support iniquity.

7 Yea, and they also became idolatrous, because they were deceived by the vain and flattering words of the king and priests; for they did speak flattering things unto them.

#### ***Comments***

In addition to altering the social organization, Noah also altered the religious organization of his people. Putting down his father's priests simply indicates that his father's priests were removed from their positions so that Noah could replace them with priests more favorable to Noah's interests.

Mormon indicates that Noah also instituted a social segregation of the priesthood, apparently tying it to the government. This is not an unusual political move and was seen in Old World Israel with the elevation of the Hasmonean priests. When Mormon indicates that they were supported in their laziness, we must read that statement with a little historical caution. Mormon intends it to sound bad when he says

that they are lazy. However, the definition of their laziness is that they do not work with their own hands for their support but are funded by the taxes. This is also not unusual, and usually follows with more complex societies. Nevertheless, it violates Mormon's understand of the goal of social equity.

Finally, Mormon accuses the priests, and the people, of being idolatrous. That term typically means worshipping idols, and that is certainly possible based on the cultures that would have surrounded them. However, when we see Abinadi before the priests of Noah, we see the priests espousing the law of Moses, which, of course, prohibited idols. Thus, it is also possible that the term *idolatrous* is simply intended as an unusual synonym for apostate.

What will be seen from the arguments of the priests with Abinadi, they appear to espouse what will later be a religious idea associated with Nehor. They cannot be connected to Nehor because of differences in time and space, but they do appear to have a similar reinterpretation of Nephite religious ideals.

### ***Mosiah 11:8–11***

8 And it came to pass that king Noah built many elegant and spacious buildings; and he ornamented them with fine work of wood, and of all manner of precious things, of gold, and of silver, and of iron, and of brass, and of ziff, and of copper;

9 And he also built him a spacious palace, and a throne in the midst thereof, all of which was of fine wood and was ornamented with gold and silver and with precious things.

10 And he also caused that his workmen should work all manner of fine work within the walls of the temple, of fine wood, and of copper, and of brass.

11 And the seats which were set apart for the high priests, which were above all the other seats, he did ornament with pure gold; and he caused a breastwork to be built before them, that they might rest their bodies and their arms upon while they should speak lying and vain words to his people.

### ***Comments***

Mormon's catalogue of Noah's sins continues with his construction projects. It appears that much of the taxes of the people went for the construction of what might be called public building projects. Mormon would argue that they benefited Noah and perhaps the priests, but they were the kinds of sumptuous building projects that characterize the rise of important cities in Mesoamerica. Along with the other issues Mormon points out, we can read between the lines and see Noah adopting the principles and trappings of the surrounding cultures. It is possible that it is just this kind of prosperity signaling that Zeniff had seen in the former city of Nephi when he saw that there was much good there and that the people not only should not be destroyed, but also that Zeniff and others might move there (Mosiah 9:1–2).

For many people, these building projects would have been signs of prosperity and a city that was increasing in wealth and influence. Public projects have been used for such purposes throughout history.

Mormon has no desire to give them any semblance of good. Contrast this description with Zeniff's statement that "we began to build buildings, and to repair the walls . . . of the city of Lehi-Nephi and the city of Shilom." Zeniff also built, but it is Noah's buildings that are described as part of his wickedness.

Mormon is painting his own picture of Noah and Noah's reign, and Mormon makes certain that his readers do not have a good opinion of king Noah. That attitude will be justified as we learn more of Noah's story, but it does contrast with what must have been written on the plates by a scribe in the employ of King Noah.

### ***Mosiah 11:12–15***

12 And it came to pass that he built a tower near the temple; yea, a very high tower, even so high that he could stand upon the top thereof and overlook the land of Shilom, and also the land of Shemlon, which was possessed by the Lamanites; and he could even look over all the land round about.

13 And it came to pass that he caused many buildings to be built in the land Shilom; and he caused a great tower to be built on the hill north of the land Shilom, which had been a resort for the children of Nephi at the time they fled out of the land; and thus he did do with the riches which he obtained by the taxation of his people.

14 And it came to pass that he placed his heart upon his riches, and he spent his time in riotous living with his wives and his concubines; and so did also his priests spend their time with harlots.

15 And it came to pass that he planted vineyards round about in the land; and he built wine-presses, and made wine in abundance; and therefore he became a wine-bibber, and also his people.

### ***Comments***

These comments end the catalogue of Noah's public sins. It continues with the building of a tower and the enlarging of the lands of Shilom. Although part of the list of bad things Noah did, the tower will play an important part in the protection of his people as the story progresses. This should remind us that the purpose of the list is to paint a picture of Noah as excessive, not that each and everything was necessarily bad for the people.

For example, the enlargement of the city of Shilom would have been seen as progress. The good results were not the issue, but rather the means by which they were achieved. That problem is encapsulated in verse 14 where it says that Noah "placed his heart upon riches." The real problem here, and which will continue to be the issue for hundreds of years to come in Nephite society, is social inequality.

In verse 15 it notes that Noah engaged in the production and, therefore, consumption of wine. The words used are for viticulture, or terms surrounding grapes, and there is some evidence that there were grapes in Mesoamerica. However, as a text in translation, it is also probable that these terms come from the influence of the Bible, particularly in the description of Noah as a winebibber, a term found in Proverbs 23:20, Matthew 11:19, and Luke 7:34. Mesoamerica had its own plants from which alcoholic drinks were made.

## Conflicts with Lamanites Begin Again

### *Mosiah 11:16–19*

16 And it came to pass that the Lamanites began to come in upon his people, upon small numbers, and to slay them in their fields, and while they were tending their flocks.

17 And king Noah sent guards round about the land to keep them off; but he did not send a sufficient number, and the Lamanites came upon them and killed them, and drove many of their flocks out of the land; thus the Lamanites began to destroy them, and to exercise their hatred upon them.

18 And it came to pass that king Noah sent his armies against them, and they were driven back, or they drove them back for a time; therefore, they returned rejoicing in their spoil.

19 And now, because of this great victory they were lifted up in the pride of their hearts; they did boast in their own strength, saying that their fifty could stand against thousands of the Lamanites; and thus they did boast, and did delight in blood, and the shedding of the blood of their brethren, and this because of the wickedness of their king and priests.

### *Comments*

In Zeniff's personal account, recorded in Mosiah 9:14, Zeniff describes a Lamanite raid on the people of Zeniff while they were in their fields. That raid sparked a retaliation that was successful. In these verses we have virtually the same historical event but recorded very differently. In Zeniff's account, the record was recorded from Zeniff's perspective. The original from which Mormon took this account undoubtedly was similarly positive from Noah's perspective.

However, Mormon is writing this account, not Noah's scribe. Therefore, it reports a victory, but that victory merely serves to exacerbate the Noahite sins. The people "were lifted up in the pride of their hearts; they did boast in their own strength." For Mormon, the result of the victory did not result in their praising God for their deliverance, but rather in distancing themselves from God and claiming the victory only on their own efforts.

## Abinadi Warns the People

### *Mosiah 11:20–22*

20 And it came to pass that there was a man among them whose name was Abinadi; and he went forth among them, and began to prophesy, saying: Behold, thus saith the Lord, and thus hath he commanded me, saying, Go forth, and say unto this people, thus saith the Lord—Wo be unto this people, for I have seen their abominations, and their wickedness, and their whoredoms; and except they repent I will visit them in mine anger.

21 And except they repent and turn to the Lord their God, behold, I will deliver them into the hands of their enemies; yea, and they shall be brought into bondage; and they shall be afflicted by the hand of their enemies.

22 And it shall come to pass that they shall know that I am the Lord their God, and am a jealous God, visiting the iniquities of my people.

### *Comments*

The story of Abinadi begins. Abinadi's story is important for the rest of the story that Mormon will tell. Mormon began telling the story with the mission of Ammon and his brethren to find the people who had left so long before. That timeline will pick up at the end of this flashback when the people of Limhi and the people of Alma<sub>1</sub> return to Zarahemla. In between we have this long flashback. Mormon had a reason for including so much information from the record of Zeniff and subsequent kings. That reason was heavily weighted on the story of Abinadi and the conversion of Alma<sub>1</sub>.

Abinadi comes to the people as many Old Testament prophets do. He did not have a position of authority in the government or current religious structure. Perhaps he was one of the deposed priests, but the text gives us no information about his background. Certainly, he was educated in the scriptures, leading to the hypothesis that he was a deposed priest, but he comes as an outsider to cry repentance. He is very much in the mold of most of the Old Testament prophets.

The message Abinadi begins with is an invocation of the promise of the land. While not stated in the standard phraseology, that would have been unnecessary for a people who would have understood that implicitly. The promise of the land was protection and prosperity if they obey the covenants, and destruction if they do not.

Abinadi makes it clear. The Lord has seen their wickedness, meaning their departure from the true way of God. Therefore, unless they repent, says God, "I will deliver them into the hands of their enemies; yea, and they shall be brought into bondage; and they shall be afflicted by the hand of their enemies." That is not only a very clear invocation of the negative aspect of the promise of the land, but it is also a prophecy that will sadly come to pass. This story will not have a Jonah-like ending with a repentant people, but rather the very clear bringing to pass of that very penalty.

### ***Mosiah 11:23–25***

23 And it shall come to pass that except this people repent and turn unto the Lord their God, they shall be brought into bondage; and none shall deliver them, except it be the Lord the Almighty God.

24 Yea, and it shall come to pass that when they shall cry unto me I will be slow to hear their cries; yea, and I will suffer them that they be smitten by their enemies.



25 And except they repent in sackcloth and ashes, and cry mightily to the Lord their God, I will not hear their prayers, neither will I deliver them out of their afflictions; and thus saith the Lord, and thus hath he commanded me.

### *Comments*

In many prophecies of doom, there is hope that repentance might be available. That happens here as well, but it is a tempered salvation. There is hope in salvation if they “repent and turn unto the Lord their God.” However, Yahweh also says that “it shall come to pass that when they shall cry unto me I will be slow to hear their cries; yea, and I will suffer them that they be smitten by their enemies.”

This part of the prophecy will also come to pass. The people will eventually turn to their God. They will eventually repent. They will eventually be saved. However, they will also come under the penalty. They will suffer bondage sufficient that Limhi declared that he would rather be a slave to the Nephites than in bondage to the Lamanites (see Mosiah 7:15).

Is the Lord slow to hear his repentant children on earth? The intent of the word *hear* in this context is to take action, rather than to simply hear. The Lord hears prayers. We must assume that they are always heard as they are offered. However, actions based upon those prayers comes in God’s time, not our time. The nature of our life on earth is one where agency is a primary principle. There are times when agency requires more time to respond to our prayers than we wish. The more rapid answering of some prayers might require a miraculous answer that would too obviously contradict agency.

Miracles are most often the small events that make the corrections necessary to answer our prayers, rather than the single majestic event that would make things happen as fast as we wish they would. God is God over all his children. That includes each of us and our individual prayers, but also the prayers, intentions, actions, and agency of all his other children. God is not slow to hear our prayers because he isn’t listening, but because he has purposes greater than we understand at any given time.

## **Noah and the People Reject Abinadi’s Words**

### ***Mosiah 11:26–29***

26 Now it came to pass that when Abinadi had spoken these words unto them they were wroth with him, and sought to take away his life; but the Lord delivered him out of their hands.

27 Now when king Noah had heard of the words which Abinadi had spoken unto the people, he was also wroth; and he said: Who is Abinadi, that I and my people should be judged of him, or who is the Lord, that shall bring upon my people such great affliction?

28 I command you to bring Abinadi hither, that I may slay him, for he has said these things that he might stir up my people to anger one with another, and to raise contentions among my people; therefore I will slay him.

29 Now the eyes of the people were blinded; therefore they hardened their hearts against the words of Abinadi, and they sought from that time forward to take him. And king Noah hardened his heart against the word of the Lord, and he did not repent of his evil doings.

### *Comments*

The result of Abinadi's preaching is animosity rather than repentance. Abinadi's life is endangered because he spoke against Noah. The wickedness of Noah is highlighted by his refusal to consider Abinadi's call for repentance. Instead, Noah calls for Abinadi's life. Not only does King Noah turn against Abinadi, but so do the people. The stage is being set for the invocation of the negative promise of the land.

There was no chapter ending at this point in the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon. The story continues without break with the first verse in our next chapter.

# Mosiah 12

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## Abinadi Returns in Disguise

### *Mosiah 12:1*

1 And it came to pass that after the space of two years that Abinadi came among them in disguise, that they knew him not, and began to prophesy among them, saying: Thus has the Lord commanded me, saying—Abinadi, go and prophesy unto this my people, for they have hardened their hearts against my words; they have repented not of their evil doings; therefore, I will visit them in my anger, yea, in my fierce anger will I visit them in their iniquities and abominations.

### *Comments*

Abinadi had unsuccessfully preached to the people in Lehi-Nephi only two years before. He is called to preach to them again. In this occasion, he comes in disguise. Then, the first thing we see him saying is “the Lord commanded me, saying—Abinadi”! Of what value is a disguise if you identify yourself at the first opportunity?

There is no answer given in the text, so we are left to supposition. Since Abinadi had preached before, it was possible that he might have been recognized. Perhaps he would not have been allowed into the city. Whatever the case, what Abinadi does is enter the city in disguise and put himself in a very public place. It is in that public place that he begins to preach and make his accusations.

Since it was the Lord who had commanded that Abinadi preach, the Lord certainly understood what the result of that preaching would be. From the standpoint of making a difference in the lives of the people of Lehi-Nephi, Abinadi would make only a single convert. However, that single convert would be Alma, the Elder, and Alma, the Elder’s contributions to the rest of Nephite history would be significant.

Therefore, we may surmise that the Lord, knowing the importance of that one convert, needed to place Abinadi in a position where he would speak before the priests of Noah, one of whom was that very Alma<sub>2</sub>. Identifying himself in a public place probably assured that he would be taken to be tried before King Noah and the judges. Once Abinadi had entered the city, there was no longer a need for the disguise because it was the goal to stand before the king and his priests.

## ***Mosiah 12:2–5***

2 Yea, wo be unto this generation! And the Lord said unto me: Stretch forth thy hand and prophesy, saying: Thus saith the Lord, it shall come to pass that this generation, because of their iniquities, shall be brought into bondage, and shall be smitten on the cheek; yea, and shall be driven by men, and shall be slain; and the vultures of the air, and the dogs, yea, and the wild beasts, shall devour their flesh.

3 And it shall come to pass that the life of king Noah shall be valued even as a garment in a hot furnace; for he shall know that I am the Lord.

4 And it shall come to pass that I will smite this my people with sore afflictions, yea, with famine and with pestilence; and I will cause that they shall howl all the day long.

5 Yea, and I will cause that they shall have burdens lashed upon their backs; and they shall be driven before like a dumb ass.

### ***Comments***

In the beginning of Abinadi's discourse before the people, he declared that, since they had not repented, Yahweh would visit them in his anger. These verses continue that condemnation. This is no longer an opportunity to repent, but a rendering of judgment.

What comes is a description of the fate that awaits the people of Noah. This isn't a conditional fate, but a prophesied fate. They will be brought into bondage, and many will be slain. There will be sore afflictions, even pestilence and famine. Abinadi specifically prophesies that King Noah's life "will be valued even as a garment in a hot furnace." While that is a simile, it is also a foreshadowing of Noah's shameful death.

A comment can be made about the language in verse 4. That the people come into bondage is elaborated with them having burdens lashed upon their backs. Carrying burdens on backs is a very Mesoamerican way of carrying heavy loads, assisted by a tumpline, which is a rope or cloth that goes under the load and is fixed onto the forehead.

The idea that the people would be "driven before like a dumb ass" is an understandable metaphor for English readers, but there were no asses in the Americas. Thus, the metaphor with that meaning on the plates must have been somewhat different while conveying the same notion of being a beast of burden. Perhaps it was a further reference to the people who might be treated as a beast, while burdened.

## ***Mosiah 12:6–7***

6 And it shall come to pass that I will send forth hail among them, and it shall smite them; and they shall also be smitten with the east wind; and insects shall pester their land also, and devour their grain.

7 And they shall be smitten with a great pestilence—and all this will I do because of their iniquities and abominations.

### *Comments*

The catalogue of calamities continues. Just as with the prophecy about King Noah that came to pass, these calamities likely came to pass even though they are not specifically mentioned in the text. John L. Sorenson noted that in order to be considered a real threat, these calamities would have been possible and perhaps historically known, but rare enough that they could be seen as the result of prophecy. Sorenson specifically mentioned that hail has occurred in the highland Guatemala region where he located this Lamanite city.

Kerry Hull wrote an important paper discussing the east wind. Although that is a harbinger of evil in the Bible, he found that it was a similar sign in the New World region where this action was to have taken place.

The importance of this condemnation is both that it is not conditional, and that it was realistic. The power of the promised afflictions was increased by being known possibilities. Perhaps the conjunction of the possibilities also intensified the condemnation.

### ***Mosiah 12:8***

8 And it shall come to pass that except they repent I will utterly destroy them from off the face of the earth; yet they shall leave a record behind them, and I will preserve them for other nations which shall possess the land; yea, even this will I do that I may discover the abominations of this people to other nations. And many things did Abinadi prophesy against this people.

### *Comments*

Finally, there is a slight bit of hope. Abinadi gives a final condemnation that does allow for repentance. If they repent, they will not be utterly destroyed. The bondage and other calamities were to come based on the past unrepentant condition, but the people of Noah could stave off utter destruction.

It is interesting that, even if they were to be destroyed, they would have a record left. The destroyed Jaredites left a record, and if the people of Noah were to be destroyed, they too would have a record. Based on the way Mormon used that Jaredite record, Mormon would certainly have included Noah's people as a bad example of how disobeying Yahweh would lead to destruction.

There was sufficient repentance that they were not destroyed. They did have, and did give to King Mosiah<sub>2</sub> (son of King Benjamin), a record. That record would not be of a destroyed people, but rather of one who repented sufficiently to avoid the prophesied destruction.

## Abinadi Is Cast into Prison

### *Mosiah 12:9–12*

9 And it came to pass that they were angry with him; and they took him and carried him bound before the king, and said unto the king: Behold, we have brought a man before thee who has prophesied evil concerning thy people, and saith that God will destroy them.

10 And he also prophesieth evil concerning thy life, and saith that thy life shall be as a garment in a furnace of fire.

11 And again, he saith that thou shalt be as a stalk, even as a dry stalk of the field, which is run over by the beasts and trodden under foot.

12 And again, he saith thou shalt be as the blossoms of a thistle, which, when it is fully ripe, if the wind bloweth, it is driven forth upon the face of the land. And he pretendeth the Lord hath spoken it. And he saith all this shall come upon thee except thou repent, and this because of thine iniquities.

### *Comments*

The result of Abinadi's preaching to the people is that he was taken before the king. That is certainly what the entire experience had been designed to do. Taking Abinadi before the king placed him in a position where he could argue his case and touch the heart of the one man whose conversion would perhaps become the salvation for all of his people from the ultimate penalty of destruction.

To make sure that the king would hear Abinadi and judge him, the people reported that it was not a generic prophesied doom, but one directed against the king himself. That would certainly have caught his attention. In addition to repeating the prophecy that King Noah's life would be as a garment in a furnace, there is an additional prophecy that was not recorded earlier. It is reported: "thou shalt be as the blossoms of a thistle, which, when it is fully ripe, if the wind bloweth, it is driven forth upon the face of the land."

Those are some very specific conditions. Mark A. Wright looked for what kind of dry stalk that might have been. After some searching, he found a particular thistle (*Argemone Mexicana*) that is native to the area that dries and can be blown around in strong winds. It is also poisonous to animals that might attempt to eat it. Thus, there appears to be a specific thistle that is in the right area that has the very conditions that were part of the prophesied calamity.

### *Mosiah 12:13–16*

13 And now, O king, what great evil hast thou done, or what great sins have thy people committed, that we should be condemned of God or judged of this man?

14 And now, O king, behold, we are guiltless, and thou, O king, hast not sinned; therefore, this man has lied concerning you, and he has prophesied in vain.

15 And behold, we are strong, we shall not come into bondage, or be taken captive by our enemies; yea, and thou hast prospered in the land, and thou shalt also prosper.

16 Behold, here is the man, we deliver him into thy hands; thou mayest do with him as seemeth thee good.

### *Comments*

Although Mormon paints a picture of Noah as a greedy and terrible king, we have seen that he engaged in city building that is typically lauded. In fact, the reaction of the people is that they appear to support King Noah. They say, “what great evil has thou done, or what great sins have the people committed, that we should be condemned of God or judged of this man?” The people appear to be supportive of both King Noah and their general circumstances.

These aspects of the text continue to suggest that the city was economically prosperous, and that the people were enjoying that prosperity. They were sufficiently comfortable that they couldn’t imagine that there was anything about their city that would be contrary to God’s will. They even allude to the promise of the land in verse 15, saying “thou hast prospered in the land, and thou shalt also prosper.” Didn’t the promise of the land include prosperity upon righteousness? If they were prosperous, didn’t that equate to righteousness?

The evidence of the people is that it is possible to prosper without adequately obeying God’s commandments. However, God declares that it will not last and that they will fall from prosperity to bondage. That was the message Abinadi delivered. As with Lehi in Jerusalem, it was rejected, and rejected with a very similar argument: “behold, we are strong, we will not come into bondage.”

## **Noah’s Priests Question Abinadi**

### ***Mosiah 12:17–19***

17 And it came to pass that king Noah caused that Abinadi should be cast into prison; and he commanded that the priests should gather themselves together that he might hold a council with them what he should do with him.

18 And it came to pass that they said unto the king: Bring him hither that we may question him; and the king commanded that he should be brought before them.

19 And they began to question him, that they might cross him, that thereby they might have wherewith to accuse him; but he answered them boldly, and withstood all their questions, yea, to their astonishment; for he did withstand them in all their questions, and did confound them in all their words.

### *Comments*

The priests request the ability to question Abinadi. Undoubtedly, the king could imprison Abinadi forever, and perhaps execute him, without any reason more than what the people had suggested. However,

the priests desire to question him. This suggests that the rejection of Abinadi's message was not universal. Indeed, the numbers of people who later follow Alma, suggest that there was sympathy to his message.

The trial would allow the priests to paint him in a different light. They were apparently certain that they could entrap him with religious blasphemy, and that would be a point that could be used to quash any support that Abinadi's preaching might have had.

Thus, they bring him to court. What we get in verse 19 is Mormon's foreshadowing of what will happen. He will show it to us in dialogue, but lest we miss it, he will show Abinadi getting the upper hand in all of the arguments.

### ***Mosiah 12:20–24***

20 And it came to pass that one of them said unto him: What meaneth the words which are written, and which have been taught by our fathers, saying:

21 How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings; that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good; that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth;

22 Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice; with the voice together shall they sing; for they shall see eye to eye when the Lord shall bring again Zion;

23 Break forth into joy; sing together ye waste places of Jerusalem; for the Lord hath comforted his people, he hath redeemed Jerusalem;

24 The Lord hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God?

### ***Comments***

The test case is the explanation of Isaiah 52:7–10. Although most modern readers would quail at having an explanation of any part of Isaiah determine their fate, Abinadi is undaunted. The question here, however, is why this passage?

The answer is complicated, and cannot be fully answered until the full evidence of the discussion has been seen. However, just as Mormon could foreshadow what Abinadi would do before recording it, we too can suggest the reason for this passage based on what will come.

The religion in the court of Noah has many corollaries to what will be known as the Order of the Nehors. One of the important aspects of that religion is adherence to the law of Moses, but rejection of the coming atoning Messiah. That will be the essential message of Abinadi's trial.

The passage from Isaiah deals with salvation, and declares that: "the Lord hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God?" Thus, the priests of Noah will be arguing that the scriptures have already declared that salvation comes through Yahweh. That would mean that there was no need for a future atoning Messiah. Not entirely without reason,



the priests would see the phrase “he hath redeemed Jerusalem” as the redemption of the people, not the city. Hence, they have scriptural proof that Yahweh has already redeemed his people.

### ***Mosiah 12:25–27***

25 And now Abinadi said unto them: Are you priests, and pretend to teach this people, and to understand the spirit of prophesying, and yet desire to know of me what these things mean?

26 I say unto you, wo be unto you for perverting the ways of the Lord! For if ye understand these things ye have not taught them; therefore, ye have perverted the ways of the Lord.

27 Ye have not applied your hearts to understanding; therefore, ye have not been wise. Therefore, what teach ye this people?

### ***Comments***

Abinadi does not begin with the answer, but rather with an attack. He uses the fact that they have asked a question to pretend that they have asked, because they want an answer. Thus, it says, “Are you priests, and pretend to teach this people, and to understand the spirit of prophesying, and yet desire to know of me what these things mean?”

Of course, Abinadi surely knew that they were not asking for the explanation. The priests already had an explanation in mind, and chose that question to entrap, not to be enlightened. Nevertheless, Abinadi attempts to turn the tables on them. Abinadi had preached against King Noah, and now he declares that the priests of Noah are “perverting the ways of the Lord.”

After declaring that the priests clearly don’t understand the scriptures, Abinadi asks, in essence, “what are you teaching this people anyways?” If they are not teaching true principles, what are they teaching?

### ***Mosiah 12:28–32***

28 And they said: We teach the law of Moses.

29 And again he said unto them: If ye teach the law of Moses why do ye not keep it? Why do ye set your hearts upon riches? Why do ye commit whoredoms and spend your strength with harlots, yea, and cause this people to commit sin, that the Lord has cause to send me to prophesy against this people, yea, even a great evil against this people?

30 Know ye not that I speak the truth? Yea, ye know that I speak the truth; and you ought to tremble before God.

31 And it shall come to pass that ye shall be smitten for your iniquities, for ye have said that ye teach the law of Moses. And what know ye concerning the law of Moses? Doth salvation come by the law of Moses? What say ye?

32 And they answered and said that salvation did come by the law of Moses.

## *Comments*

The answer to “what do you teach?” is “we teach the law of Moses.” That should be uncontroversial. Abinadi certainly believes the scriptures, and certainly believes, as did Nephi and his religious descendants, that the Nephites should follow the law of Moses.

Abinadi does not argue against the law, but against the priests. He asks, “if ye teach the law of Moses why do ye not keep it?” What Abinadi declares as evidence that they do not keep the law of Moses, however, is not clearly a violation of the law of Moses. It is contrary to Nephite interpretation of the law, but not necessarily to the law. Still, as Abinadi noted, these were the things that he had condemned them for.

Note that Abinadi has also temporarily avoided explaining the verses from Isaiah. He is setting up a framework in which his answer can be provided and be seen as complementary to the scriptures, rather than as the assumption that the priests had, which was that Abinadi could not reconcile his teachings with those verses.

What Abinadi asks is about salvation, demonstrating that the reason for the verses was indeed the issue of salvation. He gets them to commit to the statement that “salvation did come by the law of Moses.”

## ***Mosiah 12:33–37***

- 33 But now Abinadi said unto them: I know if ye keep the commandments of God ye shall be saved; yea, if ye keep the commandments which the Lord delivered unto Moses in the mount of Sinai, saying:  
34 I am the Lord thy God, who hath brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.  
35 Thou shalt have no other God before me.  
36 Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing in heaven above, or things which are in the earth beneath.  
37 Now Abinadi said unto them, Have ye done all this? I say unto you, Nay, ye have not. And have ye taught this people that they should do all these things? I say unto you, Nay, ye have not.

## *Comments*

Abinadi knows that he cannot separate the law of Moses from salvation, for the law is given to bring people into alignment with Yahweh. Thus, living the law of Moses is important. Abinadi picks up on his condemnation of the actions of the priests, and by extension the king and all the people, that they did not obey the law of Moses. He begins with the first law, as given in Exodus 20:3, “thou shalt have no other God before me.” He declares that they have not obeyed that law.

There is no information in the text to tell us how King Noah’s people had violated that commandment. It appears that they had accepted other gods and images of gods. In a Mesoamerican context, this might suggest that there was some acceptance of the gods that other peoples around them believed in. Clearly, Yahweh continued to be their god, but they may have accepted other lesser gods, even if only in a cultural

sense, rather than a religious sense. Historically, Christianity has often appropriated various gods that were among the peoples they encountered, incorporating them with perhaps different names or titles, but retaining sufficient similarity as to ease the new people into Christianity from their previous religions. There are numerous examples from the later Christian conquest of Mesoamerica where this very thing happened.

There is no chapter break here in the 1830 edition. It appears that Orson Pratt added this chapter break because there is a shift from Abinadi speaking to the reaction of the king to his words.



# Mosiah 13

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## Abinadi Is Protected by the Power of God

### *Mosiah 13:1–4*

1 And now when the king had heard these words, he said unto his priests: Away with this fellow, and slay him; for what have we to do with him, for he is mad.

2 And they stood forth and attempted to lay their hands on him; but he withstood them, and said unto them:

3 Touch me not, for God shall smite you if ye lay your hands upon me, for I have not delivered the message which the Lord sent me to deliver; neither have I told you that which ye requested that I should tell; therefore, God will not suffer that I shall be destroyed at this time.

4 But I must fulfil the commandments wherewith God has commanded me; and because I have told you the truth ye are angry with me. And again, because I have spoken the word of God ye have judged me that I am mad.

### *Comments*

It is perhaps unsurprising that King Noah was extremely unhappy with Abinadi at this point. Abinadi had undercut the very foundation of Noah's authority. In the ancient world, kings ruled through the authority of God, and the religion provided the conceptual and legal foundations of rulership. Thus, when Abinadi affirmed that the law of Moses was to be lived, and declared that they were not living it, he undercut the very foundation of King Noah's ability to rule. That was certainly dangerous, sufficiently dangerous that the king was willing to cut short the interrogation and simply have Abinadi put to death.

The way in which Abinadi was able to withstand those who came for him is not stated, other than "God will not suffer that I shall be destroyed at this time." Perhaps Abinadi understood the full implications of "at this time." He would be destroyed, but Yahweh had put him in this position, and it was the fulfillment of Yahweh's will that would not be denied.

## Abinadi Continues His Message

### *Mosiah 13:5–11*

5 Now it came to pass after Abinadi had spoken these words that the people of king Noah durst not lay their hands on him, for the Spirit of the Lord was upon him; and his face shone with exceeding luster, even as Moses' did while in the mount of Sinai, while speaking with the Lord.

6 And he spake with power and authority from God; and he continued his words, saying:

7 Ye see that ye have not power to slay me, therefore I finish my message. Yea, and I perceive that it cuts you to your hearts because I tell you the truth concerning your iniquities.

8 Yea, and my words fill you with wonder and amazement, and with anger.

9 But I finish my message; and then it matters not whither I go, if it so be that I am saved.

10 But this much I tell you, what you do with me, after this, shall be as a type and a shadow of things which are to come.

11 And now I read unto you the remainder of the commandments of God, for I perceive that they are not written in your hearts; I perceive that ye have studied and taught iniquity the most part of your lives.

### *Comments*

Whether as part of the way Abinadi resisted, or as a subsequent witness, he was shown as visibly transformed. Heavenly beings are often described as being surrounded by light, or by being extremely white. The whiteness appears to be a representation of that same extreme and unworldly light. Some of that accompanied Abinadi, and the unnatural light signaled to those around him that he was under Yahweh's protection.

As he continues, he states that he must finish his message. He says that they have no power to slay him until he finishes, and they have apparently witnessed that fact. Sadly, they will later have that power, and use it.

Knowing what his fate would be, he curses them with his own fate. "What you do with me, after this, shall be as a type and a shadow of things which are to come." They will seal their fate to the same treatment that Abinadi will receive.

To fully condemn those who have claimed to live the law of Moses, Abinadi will declare that he will "read unto you the remainder of the commandments of God," which will include the restatement of the first commandment which began this interruption. This suggests that this is what Abinadi was beginning to do, and then was interrupted by the king's reaction. Now he returns to what he had intended. It is interesting that right after we are told that Abinadi's face shone as did Moses's at Sinai, that Abinadi would recount the Decalogue.

### *Mosiah 13:12–24*

12 And now, ye remember that I said unto you: Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of things which are in heaven above, or which are in the earth beneath, or which are in the water under the earth.

13 And again: Thou shalt not bow down thyself unto them, nor serve them; for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children, unto the third and fourth generations of them that hate me;

14 And showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me and keep my commandments.

15 Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.

16 Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.

17 Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work;

18 But the seventh day, the sabbath of the Lord thy God, thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy man-servant, nor thy maid-servant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates;

19 For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is; wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.

20 Honor thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.

21 Thou shalt not kill.

22 Thou shalt not commit adultery. Thou shalt not steal.

23 Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.

24 Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife, nor his man-servant, nor his maid-servant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that is thy neighbor's.

### *Comments*

Verses 12 through 24 are a restatement, with very little variation, of the Decalogue as recorded in Exodus 20:3–17. Abinadi essentially enters God's essential commandments into the record.

Since Orson Pratt's edition of 1879, verse 24 is followed immediately by verse 25. That was not the case in the original edition. Originally, this ended a chapter. It appears that finishing the quotation was the reason for the chapter, which was a reason that doesn't conform to more modern ideas of chapter making, so Pratt changed it. It is, however, attested in other locations in the 1830 edition, suggesting that it was part of Mormon's understanding of when a chapter would end.

### ***Mosiah 13:25–26***

25 And it came to pass that after Abinadi had made an end of these sayings that he said unto them: Have ye taught this people that they should observe to do all these things for to keep these commandments?

26 I say unto you, Nay; for if ye had, the Lord would not have caused me to come forth and to prophesy evil concerning this people.

## *Comments*

After entering the essential commandments of the law of Moses into record, he rhetorically asks if the priests of Noah have taught their people to live those things. Abinadi declares that they have not, else Yahweh would not have sent him to prophesy against them.

These are categorical condemnations, and it would be interesting from a historical perspective to learn exactly which of these laws had been violated, and how. We are not given that information. Since it is not explained, either Abinadi had done so in previous preaching, or perhaps he considered that some of them would be obvious.

## ***Mosiah 13:27–31***

27 And now ye have said that salvation cometh by the law of Moses. I say unto you that it is expedient that ye should keep the law of Moses as yet; but I say unto you, that the time shall come when it shall no more be expedient to keep the law of Moses.

28 And moreover, I say unto you, that salvation doth not come by the law alone; and were it not for the atonement, which God himself shall make for the sins and iniquities of his people, that they must unavoidably perish, notwithstanding the law of Moses.

29 And now I say unto you that it was expedient that there should be a law given to the children of Israel, yea, even a very strict law; for they were a stiffnecked people, quick to do iniquity, and slow to remember the Lord their God;

30 Therefore there was a law given them, yea, a law of performances and of ordinances, a law which they were to observe strictly from day to day, to keep them in remembrance of God and their duty towards him.

31 But behold, I say unto you, that all these things were types of things to come.

## *Comments*

Abinadi returns to his most important point. While he agrees that Yahweh's people should live the law of Moses, he disagrees that salvation comes through the law alone. This returns to the essential reason for the presentation of the Isaiah passages at the beginning of his questioning. Abinadi recognizes that the reason for asking was not elucidation, but rather to promote the religious disagreement about the nature of salvation.

Abinadi makes the remarkable, and, in the context, potentially blasphemous argument that there will come a time when "it shall no more be expedient to keep the law of Moses." Why make such a statement? What Abinadi is doing is suggesting that if there is a future time when the law of Moses is not needed, then it cannot be the unique source of salvation.

Abinadi places the law of Moses in a timeline that includes the prophetic future and suggests that it points toward that future. If there is a time when it will not be needed, Abinadi explains its current value



as pointing to and preparing for that future time. Of course, the Nephite teaching is all about a future atoning Messiah, and, therefore, Abinadi sets the stage for that argument by having the law of Moses also look to a future time.

### ***Mosiah 13:32–35***

32 And now, did they understand the law? I say unto you, Nay, they did not all understand the law; and this because of the hardness of their hearts; for they understood not that there could not any man be saved except it were through the redemption of God.

33 For behold, did not Moses prophesy unto them concerning the coming of the Messiah, and that God should redeem his people? Yea, and even all the prophets who have prophesied ever since the world began—have they not spoken more or less concerning these things?

34 Have they not said that God himself should come down among the children of men, and take upon him the form of man, and go forth in mighty power upon the face of the earth?

35 Yea, and have they not said also that he should bring to pass the resurrection of the dead, and that he, himself, should be oppressed and afflicted?

### ***Comments***

Abinadi declares that although the children of Israel had received the law, they missed the critical symbolism of the law which pointed to the coming of the atoning Messiah. Thus, the prophets had testified of the Messiah's coming, but the people had misunderstood, or not correctly understood those prophecies.

When Abinadi declares: "Have they not said that God himself should come down among the children of men?" he is citing a prophet that had to have been on the plates of brass, but who is unknown to modern readers. Nevertheless, as a prophet on the brass plates, he should have been known to the priests of Noah, and they should have recognized this verse. Abinadi clearly expects that they recognize that phrase as a prophetic declaration from scripture.

In the 1830 edition, there is no chapter break at this location. The text moves directly to what we have as Mosiah 14:1.



# Mosiah 14

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## Abinadi Quotes Isaiah

### *Mosiah 14:1*

1 Yea, even doth not Isaiah say: Who hath believed our report, and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?

### *Comments*

The priests of Noah began this interrogation by asking for an explanation of verses in Isaiah 52. Abinadi's rebuttal now inserts the whole of Isaiah chapter 53. These chapters are part of an alternating pattern in Isaiah which has chapters that focus on Jerusalem and what has become known as the suffering servant. The priests of Noah quoted from one of the Jerusalem chapters, and Abinadi answers with a suffering servant chapter.

In the context of the conflict between a law of Moses that the priests assume to be complete and a law that Abinadi declares looks forward to a future Messiah, the contrast between the two types of chapters in this part of Isaiah provide an interesting backdrop but underscores the way that the priests of Noah and Abinadi see the scriptures.

In the Jerusalem chapters, Jerusalem is both the subject and a collective reference. When the priests of Noah used the verses in Isaiah 52, they dealt with the salvation of Jerusalem, and by extension her people. While true, there are different types of redemption and salvation, and the redemption and salvation of Jerusalem is temporal.

What Abinadi will do by quoting the suffering servant is to counteract the quotation of authoritative scripture with not only another authoritative quotation, but the following chapter (or text, since it does not appear that the modern chapters were reflected on the brass plates from which the Nephites took their quotations of Isaiah).

Abinadi begins with what we know as Isaiah 53:1. The important question asked is "who hath believed our report, and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" That is very much the nature of the question that Abinadi is asking. The scriptures are being put forth as conclusive, but right in those scriptures it asks, "who has believed [them]?" Abinadi has already declared that the priests of Noah have not believed

them (for if they had, they would have lived according to them). Now, Abinadi will use the scriptures to declare his case for the coming Messiah and the salvation that cometh only through him.

### ***Mosiah 14:2***

2 For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of dry ground; he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him there is no beauty that we should desire him.

#### *Comments*

Although Abinadi began with the very first verse in our chapter, the evidence for chapters in what Nephi copied from Isaiah in 2 Nephi suggests that our modern chapter divisions had not yet been implemented when Nephi wrote. Thus, Abinadi begins with a sentence that he wants to use as an accusation, but he skipped verses that shifted from Isaiah's emphasis, in chapter 52, on Jerusalem to the personal emphasis on the suffering servant. Isaiah 52:13 and 14 say: "Behold, my servant shall deal prudently, he shall be exalted and extolled, and be very high. As many were astonished at thee; his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men."

It is the image of the marred visage of Isaiah 52:14 that is echoed in Isaiah 53: "when we shall see him there is no beauty that we should desire him." Even more than simply following the chapter from which the priests of Noah selected their challenge verses, what Abinadi does is quote to them the extension and elaboration of that chapter which emphasizes the suffering servant. At the beginning of our chapter 15 in Mosiah (which was not separated into a separate chapter in 1830), Abinadi will identify the suffering servant as the future Messiah.

### ***Mosiah 14:3–6***

3 He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

4 Surely he has borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows; yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.

5 But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.

6 All we, like sheep, have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquities of us all.

#### *Comments*

The important part of these verses are found in verses 5 and 6. The same themes are part of verses 3 and 4, but in 5 and 6 they are stated in a way that makes it clear that the suffering servant suffers for us, and

that our sins or transgressions are somehow laid upon him. Importantly, in verse 5 it says that “with his stripes we are healed.” The next verses will describe what was meant by *his stripes*, but the point here is that we are healed. Thus, the clear argument is made that there is an individual, described as human, whose suffering provides our healing from transgressions and iniquities.

Therefore, Abinadi says that there is a person who will be responsible for our salvation, not the law. When Abinadi said that the law alone would not save us (in Mosiah 13:28), this is the foundation for his argument. The scriptures, through the respected prophet Isaiah, declare that it is a person and not the law.

### ***Mosiah 14:7–12***

7 He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb so he opened not his mouth.

8 He was taken from prison and from judgment; and who shall declare his generation? For he was cut off out of the land of the living; for the transgressions of my people was he stricken.

9 And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no evil, neither was any deceit in his mouth.

10 Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him; he hath put him to grief; when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.

11 He shall see the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied; by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities.

12 Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death; and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bore the sins of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

### ***Comments***

The important indicators of the identity of this suffering servant are elucidated. He is oppressed and afflicted. He is imprisoned and executed. Christians have recognized Christ in these verses from very early times. Abinadi sees Christ, or the Messiah, in those same terms long before Christian hindsight clarified them.

The end of this servant is death, but a death that sees him bearing “the sins of many” and making “intercession for the transgressors.”

There is no chapter break at this point in the 1830 edition. While Pratt’s reorganization of the chapters makes it easier to compare and connect this chapter with Isaiah 53 that it quotes, it makes it more difficult to see as part of the continuing argument Abinadi is making. In particular, it is important to see the very next verse as being tied to this chapter. It is Abinadi’s essential understanding of this chapter and the crux of the difference between Abinadi’s preaching and that of the priests of Noah.



# Mosiah 15

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## Abinadi Uses the Quoted Isaiah Chapter in His Argument

### *Mosiah 15:1–4*

1 And now Abinadi said unto them: I would that ye should understand that God himself shall come down among the children of men, and shall redeem his people.

2 And because he dwelleth in flesh he shall be called the Son of God, and having subjected the flesh to the will of the Father, being the Father and the Son—

3 The Father, because he was conceived by the power of God; and the Son, because of the flesh; thus becoming the Father and Son—

4 And they are one God, yea, the very Eternal Father of heaven and of earth.

### *Comments*

Verse 1's declaration that "God himself shall come down among the children of men" is the important concluding statement after Abinadi's quotation of Isaiah 53's suffering servant text. That text spoke of a mortal who would take upon himself our iniquities. Then Abinadi declares that God himself, or Yahweh himself, would be that man.

The rest of the verses are attempting to clarify the Nephite understanding of God. First, as part of the house of Israel, Yahweh is their God. When that God changed habitation, when that God condescended to come to earth, that shift gave him a different designation.

Abinadi clarifies that there is no difference in person between Yahweh in the heavens and Yahweh as a mortal. It is simply the change of location and subjection to humanity that creates the designation as the Son of God. He is both the Father and the Son simultaneously. The Father as God, the Son as mortal. Nevertheless, it is the same being. It is the state that changes the designation.

It is also possible that the terminology created a different type of designation for the mortal Messiah. While modern readers easily see Son of God as a title for Jesus Christ, it is possible that the use in the Book of Mormon derives more from the tradition surrounding Israelite kingship.

In Psalms 2:7, the Lord says to the king: "Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee." The Israelite kings joined with their ancient Near Eastern counterparts in considering themselves sons of god. If this

is the meaning, then the import of this change in state is not to create a new biological relationship, but rather a new regnal designation for the coming atoning Messiah.

### ***Mosiah 15:5–7***

5 And thus the flesh becoming subject to the Spirit, or the Son to the Father, being one God, suffereth temptation, and yieldeth not to the temptation, but suffereth himself to be mocked, and scourged, and cast out, and disowned by his people.

6 And after all this, after working many mighty miracles among the children of men, he shall be led, yea, even as Isaiah said, as a sheep before the shearer is dumb, so he opened not his mouth.

7 Yea, even so he shall be led, crucified, and slain, the flesh becoming subject even unto death, the will of the Son being swallowed up in the will of the Father.

### ***Comments***

These verses are Abinadi's explanation of the verses in Isaiah 53, which speak of specific events in the life of the suffering servant. In verse 5 Abinadi notes that as a mortal, the atoning Messiah would suffer temptation, and be cast out by his own people. In Isaiah 53:3 it says that the servant would be despised. In 53:8 he had been imprisoned.

In verse 6, Abinadi notes that he will do miracles, and that he would be "as a sheep before the shearer is dumb." Both of those statements are familiar to Christians, and Abinadi must have relied upon other information to make those connections to Isaiah. However, when Abinadi noted in verse 5 that the coming Messiah would not yield to temptation, that picked up directly on Isaiah 53:9 which declared: "he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth."

The crucifixion of the Messiah not only fulfilled the suffering servant's imprisonment, but clearly the requirement that he be killed, or, in the language of Isaiah 53:8, "cut off from the land of the living."

### ***Mosiah 15:8–10***

8 And thus God breaketh the bands of death, having gained the victory over death; giving the Son power to make intercession for the children of men—

9 Having ascended into heaven, having the bowels of mercy; being filled with compassion towards the children of men; standing betwixt them and justice; having broken the bands of death, taken upon himself their iniquity and their transgressions, having redeemed them, and satisfied the demands of justice.

10 And now I say unto you, who shall declare his generation? Behold, I say unto you, that when his soul has been made an offering for sin he shall see his seed. And now what say ye? And who shall be his seed?



## *Comments*

Isaiah opened the door for Abinadi to discuss the atoning mission of the Messiah when he said that our iniquities would be placed upon the suffering servant. Abinadi makes that more explicit by recounting the doctrine of the Messiah as it had been taught among the Nephites from Nephi's time. Yahweh himself would come down and do two very important things. He would first break the bands of death. Then he would mercifully break the bands of sin.

However, Abinadi is indirectly speaking about the passage that the priests presented him with. In Mosiah 12:23 we have the quotation of the line "he hath redeemed Jerusalem" from Isaiah 52:9. In verse 9 above, Abinadi declares that when Yahweh takes upon himself our sins, he redeems us.

Abinadi weaves in a line from Isaiah 53:8 (quoted in Mosiah 14:8) which asks "who shall declare his generation?" In Isaiah 53:8 the rest of the verse speaks of his death, thus leaving him without seed. Thus, Abinadi plays off the idea of the Messiah not having subsequent offspring or *generation* and suggests that he indeed will see his seed. Then Abinadi asks who that seed might be, leading to his next point.

## ***Mosiah 15:11–13***

11 Behold I say unto you, that whosoever has heard the words of the prophets, yea, all the holy prophets who have prophesied concerning the coming of the Lord—I say unto you, that all those who have hearkened unto their words, and believed that the Lord would redeem his people, and have looked forward to that day for a remission of their sins, I say unto you, that these are his seed, or they are the heirs of the kingdom of God.

12 For these are they whose sins he has borne; these are they for whom he has died, to redeem them from their transgressions. And now, are they not his seed?

13 Yea, and are not the prophets, every one that has opened his mouth to prophesy, that has not fallen into transgression, I mean all the holy prophets ever since the world began? I say unto you that they are his seed.

## *Comments*

Abinadi has asked, who are the seed of this Messiah? This is a question that was generated from one of the passages that the priests of Noah presented him with. Abinadi declares that the seed of the Messiah are the all the prophets who have prophesied of the coming of the Messiah. This is an ingenious line of argumentation because it will pit the priests of Noah against the holy prophets. The prophets "believed that the Lord would redeem his people, and have looked forward to that day for a remission of their sins." If the priests of Noah do not also look forward to that day, then they have placed themselves firmly against the word of the prophets and scripture.

## ***Mosiah 15:14–19***

14 And these are they who have published peace, who have brought good tidings of good, who have published salvation; and said unto Zion: Thy God reigneth!

15 And O how beautiful upon the mountains were their feet!

16 And again, how beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of those that are still publishing peace!

17 And again, how beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of those who shall hereafter publish peace, yea, from this time henceforth and forever!

18 And behold, I say unto you, this is not all. For O how beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that is the founder of peace, yea, even the Lord, who has redeemed his people; yea, him who has granted salvation unto his people;

19 For were it not for the redemption which he hath made for his people, which was prepared from the foundation of the world, I say unto you, were it not for this, all mankind must have perished.

### ***Comments***

Now Abinadi brings his response to the opening verses of the Isaiah passage. He declares that it is the prophets who have published peace. He does that by nearly quoting Isaiah 52:7 in his argument (in our verse 14). This opens the rhetorical argument that not only do the prophets publish peace, but that this is the same as declaring the Messiah.

Abinadi makes this connection when he says, “For O how beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that is the founder of peace, yea, even the Lord, who has redeemed his people; yea, him who has granted salvation unto his people.” Thus, Abinadi argues that the prophets are Yahweh’s seed, and Yahweh is the one who has redeemed his people. Therefore, the one who has most effectively published peace is Yahweh in his mortal ministry as the Messiah.

## **Abinadi Explains the First Resurrection**

### ***Mosiah 15:20–25***

20 But behold, the bands of death shall be broken, and the Son reigneth, and hath power over the dead; therefore, he bringeth to pass the resurrection of the dead.

21 And there cometh a resurrection, even a first resurrection; yea, even a resurrection of those that have been, and who are, and who shall be, even until the resurrection of Christ—for so shall he be called.

22 And now, the resurrection of all the prophets, and all those that have believed in their words, or all those that have kept the commandments of God, shall come forth in the first resurrection; therefore, they are the first resurrection.

23 They are raised to dwell with God who has redeemed them; thus they have eternal life through Christ, who has broken the bands of death.

24 And these are those who have part in the first resurrection; and these are they that have died before Christ came, in their ignorance, not having salvation declared unto them. And thus the Lord bringeth about the restoration of these; and they have a part in the first resurrection, or have eternal life, being redeemed by the Lord.

25 And little children also have eternal life.

### *Comments*

Modern explanations of the result of the atonement focus on the redemption from death and the redemption from sin. Abinadi also makes that distinction, but perhaps not as clearly as modern readers might expect. The idea of the resurrection overcoming death is obvious. Abinadi declares that there is a first resurrection. The definition of that is somewhat unclear, for he says that it includes “those that have been, and who are, and who shall be.” The only qualifier is “until the resurrection of Christ.” It appears that in this definition, the first resurrection is for all who die prior to the Messiah’s resurrection, who clearly could not have been resurrected until the bands of death were broken.

The explanation of the difference between resurrection and exaltation begins in verse 23 when Abinadi says that “they are raised to dwell with God who has redeemed them; thus they have eternal life through Christ.” The resurrection breaks the bands of death, and the Messiah’s atonement allows them to have eternal life with God. The concept that there is an element of one’s personal merit in this process comes when Abinadi mentions that those who did not have the opportunity to choose to know the truth have access to the restoration. The concept of restoration will be explored later when it is more fully developed in Alma.

The idea that those who are ignorant, “not having salvation declared unto them”, also leads to the declaration that “little children also have eternal life.” They are placed in that same category of inability to actively choose.

### ***Mosiah 15:26–27***

26 But behold, and fear, and tremble before God, for ye ought to tremble; for the Lord redeemeth none such that rebel against him and die in their sins; yea, even all those that have perished in their sins ever since the world began, that have wilfully rebelled against God, that have known the commandments of God, and would not keep them; these are they that have no part in the first resurrection.

27 Therefore ought ye not to tremble? For salvation cometh to none such; for the Lord hath redeemed none such; yea, neither can the Lord redeem such; for he cannot deny himself; for he cannot deny justice when it has its claim.

### *Comments*

After proclaiming that those who were ignorant could be redeemed, Abinadi turns the argument to the priests of Noah personally. They are not ignorant. They have declared that they teach the law of Moses. However, it is because of their acceptance of the scriptures that Abinadi condemns them. Abinadi declares: “for ye ought to tremble; for the Lord redeemeth none such that rebel against him and die in their sins.”

This is a strong condemnation, and perhaps even stronger than the general prophesy that caused Abinadi to be brought before Noah and the priests. He very clearly accuses them of willful rebellion against God, and pronounces that “salvation cometh to none such.”

What is important in this condemnation, however, is that there is an escape clause. When Abinadi says that this applies to those who die in their sins, he leaves open the possibility of repentance, for the priests have not yet died, and, therefore, have opportunity to repent. That is important because one of the condemned priests is Alma, the Elder, who will take that opportunity to repent and not fall under that condemnation.

### ***Mosiah 15:28–31***

28 And now I say unto you that the time shall come that the salvation of the Lord shall be declared to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people.

29 Yea, Lord, thy watchmen shall lift up their voice; with the voice together shall they sing; for they shall see eye to eye, when the Lord shall bring again Zion.

30 Break forth into joy, sing together, ye waste places of Jerusalem; for the Lord hath comforted his people, he hath redeemed Jerusalem.

31 The Lord hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.

### *Comments*

After the condemnation of the priests of Noah, Abinadi returns to the positive aspects of the Messiah’s mission. There will come a time when “the salvation of the Lord shall be declared to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people.” The phrase “nation, kindred, tongue and people” is used in that order in Revelations 5:9, but the elements are also in Revelation 7:9 and 11:9. It shows up frequently in the Book of Mormon.

Verses 29 through 31 quote Isaiah 52:8–10 and were the final verses that the priests of Noah quoted when beginning Abinadi’s interrogation. Abinadi is tying up the threads of his explanation of the passages that the priests put to him. There is no chapter break at this point in the 1830 edition. Abinadi continues speaking without break in Mosiah 16.

# Mosiah 16

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## Abinadi Continues to Prophecy of the Messiah

### *Mosiah 16:1–3*

1 And now, it came to pass that after Abinadi had spoken these words he stretched forth his hand and said: The time shall come when all shall see the salvation of the Lord; when every nation, kindred, tongue, and people shall see eye to eye and shall confess before God that his judgments are just.

2 And then shall the wicked be cast out, and they shall have cause to howl, and weep, and wail, and gnash their teeth; and this because they would not hearken unto the voice of the Lord; therefore the Lord redeemeth them not.

3 For they are carnal and devilish, and the devil has power over them; yea, even that old serpent that did beguile our first parents, which was the cause of their fall; which was the cause of all mankind becoming carnal, sensual, devilish, knowing evil from good, subjecting themselves to the devil.

### *Comments*

There was no chapter break at this point in the 1830 edition. Nevertheless, we have one sentence that may be presumed to be Mormon writing before he continues quoting Abinadi.

Abinadi is speaking of the final judgment, and there are two aspects of that judgment. In the black and white symbolic world, there is good and evil, and there will come a time when they will be separated, even though they are allowed to coexist in this mortality. Therefore, there will come a time when all must stand before God, whose judgments are just. Abinadi begins by describing the unjust. At this final judgment, the wicked are cast out. Their actions on earth have condemned them, and therefore they are not redeemed.

The judgment is upon what they have become, not what they believed. They are carnal and devilish. They have become similar to the one who opposes God, and, therefore, they are, in the end, found to oppose God. Importantly, however, it comes about because they do know good from evil. Fully understanding their choices, they have chosen to subject themselves to the devil. Therefore, while God declares the judgment, it is a natural judgment brought about by their own natures.

## ***Mosiah 16:4–5***

4 Thus all mankind were lost; and behold, they would have been endlessly lost were it not that God redeemed his people from their lost and fallen state.

5 But remember that he that persists in his own carnal nature, and goes on in the ways of sin and rebellion against God, remaineth in his fallen state and the devil hath all power over him. Therefore he is as though there was no redemption made, being an enemy to God; and also is the devil an enemy to God.

### ***Comments***

Abinadi is intent on teaching about the role of the coming Messiah, so he emphasizes that without the Messiah's intervention, all mankind would be lost. This is certainly not God's plan, but that is the point he is making. Without the part of the plan where the Messiah provides redemption, all would necessarily be lost and become as the devil. The choices we make are rarely all positive and correct, and any sin would separate us from the spirit of God. Without repentance, we would have no means to reconcile ourselves and learn from our mistakes.

Nevertheless, agency is still operative. Although a redemption will come, in verse 5 Abinadi makes it clear that all still have their agency. If a man or woman persists in choosing their carnal nature, as opposed to their spiritual nature, they are still in that fallen state.

The phrase is used that such an one is "an enemy to God." The intent of the phrase is to indicate one who is the opposite of God. Abinadi contrasts carnal with spiritual, and, therefore, enemy with one who loves God. The language is intended to describe the two opposite possible poles of experience. The reality of mortal life is that it is rarely so completely divided into the two polar opposites. By using the polar opposites, Abinadi can focus on the importance of the redemption without delving into the details of how such things are worked out through our lives. Nevertheless, he did give us the clue that we would be judged on what kind of person we become. Repentance opens the possibility of becoming better, regardless of any mistakes we might have made in mortality.

## **Redemption and Resurrection Come Only through Christ**

### ***Mosiah 16:6–8***

6 And now if Christ had not come into the world, speaking of things to come as though they had already come, there could have been no redemption.

7 And if Christ had not risen from the dead, or have broken the bands of death that the grave should have no victory, and that death should have no sting, there could have been no resurrection.

8 But there is a resurrection, therefore the grave hath no victory, and the sting of death is swallowed up in Christ.

## *Comments*

Abinadi concludes the picture of the world if no redemption were to be made. Without the Messiah coming to the world, there would be no redemption. Without the Messiah rising from the dead, there would be no resurrection, and death would be final.

At the end of this litany of the doom of the world without the Messiah, Abinadi now turns to the glorious declaration that “there is a resurrection, therefore the grave hath no victory, and the sting of death is swallowed up in Christ.” All of these dire possibilities need not occur because there is a coming Messiah who will perform the necessary tasks to make it possible that we should live again after death, and that we can be clean again after sin.

In these verses, Abinadi speaks of the Messiah in the past tense. He notes that he is “speaking of things to come as though they had already come.” This is a literary technique also seen in the Bible and has come to be called the “prophetic past.”

## ***Mosiah 16:9–12***

9 He is the light and the life of the world; yea, a light that is endless, that can never be darkened; yea, and also a life which is endless, that there can be no more death.

10 Even this mortal shall put on immortality, and this corruption shall put on incorruption, and shall be brought to stand before the bar of God, to be judged of him according to their works whether they be good or whether they be evil—

11 If they be good, to the resurrection of endless life and happiness; and if they be evil, to the resurrection of endless damnation, being delivered up to the devil, who hath subjected them, which is damnation—

12 Having gone according to their own carnal wills and desires; having never called upon the Lord while the arms of mercy were extended towards them; for the arms of mercy were extended towards them, and they would not; they being warned of their iniquities and yet they would not depart from them; and they were commanded to repent and yet they would not repent.

## *Comments*

The result of the coming Messiah’s mission is to light a world that would otherwise be fated to remain in darkness. Through the resurrection, the bands of death will be broken. Then, when all come to the judgment of God, they need not be condemned as wicked. The Messiah’s redemption will allow repentance to guide their agency. They will not be condemned to become as the devil but will have the opportunity to use their agency to become as God.

This final judgment separates the two opposite kinds of people. Those who have become as the devil must remain with the devil, but those who have embraced the way of God will be resurrected to endless

life and happiness. When the Book of Mormon speaks of happiness, or of joy, it is speaking of this type of eternal happiness and joy rather than the fleeting happiness of our mortal life.

The final comment emphasizes agency. Those who are condemned were warned. The arms of mercy were extended to them. Nevertheless, Abinadi says that they would not accept the offer. We are judged for what we have chosen to become.

### ***Mosiah 16:13–15***

13 And now, ought ye not to tremble and repent of your sins, and remember that only in and through Christ ye can be saved?

14 Therefore, if ye teach the law of Moses, also teach that it is a shadow of those things which are to come—

15 Teach them that redemption cometh through Christ the Lord, who is the very Eternal Father. Amen.

### ***Comments***

As Abinadi ends his discourse, he returns to the theme of the priests who have not properly taught the law. In Mosiah 12:27 Abinadi had asked what the priests taught, and they replied in verse 28 that they taught the law of Moses. As part of Abinadi's accusation against the priests, he had asked, in verse Mosiah 12:31, if salvation came through the law of Moses. His entire discourse that he just finished was to show that salvation came through the Messiah, not the law of Moses. Thus, as he finishes, he returns to the theme of what the priests teach. They might think that they teach the law of Moses, but Abinadi has shown that they are not teaching the means whereby salvation cometh. Therefore, he says to them: "ought ye not to tremble and repent of your sins, and remember that only in and through Christ ye can be saved?"

Abinadi declares that "if ye teach the law of Moses, also teach that it is a shadow of those things which are to come—Teach them that redemption cometh through Christ the Lord, who is the very Eternal Father." That has been the whole of his message. That was what he had come to declare, and now he has finished.

He testifies to what he has said with an *amen*. It ends the chapter.



# Mosiah 17

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## Alma<sub>1</sub> Believes Abinadi's Teaching

### *Mosiah 17:1–4*

1 And now it came to pass that when Abinadi had finished these sayings, that the king commanded that the priests should take him and cause that he should be put to death.

2 But there was one among them whose name was Alma, he also being a descendant of Nephi. And he was a young man, and he believed the words which Abinadi had spoken, for he knew concerning the iniquity which Abinadi had testified against them; therefore he began to plead with the king that he would not be angry with Abinadi, but suffer that he might depart in peace.

3 But the king was more wroth, and caused that Alma should be cast out from among them, and sent his servants after him that they might slay him.

4 But he fled from before them and hid himself that they found him not. And he being concealed for many days did write all the words which Abinadi had spoken.

### *Comments*

The prior attempt to seize Abinadi did not work because Abinadi had not finished his message and he was divinely protected. Now, his message was delivered, and the protection was withdrawn. One part of the beginning of this chapter was to indicate that the court declared that Abinadi should be put to death.

The more important part of this beginning is the introduction to perhaps the reason that Yahweh had Abinadi come to the court to declare his message. In the entire episode, from when Abinadi enters in disguise to the time he is taken to be executed, he made only one convert. That convert was Alma<sub>1</sub>, and it is Alma<sub>1</sub> who becomes an extremely important figure in the Nephite story. Alma<sub>1</sub>'s story begins with his pleading on Abinadi's behalf, and results in his expulsion from king Noah's court. Having taken Abinadi's side, he was condemned to share his fate. Fortunately for the remainder of Nephite history, the attempt to slay Alma<sub>1</sub> failed.

Mormon tells us that Alma<sub>1</sub> hid himself, and that he did write down Abinadi's words. This appears to indicate that there may have been two records of Abinadi's preaching, one from the official court records, which would have been on the record of Zeniff, and the second one as part of Alma<sub>1</sub>'s records. Because we

have a favorable view of Abinadi's preaching, it is probable that Mormon took his account from Alma<sub>1</sub>'s record. However, the events following Alma<sub>1</sub>'s expulsion could not have been on Alma<sub>1</sub>'s record because he was not there to see them. Therefore, we can assume that there were two records, and that the actions describing what happened in Noah's court from this time forward had to have come from the record that Noah's scribe kept. It is also probable that this is the reason we see more of Mormon's narration rather than quotation of the record.

## **Abinadi Is Sentenced and Put to Death**

### ***Mosiah 17:5–8***

5 And it came to pass that the king caused that his guards should surround Abinadi and take him; and they bound him and cast him into prison.

6 And after three days, having counseled with his priests, he caused that he should again be brought before him.

7 And he said unto him: Abinadi, we have found an accusation against thee, and thou art worthy of death.

8 For thou hast said that God himself should come down among the children of men; and now, for this cause thou shalt be put to death unless thou wilt recall all the words which thou hast spoken evil concerning me and my people.

### ***Comments***

When Abinadi entered the city, he had preached against king Noah, and for that reason had been brought before Noah and the court of priests. His fate was probably sealed at that time, but there was something about the law that they followed that required a different offense in order to be worthy of execution. When the priests began questioning him, it was clear that they knew that Abinadi had a different understanding of Yahweh than they did, and thus they began a line of questioning that would expose that difference.

Although Abinadi bore a powerful message that converted Alma<sub>1</sub>, no others were moved. They deliberated and unsurprisingly found him guilty of what they would have considered blasphemy, a conviction meriting execution. What was his blasphemy? That God himself should come down among the children of men. This is, of course, exactly what Abinadi had preached and the entire reason for his discourse. Abinadi declared that the very Yahweh would, at a future date, come to earth to become the Messiah and provide the atonement.

The trial began with the expectation that Abinadi would be found guilty of blasphemy, and he was. The trial fulfilled their law, but it also fulfilled Yahweh's purpose in that Alma<sub>1</sub> believed. Alma<sub>1</sub>'s belief led to important changes in the nature of Nephite religion, and probably its political system as well. It

is possible that no single person, since Nephi, had as great an impact on the future direction of Nephite history than Alma<sub>1</sub> himself.

### ***Mosiah 17:9–12***

9 Now Abinadi said unto him: I say unto you, I will not recall the words which I have spoken unto you concerning this people, for they are true; and that ye may know of their surety I have suffered myself that I have fallen into your hands.

10 Yea, and I will suffer even until death, and I will not recall my words, and they shall stand as a testimony against you. And if ye slay me ye will shed innocent blood, and this shall also stand as a testimony against you at the last day.

11 And now king Noah was about to release him, for he feared his word; for he feared that the judgments of God would come upon him.

12 But the priests lifted up their voices against him, and began to accuse him, saying: He has reviled the king. Therefore the king was stirred up in anger against him, and he delivered him up that he might be slain.

### ***Comments***

As Abinadi stands condemned to death, he declares that he will not retract his words. In this case, we have a return to the words that he spoke in prophecy about Noah. When he came among the people, he had predicted that Noah's life would be as a garment in a hot furnace, as recorded in Mosiah 12:3. Now he points his accusation directly at Noah, telling him that Noah himself will be under condemnation if Abinadi is executed.

Perhaps because of the experience that Noah had witnessed, where Abinadi had been divinely protected during his trial, he appears to believe that Abinadi really could condemn him. Although he wavered and might have released him, the priests turn the tide and persuade the king that Abinadi must die. Although the official reason to put Abinadi to death was blasphemy, the real reason was that "he has reviled the king." That was the reason the people brought Abinadi before the king, and it is the convincing argument to continue with the execution that was based on an entirely different legal justification.

The long discourse on the Messiah may have come from Alma<sub>1</sub>'s record, but this part must have come from the record which Noah's scribe kept. Note the difference in what was important to record. Alma<sub>1</sub> kept the important speech that declared the coming Messiah, but the court record only deals with the issue of Abinadi's opposition to the king. The only quotation from Abinadi here is the one that reiterates his initial prophecy against the king. Not only is the record different, but the type of information that the two plausible accounts recorded is also quite different.

## ***Mosiah 17:13–15***

13 And it came to pass that they took him and bound him, and scourged his skin with faggots, yea, even unto death.

14 And now when the flames began to scorch him, he cried unto them, saying:

15 Behold, even as ye have done unto me, so shall it come to pass that thy seed shall cause that many shall suffer the pains that I do suffer, even the pains of death by fire; and this because they believe in the salvation of the Lord their God.

### ***Comments***

Abinadi is executed with fire. While this invokes images of being burned at the stake, that does not appear to be the means employed. Key to understanding what is happening is that he was “scourged . . . with faggots, yea, even unto death.” Faggots are bundles of sticks that are set on fire. Scourging is to strike against the flesh. This is a terrible means of torture that was unfortunately widespread through Central and even North American indigenous tribes.

A bound captive would be beaten with or jabbed with the burning bundle, burning the skin, but not causing death. It was a process that could be extended for a long time and was more brutal than burning at the stake. In some cultures, when the victim passed out from the pain, the victim was allowed to rest and recover consciousness, and was then tortured again.

With such a terrible death, it is even less surprising that Abinadi would curse Noah with the same death. In Alma 25:9–11, Mormon writes that this prophecy was even visited upon the seed of the priests.

## ***Mosiah 17:16–20***

16 And it will come to pass that ye shall be afflicted with all manner of diseases because of your iniquities.

17 Yea, and ye shall be smitten on every hand, and shall be driven and scattered to and fro, even as a wild flock is driven by wild and ferocious beasts.

18 And in that day ye shall be hunted, and ye shall be taken by the hand of your enemies, and then ye shall suffer, as I suffer, the pains of death by fire.

19 Thus God executeth vengeance upon those that destroy his people. O God, receive my soul.

20 And now, when Abinadi had said these words, he fell, having suffered death by fire; yea, having been put to death because he would not deny the commandments of God, having sealed the truth of his words by his death.

### ***Comments***

Abinadi continues the curse on Noah and his priests. In verse 18, Abinadi declares that “ye shall be hunted, and ye shall be taken by the hand of your enemies, and then ye shall suffer, as I suffer, the pains

of death by fire.” In Alma 25:9 he shows the fulfillment of the prophecy: “And behold they are hunted at this day by the Lamanites. Thus the words of Abinadi were brought to pass, which he said concerning the seed of the priests who caused that he should suffer death by fire.”

As with other prophecies in the Book of Mormon, Mormon works the fulfillment into his narrative. He does not intend to leave any prophecy with an undetermined end, but rather intends that all understand that when a prophecy is declared by the power of God, its fulfillment is sure.

There is no chapter break at this point in the 1830 edition.



# Mosiah 18

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## ***Mosiah 18:1–3***

1 And now, it came to pass that Alma, who had fled from the servants of king Noah, repented of his sins and iniquities, and went about privately among the people, and began to teach the words of Abinadi—  
2 Yea, concerning that which was to come, and also concerning the resurrection of the dead, and the redemption of the people, which was to be brought to pass through the power, and sufferings, and death of Christ, and his resurrection and ascension into heaven.  
3 And as many as would hear his word he did teach. And he taught them privately, that it might not come to the knowledge of the king. And many did believe his words.

## ***Comments***

There is no chapter break at this point in the 1830 edition. Our chapter 17 began the original chapter, and that chapter began with an introduction to Alma<sub>1</sub>, as the only convert from Abinadi's direct teaching. The rest of our chapter 17 finished the story of Abinadi. Now, having ended Abinadi's story, Mormon returns to the beginning of the original chapter to pick up on Alma<sub>1</sub>'s story.

Abinadi's message was the essentiality of the coming Messiah to provide salvation. Alma<sub>1</sub> absorbed that lesson, and when he began to teach, he taught "concerning that which was to come." That phrase occurs multiple times in the Book of Mormon and refers to the coming Messiah. Thus, Alma<sub>1</sub> teaches what Abinadi taught.

Alma<sub>1</sub> begins to have success in teaching. Verse 3 notes that "many did believe his words." That preaching will expand and will result in finding a new location where believers might gather to be taught. That is the next part of the story.

## **Alma<sub>1</sub> Forms a Church at the Waters of Mormon**

## ***Mosiah 18:4–7***

4 And it came to pass that as many as did believe him did go forth to a place which was called Mormon, having received its name from the king, being in the borders of the land having been infested, by times or at seasons, by wild beasts.

5 Now, there was in Mormon a fountain of pure water, and Alma resorted thither, there being near the water a thicket of small trees, where he did hide himself in the daytime from the searches of the king.

6 And it came to pass that as many as believed him went thither to hear his words.

7 And it came to pass after many days there were a goodly number gathered together at the place of Mormon, to hear the words of Alma. Yea, all were gathered together that believed on his word, to hear him. And he did teach them, and did preach unto them repentance, and redemption, and faith on the Lord.

### *Comments*

Alma<sub>1</sub> had been condemned to death. He was clearly in need of remaining out of Noah's attention. Therefore, he and those who believe what he taught leave the city and gather in a new location. This location is "in the borders of the land." That suggests that it is away from the city and perhaps in a region that is not often visited. The statement that there were, at times, wild beasts, suggests that it might have been avoided as a location of dangerous animals. In a Mesoamerican setting, this would likely have been the hunting range for one or more jaguars. The fact that there was water nearby made it both attractive to a new group of people, and it also likely influenced the presence of the jaguars who would prey on other animals as they came to drink in the waters.

The place which was called Mormon may have been named for a previous king, but it seems likely that the Mormon who is writing mentions the name because he is named for that location. More than for the person, Mormon would have been named for the events that began there.

While the waters of Mormon were important to the animals of the region, and important to any people who might assemble there, they became important for a much more sacred reason.

### ***Mosiah 18:8–10***

8 And it came to pass that he said unto them: Behold, here are the waters of Mormon (for thus were they called) and now, as ye are desirous to come into the fold of God, and to be called his people, and are willing to bear one another's burdens, that they may be light;

9 Yea, and are willing to mourn with those that mourn; yea, and comfort those that stand in need of comfort, and to stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all things, and in all places that ye may be in, even until death, that ye may be redeemed of God, and be numbered with those of the first resurrection, that ye may have eternal life—

10 Now I say unto you, if this be the desire of your hearts, what have you against being baptized in the name of the Lord, as a witness before him that ye have entered into a covenant with him, that ye will serve him and keep his commandments, that he may pour out his Spirit more abundantly upon you?



## *Comments*

Nephi has seen the baptism of Christ in his vision. In 1 Nephi 31:4–12, Nephi explains baptism for the remission of sins. However, after that vision we do not explicitly hear about baptism until these verses. Certainly, the teaching of immersion as a means of cleansing sin continued in Nephite religion. Alma<sub>1</sub> does not introduce baptism itself, but what he does is introduce baptism as an entry covenant into a new relationship with Yahweh. He was teaching those who had learned some form of the law of Moses. They understood clean and unclean. They understood sin.

What this people did not understand fully was that they could have a community separate from their city in which they might have a different understanding of God. The ability to have a divided religious community was beginning near the waters of Mormon, and baptism was expanded to become the covenant of entry as well as an act of cleansing.

The new community is defined by the way each was to care for the other. They were to bear one another's burdens. They were to sympathize and comfort each other. Above all, of the social rules for this new division in society, they were also to be a witness for their new relationship to Yahweh. The people who remained, believing as did Noah and his court priests, had their own understanding of religion, but the new covenant of this new people was that they would stand firm in their new understanding of Yahweh as the very God who would come down to put into effect the resurrection and provide the means of repentance.

## ***Mosiah 18:11–14***

11 And now when the people had heard these words, they clapped their hands for joy, and exclaimed: This is the desire of our hearts.

12 And now it came to pass that Alma took Helam, he being one of the first, and went and stood forth in the water, and cried, saying: O Lord, pour out thy Spirit upon thy servant, that he may do this work with holiness of heart.

13 And when he had said these words, the Spirit of the Lord was upon him, and he said: Helam, I baptize thee, having authority from the Almighty God, as a testimony that ye have entered into a covenant to serve him until you are dead as to the mortal body; and may the Spirit of the Lord be poured out upon you; and may he grant unto you eternal life, through the redemption of Christ, whom he has prepared from the foundation of the world.

14 And after Alma had said these words, both Alma and Helam were buried in the water; and they arose and came forth out of the water rejoicing, being filled with the Spirit.

## *Comments*

The people were willing and excited to accept this new covenant, and baptism became the symbol of that covenant. To begin, Alma<sub>1</sub> selects Helam and takes him down into the water. After invoking authority from God, Alma<sub>1</sub> and Helam are both immersed.

At this point in Nephite history, the use of immersion in baptism is clear, but it is an immersion borrowing significance from the previous Mikveh rite of cleansing, which was by immersion. Later Christianity used the immersion as a symbol of death and resurrection, but that symbolism was only possible after Christ's death and resurrection. That imagery was unavailable at this time, and the Book of Mormon will not use that symbolic association with baptism.

When Alma<sub>1</sub> baptized with authority, with what authority did he baptize? There will later be a discussion of authority, but the important point here is that Israel had two means of assigning religious authority to perform religious acts. One was lineal, and we know it as the Levitical Priesthood. That was not the only way, however. A king had the divine right and the ability to provide authority. Alma<sub>1</sub> had such authority from Noah. Although we know Noah as a bad king, that does not mean that actions performed with good faith through his granted authority are not divinely recognized. Even today, we understand that the act can be valid in God's eyes even if, or when, the one performing the act is not fully worthy. We are blessed for our action and beliefs, not those of another.

Nevertheless, the most important indication will come in verse 18. Alma<sub>1</sub> acted, "having authority from God." If God authorizes Alma<sub>1</sub>, we need not worry about the intermediaries.

### ***Mosiah 18:15–17***

15 And again, Alma took another, and went forth a second time into the water, and baptized him according to the first, only he did not bury himself again in the water.

16 And after this manner he did baptize every one that went forth to the place of Mormon; and they were in number about two hundred and four souls; yea, and they were baptized in the waters of Mormon, and were filled with the grace of God.

17 And they were called the church of God, or the church of Christ, from that time forward. And it came to pass that whosoever was baptized by the power and authority of God was added to his church.

### ***Comments***

Alma<sub>1</sub> enacted the covenant of baptism with all who had come to the place of Mormon. Had these people been previously baptized? We cannot know. What we can know is that Alma<sub>1</sub> instituted a second function of baptism as an entry covenant. Even had they been baptized previously, the new baptism enacted their entry into the new covenant. It is the same in our modern experience. Regardless whether a convert was previously baptized, they are baptized again, not simply for the cleansing, but for the entrance into the new covenant of the restored gospel.

Verse 17 introduces the idea that this new, separated, people were "called the church of God, or the church of Christ." While modern readers might see a difference in the terms "God" and "Christ," Alma<sub>1</sub> did not. He taught that which Abinadi had taught, which was that Yahweh himself (who is God),

would come down to earth to be the Messiah. Thus, the terms were intended to be equivalent, two ways to say the very same thing.

The idea of “church” is also a new innovation. In both the Hebrew and the Greek, the word behind the translated “church” means *an assembly or congregation*. For the Hebrews, it meant *the faithful*, and in the Greek it defined the group who gathered together and believed in the gospel of Christ. Alma<sub>1</sub>’s use of the term is more similar to the Greek, and perhaps similar again in that it was the beginning concept that would lead to the more specific definition of a church as a separate body of believers inside of the larger community. That was certainly what they had done in the land of Mormon, and it will happen after Alma<sub>1</sub> arrives in Zarahemla. It will likely happen through his influence since it was a change from the way religion had been administered up to that point.

### ***Mosiah 18:18–20***

18 And it came to pass that Alma, having authority from God, ordained priests; even one priest to every fifty of their number did he ordain to preach unto them, and to teach them concerning the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.

19 And he commanded them that they should teach nothing save it were the things which he had taught, and which had been spoken by the mouth of the holy prophets.

20 Yea, even he commanded them that they should preach nothing save it were repentance and faith on the Lord, who had redeemed his people.

### ***Comments***

When Alma<sub>1</sub> creates a church, he ordains priests. Alma<sub>1</sub>’s priestly authority may have come through the king, but his authority to then create priests did not come through the king, but directly from God. Alma<sub>1</sub> is creating a separate religious body with its own teachers, further defining “church” as a separate entity within a community. At this point, it is probable that many are still returning to their homes at night. Indeed, following those people will later be the means whereby Alma<sub>1</sub>’s people are discovered by Noah’s spies.

When Alma<sub>1</sub> has the people preach, he has them “teach nothing save it were the things which he had taught, and which had been spoken by the mouth of the holy prophets.” This sentence should be read that he told them to preach the words of the scripture as he taught them to understand it, that is, in the same way Abinadi had explained them. The priests of Noah claimed to teach the scriptures, but they denied the coming Messiah. Alma<sub>1</sub> has them preach under the understanding that the scriptures looked forward to that Messiah.

When he says that they should “preach nothing save it were repentance and faith on the Lord,” he is not saying that this is the only topic, but rather that repentance and faith in the Lord were the supreme topics. The mission of the Messiah was to provide the ability to repent, thus, teaching repentance was

part and parcel of teaching about the coming Messiah. Teaching of that which was to come was the whole point of the establishment of this new religious covenant.

### ***Mosiah 18:21–24***

21 And he commanded them that there should be no contention one with another, but that they should look forward with one eye, having one faith and one baptism, having their hearts knit together in unity and in love one towards another.

22 And thus he commanded them to preach. And thus they became the children of God.

23 And he commanded them that they should observe the sabbath day, and keep it holy, and also every day they should give thanks to the Lord their God.

24 And he also commanded them that the priests whom he had ordained should labor with their own hands for their support.

### ***Comments***

As Alma<sub>1</sub> begins his new congregation, his new church, he establishes the social rules that govern it. Part of the rules of community were discussed as preparation for the entrance rite of baptism, that they care for one another and, therefore, become a community.

Now, Alma<sub>1</sub> begins a listing of how they were to organize and how they should practice this new religious covenant. First, he repeats the essentials that prepared them for baptism. They had declared that they were willing to bear one another's burdens, and now that was part of their responsibility. Here it is phrased that they should have no contention with one another. The idea is that they are now a family and are to treat one another as family. That is finalized when Alma<sub>1</sub> says that "thus they became the children of God." They are part of a new family.

Next, there is a continuation of the sabbath day. This is still a community that will live under the law of Moses, and therefore they will continue the sabbath practice.

Verse 24 repeats a theme we saw in Benjamin's speech. The ideal is egalitarianism. While the priests have responsibilities to the community, they are also to labor with their own hands for their support. This would ensure that they did not see themselves as better than others, since all had to work.

### ***Mosiah 18:25–26***

25 And there was one day in every week that was set apart that they should gather themselves together to teach the people, and to worship the Lord their God, and also, as often as it was in their power, to assemble themselves together.

26 And the priests were not to depend upon the people for their support; but for their labor they were to receive the grace of God, that they might wax strong in the Spirit, having the knowledge of God, that they might teach with power and authority from God.

### *Comments*

Verses 25 and 26 essentially repeat verses 23 and 24. Verse 23 said they should continue to observe the Sabbath. Verse 25 has them set aside a day when they should worship. Particularly in an agrarian society, there was much labor in the growing season, and it would be unusual to take two different days off for worship. Thus, verses 23 and 25 are different ways of saying the same thing.

Similarly, verses 24 and 26 both indicate that the priests are to work for their own support. Why repeat these things? The repetition serves to emphasize their importance. As a new community, there are two principles that will become part of the bedrock actions of the community: They will observe the sabbath to worship God, and their priests will not depend upon the people for their support, but they will work with their own hands.

### ***Mosiah 18:27–30***

27 And again Alma commanded that the people of the church should impart of their substance, every one according to that which he had; if he have more abundantly he should impart more abundantly; and of him that had but little, but little should be required; and to him that had not should be given.

28 And thus they should impart of their substance of their own free will and good desires towards God, and to those priests that stood in need, yea, and to every needy, naked soul.

29 And this he said unto them, having been commanded of God; and they did walk uprightly before God, imparting to one another both temporally and spiritually according to their needs and their wants.

30 And now it came to pass that all this was done in Mormon, yea, by the waters of Mormon, in the forest that was near the waters of Mormon; yea, the place of Mormon, the waters of Mormon, the forest of Mormon, how beautiful are they to the eyes of them who there came to the knowledge of their Redeemer; yea, and how blessed are they, for they shall sing to his praise forever.

### *Comments*

Not only is egalitarianism a principle applied to the priests, but the people themselves are not to esteem themselves above another. This is an old Nephite teaching that we saw in Jacob's sermons. The admonitions here to impart of one's substance echo similar sentiments in King Benjamin's speech. These were not new principles, but reiterations of longstanding beliefs.

It is important to note that while we might focus on the sharing of material substance with the needy, Alma, considered spiritual needs to be equally important. Certainly, if one is physically hungry, we have

a responsibility to assuage that hunger. Similarly, however, if one is spiritually hungry, we have an equal responsibility to feed that hunger. Perhaps for the spiritual needs, it is important that it is not only the needs, but we are to fulfill the wants. One may become sated physically, but spiritual hunger often leads to a greater hunger for greater understanding. That also we are to fulfil, as we are able.

## The King Discovers Alma<sub>1</sub>'s People

### *Mosiah 18:31–35*

31 And these things were done in the borders of the land, that they might not come to the knowledge of the king.

32 But behold, it came to pass that the king, having discovered a movement among the people, sent his servants to watch them. Therefore on the day that they were assembling themselves together to hear the word of the Lord they were discovered unto the king.

33 And now the king said that Alma was stirring up the people to rebellion against him; therefore he sent his army to destroy them.

34 And it came to pass that Alma and the people of the Lord were apprised of the coming of the king's army; therefore they took their tents and their families and departed into the wilderness.

35 And they were in number about four hundred and fifty souls.

### *Comments*

This section of the story ends, but the chapter will not. This part of the story concerned the creation of the church near the waters of Mormon. The next part of the story is their flight to a new land. That story begins when the king discovers that some larger number of people are often leaving and returning. Of course, it wasn't the king himself, but the use of his title to indicate officials of the king.

Spies are sent to find out what is happening, and that is when they discover that Alma<sub>1</sub> has established a division. It is not surprising that they equated that division with a possible rebellion. Therefore, the king sends an armed force to destroy them. Alma<sub>1</sub>'s people are warned, and they flee to safety.

There is no chapter break in the 1830 edition, but there is a logical break in that when Alma<sub>1</sub>'s people flee the story returns its focus to Noah and the actions on the home front. We will see Alma<sub>1</sub>'s people again, but at this point Mormon has told enough of their story and returns to important events in the city.

# Mosiah 19

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## Rebellion against King Noah

### *Mosiah 19:1–3*

- 1 And it came to pass that the army of the king returned, having searched in vain for the people of the Lord.  
2 And now behold, the forces of the king were small, having been reduced, and there began to be a division among the remainder of the people.  
3 And the lesser part began to breathe out threatenings against the king, and there began to be a great contention among them.

### *Comments*

The key to understanding verse 2 is verse 3. There were the beginnings of a division among the people. Mormon does not tell us why the contentions arose, but the fact that there was less than unanimous support for King Noah explains why the forces of the king had been reduced. In many ancient societies, the military was made up of the people who were otherwise farmers and laborers. There was no standing army. Thus, there were no paid positions, and the reduction of the forces likely signifies that when many of the people began to dissent from King Noah's reign, they also would not have answered the call to a military operation.

The reason for mentioning the reduction in the numbers in the forces of the king has little to do with the story, except that it provides the essential background of a people divided and ready for change. That is the backdrop for the story of Gideon, which begins in the next verse.

### *Mosiah 19:4–6*

- 4 And now there was a man among them whose name was Gideon, and he being a strong man and an enemy to the king, therefore he drew his sword, and swore in his wrath that he would slay the king.  
5 And it came to pass that he fought with the king; and when the king saw that he was about to overpower him, he fled and ran and got upon the tower which was near the temple.

6 And Gideon pursued after him and was about to get upon the tower to slay the king, and the king cast his eyes round about towards the land of Shemlon, and behold, the army of the Lamanites were within the borders of the land.

### *Comments*

We do not know anything about Gideon's background. He might have had some military training as he later becomes king's captain for Limhi (see Mosiah 20:17). There may not have been such information in the records from which Mormon took this account. What we do learn is that he was a strong man, a description that tends to identify protagonists in the Book of Mormon. Good men and strong men. Most importantly, he was an enemy of the king. Perhaps he was a leader in the dissent from Noah's rule.

The dissent became so dire that Gideon attempts a coup by killing Noah. They engage in battle, and Noah runs up the tower near the temple. That simple statement belies the picture of the overweight Noah sitting in judgment of Abinadi that Arnold Friberg painted. Friberg's Noah would never outrun Gideon up a tower.

Noah would have gone up the tower to gain the strategic advantage of the higher ground, probably hoping that it would equal out a combat that he had been about to lose. When he arrived however, he happened to see an invading army of Lamanites.

## **Lamanites Attack City of Lehi-Nephi**

### ***Mosiah 19:7–9***

7 And now the king cried out in the anguish of his soul, saying: Gideon, spare me, for the Lamanites are upon us, and they will destroy us; yea, they will destroy my people.

8 And now the king was not so much concerned about his people as he was about his own life; nevertheless, Gideon did spare his life.

9 And the king commanded the people that they should flee before the Lamanites, and he himself did go before them, and they did flee into the wilderness, with their women and their children.

### *Comments*

The appearance of a threat to all the people convinces Gideon to spare Noah's life. What Noah does with that life is to demonstrate the division that existed among the people. Gideon would begin to work to defend the people. Noah ordered the people to flee with their women and children.

Mormon doesn't tell us what is behind this exodus. Clearly Noah fears that the people would be killed, including women and children. Perhaps it was another invasion such as had caused the people of Mosiah<sub>1</sub> (father of Benjamin) to leave the city of Nephi.



### ***Mosiah 19:10–14***

10 And it came to pass that the Lamanites did pursue them, and did overtake them, and began to slay them.

11 Now it came to pass that the king commanded them that all the men should leave their wives and their children, and flee before the Lamanites.

12 Now there were many that would not leave them, but had rather stay and perish with them. And the rest left their wives and their children and fled.

13 And it came to pass that those who tarried with their wives and their children caused that their fair daughters should stand forth and plead with the Lamanites that they would not slay them.

14 And it came to pass that the Lamanites had compassion on them, for they were charmed with the beauty of their women.

### ***Comments***

Noah and those who fled with him are overtaken and they engage with the Lamanites. It is unlikely that those who went with Noah were the younger men or the warriors. They were more likely to have been the elites, and perhaps not as experienced in combat. In any case, it became clear to Noah that they would be slain, so Noah commands that they leave the women and children and flee.

Certainly, this appears reprehensible. It was sufficiently difficult for some that they could not do it and remained with the women and children. However, what followed might have been part of the plan in leaving. If we give Noah the benefit of the doubt that Mormon does not want to accord him, it is possible that Noah expected that the pleading of the women might be effective. It is a tactic that we saw at a time when Nephi's brothers and Ismael's sons wanted to kill him, and the women intervened. We will see it again with another group of women. It is possible that this was understood as an acceptable means of surrender and cessation of conflict.

### ***Mosiah 19:15–16***

15 Therefore the Lamanites did spare their lives, and took them captives and carried them back to the land of Nephi, and granted unto them that they might possess the land, under the conditions that they would deliver up king Noah into the hands of the Lamanites, and deliver up their property, even one half of all they possessed, one half of their gold, and their silver, and all their precious things, and thus they should pay tribute to the king of the Lamanites from year to year.

16 And now there was one of the sons of the king among those that were taken captive, whose name was Limhi.

## *Comments*

The beginning of verse 15 underscores how the Book of Mormon differs from more modern cultural expectations. It begins as might be expected with the taking of prisoners. The difference is where they were taken.

Modern assumptions would have captives taken back to the land of the victors. These prisoners are taken back to their city. Modern assumptions would have the captives imprisoned, but these are returned to their lands and lives. Modern assumptions would have the victors looting the city and taking anything of value, but these captives surrender half. That is clearly a large amount, but significantly different from losing everything.

Each of these actions differs from modern expectations but are perfectly in line with common practice in Mesoamerica. The purpose of conquest in Mesoamerica was to set up lines of tribute. The genius of that system was that the conquerors received goods not only immediately after the conquest but created an ongoing stream of goods. Leaving the people in place allowed for the continued creation of the goods and redirected a percentage of them from the inhabitants to the victors.

## **King Noah Dies by Fire**

### ***Mosiah 19:17–21***

17 And now Limhi was desirous that his father should not be destroyed; nevertheless, Limhi was not ignorant of the iniquities of his father, he himself being a just man.

18 And it came to pass that Gideon sent men into the wilderness secretly, to search for the king and those that were with him. And it came to pass that they met the people in the wilderness, all save the king and his priests.

19 Now they had sworn in their hearts that they would return to the land of Nephi, and if their wives and their children were slain, and also those that had tarried with them, that they would seek revenge, and also perish with them.

20 And the king commanded them that they should not return; and they were angry with the king, and caused that he should suffer, even unto death by fire.

21 And they were about to take the priests also and put them to death, and they fled before them.

## *Comments*

The comment that Limhi was a just man appears to place him on the same side of the internal conflict as Gideon, in spite of being the son of the king. Nevertheless, Limhi did not desire that his father should die, even though it appears clear that he was happy enough to have deposed him. Gideon is clearly important in Limhi's new government from the beginning, and it is to him that Limhi turns in order to send people to find Noah and the priests.

What they find is some of the people who fled with Noah, but who then rebelled. The story is told quickly, and the fact that they executed Noah by fire is given to provide the fulfilment of Abinadi's prophecy that the king would be like a garment in a fire (Mosiah 12:10).

The short line telling that the priests were to be put to death, but fled, becomes important later in the relation. As Mormon is writing, he certainly knows that they will have an important role to play later, so he makes certain to tell his readers that they have escaped.

### ***Mosiah 19:22–25***

22 And it came to pass that they were about to return to the land of Nephi, and they met the men of Gideon. And the men of Gideon told them of all that had happened to their wives and their children; and that the Lamanites had granted unto them that they might possess the land by paying a tribute to the Lamanites of one half of all they possessed.

23 And the people told the men of Gideon that they had slain the king, and his priests had fled from them farther into the wilderness.

24 And it came to pass that after they had ended the ceremony, that they returned to the land of Nephi, rejoicing, because their wives and their children were not slain; and they told Gideon what they had done to the king.

25 And it came to pass that the king of the Lamanites made an oath unto them, that his people should not slay them.

### ***Comments***

As those men who had killed Noah returned toward their homes, they met Gideon's men. The story is told, and Mormon abridges it severely. Mormon is providing historical details that will be important to future aspects of the story he intends to tell.

The most confusing passage is verse 24, which says, "After they had ended the ceremony . . . they returned to the land of Nephi." Royal Skousen has suggested that the word *ceremony* should be rather seen as *sermon*. Frankly, all explanations fall short of full understanding. We simply don't have enough information to understand what happened.

What we can see from these verses is that something happened when the two groups who had been inhabitants of Lehi-Nephi met and exchanged information. Only after stating that they returned home do we have the statement that the king of the Lamanites swore an oath not to slay them. There is no information on why that should have happened either.

It is most probable that the information in the original record of Zeniff would have explained these events more fully. They are peripheral to Mormon's interests, however, and it appears that he abridged out a little too much information for our modern historical interests.

## Limhi's People Become Lamanite Vassals

### *Mosiah 19:26–29*

26 And also Limhi, being the son of the king, having the kingdom conferred upon him by the people, made oath unto the king of the Lamanites that his people should pay tribute unto him, even one half of all they possessed.

27 And it came to pass that Limhi began to establish the kingdom and to establish peace among his people.

28 And the king of the Lamanites set guards round about the land, that he might keep the people of Limhi in the land, that they might not depart into the wilderness; and he did support his guards out of the tribute which he did receive from the Nephites.

29 And now king Limhi did have continual peace in his kingdom for the space of two years, that the Lamanites did not molest them nor seek to destroy them.

### *Comments*

Limhi was the son of the king, and presumably king by birthright. Nevertheless, it is the people who are said to confer the kingdom upon him. It is probable that this is a reference to the voice of the people, a process that we will see in Zarahemla in more detail before the end of the book of Mosiah. In short, even kings who ruled according to inheritance were supported by the voice of the people. The voice of the people was not a democratic process of voting, but perhaps more a confirmation.

The result of this part of the story is that conflict ends, both internal and external. The statement that there were two years of continual peace only highlights the fact that the peace will soon be disrupted.

There is no chapter break at this point in the 1830 edition. Orson Pratt divided the chapter at this point because there is a shift to a new story in our chapter 20. However, it is a story that has already been set up with the indication that the priests of Noah had escaped Noah's fate and fled. The next chapter picks up their story and its impact upon the people of Limhi.

# Mosiah 20

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## Lamanite Maidens Kidnapped

### *Mosiah 20:1–2*

1 Now there was a place in Shemlon where the daughters of the Lamanites did gather themselves together to sing, and to dance, and to make themselves merry.

2 And it came to pass that there was one day a small number of them gathered together to sing and to dance.

### *Comments*

Mormon gives us the essential information that will set up this episode. There are a number of young women gathered together in a place that appears to be unguarded. Mormon doesn't tell us why, and perhaps he did not know.

The basics of the event suggest that there was some ritual action taking place that involved young women. Perhaps it was a rite of passage. The fact that there “was a place in Shemlon” suggests that this was a recurring event, again underscoring the ritual nature. The enactment of a ritual, such as a rite of passage, would give us the reason behind the periodic gathering, and the reason that it would appear to include women young enough to be described as daughters rather than as women.

### *Mosiah 20:3–5*

3 And now the priests of king Noah, being ashamed to return to the city of Nephi, yea, and also fearing that the people would slay them, therefore they durst not return to their wives and their children.

4 And having tarried in the wilderness, and having discovered the daughters of the Lamanites, they laid and watched them;

5 And when there were but few of them gathered together to dance, they came forth out of their secret places and took them and carried them into the wilderness; yea, twenty and four of the daughters of the Lamanites they carried into the wilderness.

### *Comments*

Mormon had made certain that he noted that the priests of Noah escaped during the episode when Noah had been taken and executed. The reason it was important to note their escape was so that this part of the story could be told. The priests had escaped, but they were on their own. They had left family behind and could not return for them. They were forced into a new life.

We cannot know if they were searching for a way to find wives, or if the chance of finding this place of ritual simply provided an opportunity they chose to use to their advantage. What they did was steal away the daughters of the Lamanites. A similar story of the abduction of young women who were dancing is told in Judges 21:16–23. It is possible that the story from Israel's history was known to the priests and may have served as their justification.

### ***Mosiah 20:6–7***

6 And it came to pass that when the Lamanites found that their daughters had been missing, they were angry with the people of Limhi, for they thought it was the people of Limhi.

7 Therefore they sent their armies forth; yea, even the king himself went before his people; and they went up to the land of Nephi to destroy the people of Limhi.

### *Comments*

The disappearance of their daughters obviously affected the Lamanites. They would have understood that they were taken because the alternative would have been some attack by wild beasts. That, however, would have left traces and probably not resulted in all of the daughters vanishing. The clear conclusion was that they were taken and the Lamanites blamed the obvious enemy, the people of Limhi.

Whatever the conditions of the peace that had been established, this was certainly a breach of that peace and therefore the Lamanites came with armies. Certainly, they intended to recover their daughters, but their anger also dictated that they enact revenge, hence the desire to destroy the people of Limhi.

### ***Mosiah 20:8–11***

8 And now Limhi had discovered them from the tower, even all their preparations for war did he discover; therefore he gathered his people together, and laid wait for them in the fields and in the forests.

9 And it came to pass that when the Lamanites had come up, that the people of Limhi began to fall upon them from their waiting places, and began to slay them.

10 And it came to pass that the battle became exceedingly sore, for they fought like lions for their prey.

11 And it came to pass that the people of Limhi began to drive the Lamanites before them; yet they were not half so numerous as the Lamanites. But they fought for their lives, and for their wives, and for their children; therefore they exerted themselves and like dragons did they fight.

### *Comments*

The tower in the city makes its second important appearance, again discovering an approaching army of Lamanites. Limhi prepares his people as well as he is able to defend their homes. Verse 11 notes that even though they were outnumbered, they began to have success because their stakes were so high. They were fighting for their homes and families.

There are two interesting analogies used in these verses. In both verses 10 and 11 Mormon describes the people of Limhi fighting. The first metaphor is that they “fought like lions for their prey.” The second is that “like dragons did they fight.” Modern readers can understand the imagery. We have some notion of powerful lions fighting for prey, and even though we understand dragons as fictional animals, we understand that they could be considered fierce fighters.

We do not know what the references were in the language of the plates. What we have is the English translation, but there were no lions, and the concept of dragons was also an Old World image. This suggests that we have the metaphors in a translation that we could understand, but that the original metaphor might have been animals with which the Nephites and Lamanites would have been familiar. For lions, it is easy to suggest that it could have been a jaguar, which was one of the most powerful New World predators. The second could easily have been a crocodile, which appears frequently in Mesoamerican imagery. Both are plausible for the plate-language metaphors.

## **Confrontation between Limhi and the Lamanite King**

### ***Mosiah 20:12–13***

12 And it came to pass that they found the king of the Lamanites among the number of their dead; yet he was not dead, having been wounded and left upon the ground, so speedy was the flight of his people.

13 And they took him and bound up his wounds, and brought him before Limhi, and said: Behold, here is the king of the Lamanites; he having received a wound has fallen among their dead, and they have left him; and behold, we have brought him before you; and now let us slay him.

### *Comments*

Earlier, in verse 7, Mormon made sure to note that the king of the Lamanites was at the head of his army. That information leads directly to this episode where the king is among the injured. In later Maya descriptions, the kings are often depicted as warriors, and while some of them were more likely only symbolically

present, it would not have been surprising to find a king on the battlefield. Note that later in the book of Alma we will have Alma<sub>2</sub> himself in battle.

That the king was wounded, but not dead, is also part of ancient warfare. The types of injuries that would debilitate occurred frequently, and the actual dead were often fewer than the injured. In this case it is fortuitous, and perhaps divinely fortuitous, that he is alive, even though injured.

The people of Limhi suggest that Limhi kill the king. Although they could have done so on the battlefield, it was more appropriate for their king to pass judgment on another king. Therefore, while they suggest that Limhi kill him, they nevertheless allow Limhi to make his own declaration of the Lamanite king's fate.

### ***Mosiah 20:14–16***

14 But Limhi said unto them: Ye shall not slay him, but bring him hither that I may see him. And they brought him. And Limhi said unto him: What cause have ye to come up to war against my people? Behold, my people have not broken the oath that I made unto you; therefore, why should ye break the oath which ye made unto my people?

15 And now the king said: I have broken the oath because thy people did carry away the daughters of my people; therefore, in my anger I did cause my people to come up to war against thy people.

16 And now Limhi had heard nothing concerning this matter; therefore he said: I will search among my people and whosoever has done this thing shall perish. Therefore he caused a search to be made among his people.

### ***Comments***

The wisdom of allowing the king to live is demonstrated when Limhi is able to ask for an explanation. The important subtext behind the exchange is the importance of oaths. The people of Limhi and the people of the Lamanite king had made mutual oaths to each other. Limhi declares that his people have kept their oath and asks what could have caused the Lamanite king to break his.

The answer is that the Lamanite king saw the kidnapping of the daughters as a violation of Limhi's oath and therefore he was retaliating. Limhi appears to see that as a violation of the oath as well but not one that he had authorized. Thus, he declares that he has kept the oath and searches for those who had not.

## **Blame for Kidnapping Associated with Noah's Priests**

### ***Mosiah 20:17–21***

17 Now when Gideon had heard these things, he being the king's captain, he went forth and said unto the king: I pray thee forbear, and do not search this people, and lay not this thing to their charge.



18 For do ye not remember the priests of thy father, whom this people sought to destroy? And are they not in the wilderness? And are not they the ones who have stolen the daughters of the Lamanites?

19 And now, behold, and tell the king of these things, that he may tell his people that they may be pacified towards us; for behold they are already preparing to come against us; and behold also there are but few of us.

20 And behold, they come with their numerous hosts; and except the king doth pacify them towards us we must perish.

21 For are not the words of Abinadi fulfilled, which he prophesied against us—and all this because we would not hearken unto the words of the Lord, and turn from our iniquities?

### *Comments*

Gideon realizes that it must have been the priests of Noah who had stolen the Lamanite daughters. He was correct, but we do not know if it was only suspicion or if there were some evidence of it.

In any case, it is Gideon's reasoning that is important. First, he wants to explain the problem to the Lamanite king. Perhaps if the Lamanite king understood that the people of Limhi had kept their oath, but that it was a separate and disgraced group who had done this, the peace might be destroyed.

The rest of the argument focuses on the alternative, which is an even larger army and even more destruction. While Gideon is attempting to forestall that event, he ties it into Abinadi's prophecy of doom upon the people. Abinadi had said that they would be "scattered to and fro" in Mosiah 17:17. Gideon sees this current battle, and the possible future engagements, as fulfillment of Abinadi's prophecies.

### ***Mosiah 20:22–26***

22 And now let us pacify the king, and we fulfil the oath which we have made unto him; for it is better that we should be in bondage than that we should lose our lives; therefore, let us put a stop to the shedding of so much blood.

23 And now Limhi told the king all the things concerning his father, and the priests that had fled into the wilderness, and attributed the carrying away of their daughters to them.

24 And it came to pass that the king was pacified towards his people; and he said unto them: Let us go forth to meet my people, without arms; and I swear unto you with an oath that my people shall not slay thy people.

25 And it came to pass that they followed the king, and went forth without arms to meet the Lamanites. And it came to pass that they did meet the Lamanites; and the king of the Lamanites did bow himself down before them, and did plead in behalf of the people of Limhi.

26 And when the Lamanites saw the people of Limhi, that they were without arms, they had compassion on them and were pacified towards them, and returned with their king in peace to their own land.

### *Comments*

In verse 22 the important statement is that Gideon believes that they can explain that “we fulfil the oath which we have made.” This is an issue of oath-taking. Just as when Zoram calmed down when Nephi swore an oath that he would be family, these oaths were the foundations of firm understanding. It was important that the people of Limhi be seen as fulfilling, rather than breaking their oath.

The Lamanite king was able to see reason. The result is yet another oath. The Lamanite king’s people had felt justified in desiring to kill the people of Limhi because of an apparent broken oath. With the oaths in place, peace could resume.

There is no chapter break at this point in the 1830 edition.

# Mosiah 21

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## Renewed Conflict with the Lamanites

### *Mosiah 21:1–4*

1 And it came to pass that Limhi and his people returned to the city of Nephi, and began to dwell in the land again in peace.

2 And it came to pass that after many days the Lamanites began again to be stirred up in anger against the Nephites, and they began to come into the borders of the land round about.

3 Now they durst not slay them, because of the oath which their king had made unto Limhi; but they would smite them on their cheeks, and exercise authority over them; and began to put heavy burdens upon their backs, and drive them as they would a dumb ass—

4 Yea, all this was done that the word of the Lord might be fulfilled.

### *Comments*

Mormon continues his interest in conflict. In this case, he notes that the people of Limhi live in peace so that he can contrast that peace with the conflict which is coming. What Mormon does not say about this new conflict is that it is probably simply a continuation of the conditions that created the peace prior to the abduction of the Lamanite daughters. The people of Limhi had an oath of peace with the Lamanites that had included a heavy burden of tribute. Those conditions had not changed, and perhaps individual Lamanites still harbored resentment and suspicions about the abduction of the young women. Thus, the heavy burdens placed on the people of Limhi were a continuation of the previous requirement to surrender half of all that they owned or created.

What is important for Mormon is that this condition of subservience came as a fulfilment to prophecy, and a confirmation that Abinadi was not only a prophet, but a prophet who had taught as Yahweh had required.

### *Mosiah 21:5–8*

5 And now the afflictions of the Nephites were great, and there was no way that they could deliver themselves out of their hands, for the Lamanites had surrounded them on every side.

6 And it came to pass that the people began to murmur with the king because of their afflictions; and they began to be desirous to go against them to battle. And they did afflict the king sorely with their complaints; therefore he granted unto them that they should do according to their desires.

7 And they gathered themselves together again, and put on their armor, and went forth against the Lamanites to drive them out of their land.

8 And it came to pass that the Lamanites did beat them, and drove them back, and slew many of them.

### *Comments*

The heavy burdens were sufficient that the people of Limhi rebelled against them. Mormon's statement that they could not deliver themselves because they were surrounded suggests that they were willing to abandon their lands and escape. While not mentioned at this point, it is clear that they were looking to return to Zarahemla.

At this point, however, they could see no way to escape. Therefore, they desired to obtain some independence through force of arms. That would break their oath. Perhaps surprisingly, they were willing to do so. That suggests that the conditions were indeed onerous.

They do attempt to fight, but they are driven back. The previous encounters had them victorious, but subtly involved in those victories is that they were defensive. This was an offensive military movement. It did not succeed.

### ***Mosiah 21:9–12***

9 And now there was a great mourning and lamentation among the people of Limhi, the widow mourning for her husband, the son and the daughter mourning for their father, and the brothers for their brethren.

10 Now there were a great many widows in the land, and they did cry mightily from day to day, for a great fear of the Lamanites had come upon them.

11 And it came to pass that their continual cries did stir up the remainder of the people of Limhi to anger against the Lamanites; and they went again to battle, but they were driven back again, suffering much loss.

12 Yea, they went again even the third time, and suffered in the like manner; and those that were not slain returned again to the city of Nephi.

### *Comments*

The results of war are typically terrible, even in victory. However, in defeat there is little to comfort the terrible losses. In this case, the loss of life was great, and great enough to increase the desperation to escape from the Lamanites. Sadly, they chose the same failed method, and attempted to fight their way free. They were defeated. They tried again. They were defeated again.

## Limhi's People Humble Themselves

### *Mosiah 21:13–15*

13 And they did humble themselves even to the dust, subjecting themselves to the yoke of bondage, submitting themselves to be smitten, and to be driven to and fro, and burdened, according to the desires of their enemies.

14 And they did humble themselves even in the depths of humility; and they did cry mightily to God; yea, even all the day long did they cry unto their God that he would deliver them out of their afflictions.

15 And now the Lord was slow to hear their cry because of their iniquities; nevertheless the Lord did hear their cries, and began to soften the hearts of the Lamanites that they began to ease their burdens; yet the Lord did not see fit to deliver them out of bondage.

### *Comments*

In verse 13, Mormon indicates that they were being “driven to and fro.” Mormon intentionally echoes language from Abinadi’s curse that was recorded in Mosiah 17:17. Mormon continues to emphasize the awful fulfillment of prophecy upon this people. Modern readers must understand that many ancient cultures understood sin to be assessed communally as much, and perhaps more, than individually. Thus, although not every individual was guilty of desiring Abinadi’s death, as a people they were culpable. Therefore, the curse was applied to the community.

However, even though that dire curse was relentlessly and terribly applied, it was not permanent. In verse 14 Mormon begins the process of showing the people’s repentance. Under the pressure of their trials, they humbled themselves. They had no other option. They finally turn to Yahweh for deliverance.

What is interesting is that Mormon says that the Lord “was slow to hear their cry.” That should be seen as a literary reference with the meaning that God did not immediately grant their request. It would not be actually true that God did not hear, but rather that God’s purposes perhaps worked with human time and circumstances. There was a process that began to answer their prayer, rather than a transcendent miracle for which they were doubtless hoping.

### *Mosiah 21:16–17*

16 And it came to pass that they began to prosper by degrees in the land, and began to raise grain more abundantly, and flocks, and herds, that they did not suffer with hunger.

17 Now there was a great number of women, more than there was of men; therefore king Limhi commanded that every man should impart to the support of the widows and their children, that they might not perish with hunger; and this they did because of the greatness of their number that had been slain.

## *Comments*

That the redemption of the people of Limhi had begun is testified in the statement that “they began to prosper by degrees in the land.” The covenant of the land declared that the righteous would prosper. That also suggests that prospering was evidence of righteousness. In this case, the degrees of improvement in their prosperity are to be seen as parallel to the degrees of improvement in their righteousness.

Further indication that they were truly humbled and changed is that they began to impart of their substance to others. These were the people who, under King Noah, had been happy in a worldly sense. While Mormon did not discuss the people, the worldliness of Noah and the priests was intended to be representative, not exceptional. The Nephite ideal was egalitarianism, and when the text describes the Nephites becoming more socially stratified, it is always a prelude to a form of apostasy. The opposite, as revealed in the people of Limhi, proves the case. Righteousness sees people care for each other and does not have them deem one person above another.

## ***Mosiah 21:18–22***

18 Now the people of Limhi kept together in a body as much as it was possible, and secured their grain and their flocks;

19 And the king himself did not trust his person without the walls of the city, unless he took his guards with him, fearing that he might by some means fall into the hands of the Lamanites.

20 And he caused that his people should watch the land round about, that by some means they might take those priests that fled into the wilderness, who had stolen the daughters of the Lamanites, and that had caused such a great destruction to come upon them.

21 For they were desirous to take them that they might punish them; for they had come into the land of Nephthi by night, and carried off their grain and many of their precious things; therefore they laid wait for them.

22 And it came to pass that there was no more disturbance between the Lamanites and the people of Limhi, even until the time that Ammon and his brethren came into the land.

## *Comments*

These verses serve to close one story and begin another. It is a subtle transition because it uses the events of the previous story as the background for the next. The tensions with the Lamanites were high, and after three significant defeats, the confidence of the people of Limhi was low. Not only was there fear of the Lamanites, but the former priests of Noah had created deadly mischief before, and there were missing grains and other things that were ascribed to the thieving priests.

All these events will explain how it was that when Limhi was outside the city that he had armed guards when Ammon and his brethren came into the land. At this point, the record of Zeniff catches up with the events that Mormon had already recorded using Ammon’s record, perhaps as entered into the large plates of Nephi.

## Ammon Meets Limhi

### ***Mosiah 21:23–25***

23 And the king having been without the gates of the city with his guard, discovered Ammon and his brethren; and supposing them to be priests of Noah therefore he caused that they should be taken, and bound, and cast into prison. And had they been the priests of Noah he would have caused that they should be put to death.

24 But when he found that they were not, but that they were his brethren, and had come from the land of Zarahemla, he was filled with exceedingly great joy.

25 Now king Limhi had sent, previous to the coming of Ammon, a small number of men to search for the land of Zarahemla; but they could not find it, and they were lost in the wilderness.

### ***Comments***

Verses 23 and 24 reprise the scene Mormon told earlier from Ammon’s perspective. The Limhite side of the story explains why the first impulse was to capture Ammon, rather than celebrate his arrival. That certainly happened when they knew who he was, and verse 24’s statement that Limhi was “filled with exceedingly great joy” was displayed in both versions of the account.

This story is told according to a different perspective and from a different record. However, Mormon is editing the material from both records, and repetitions of events are typically intentional. In this case, much of the story he has told about Limhi’s people sets up this next event.

Because of all the burdens placed upon his people, Limhi and his people had tried to escape. One attempt resulted in three military defeats. Another failed attempt was to have Zarahemla come to their aid. That attempt is the next story to be told. Limhi sent “a small number of men to search for the land of Zarahemla, but they could not find it.” Perhaps as a part of God’s plan to soften their hearts and to encourage repentance, even that attempt failed.

Although it failed to find Zarahemla, what they found became very important in Mormon’s construction of the remainder of Nephite history.

### ***Mosiah 21:26–27***

26 Nevertheless, they did find a land which had been peopled; yea, a land which was covered with dry bones; yea, a land which had been peopled and which had been destroyed; and they, having supposed it to be the land of Zarahemla, returned to the land of Nephi, having arrived in the borders of the land not many days before the coming of Ammon.

27 And they brought a record with them, even a record of the people whose bones they had found; and it was engraven on plates of ore.

## *Comments*

The small party of men attempted to find Zarahemla but failed. What they did find was the land of a destroyed people. They brought back souvenirs from that destroyed land. The most important of which was a record. That record we learn later was a record of Ether, last of the Jaredites.

The story of the men getting lost is an interesting geographical conundrum. The land of Nephi is at a higher elevation than Zarahemla, and Zarahemla was built near the river Sidon. The clues in the text suggest that the river may have had its headwaters in between the lands of Nephi and Zarahemla. The people of Limhi are only a generation separated from the people of Zarahemla, and it is possible that there were some alive who had made the journey. The instructions from those elderly might have been something like “go up to the mountains, and find the river, follow the river to Zarahemla, you can’t miss it.” They missed it.

Scholarly consensus has the land of Nephi in highland Guatemala. There is a mountain range that they might go to that just so happens to contain the headwaters of two major rivers that are about thirty kilometers apart. The best explanation for how this party could possibly get lost suggests that they simply followed the wrong river. No matter which of the two they would have followed, they would end up in a territory that had belonged to an older civilization that had been destroyed by Limhi’s time.

## ***Mosiah 21:28–30***

28 And now Limhi was again filled with joy on learning from the mouth of Ammon that king Mosiah had a gift from God, whereby he could interpret such engravings; yea, and Ammon also did rejoice.

29 Yet Ammon and his brethren were filled with sorrow because so many of their brethren had been slain;

30 And also that king Noah and his priests had caused the people to commit so many sins and iniquities against God; and they also did mourn for the death of Abinadi; and also for the departure of Alma and the people that went with him, who had formed a church of God through the strength and power of God, and faith on the words which had been spoken by Abinadi.

## *Comments*

The earlier version of the story of the lost expedition is given in Mosiah 8:9–13. The important overlap is the question of translation. There was a record that must have information, but no one could read it. In Mosiah 8:11–12 Limhi twice asks if Ammon knows of anyone who can translate it. In both retellings, Ammon declares that there is such a one. King Mosiah<sub>2</sub> had the means wherewith he could translate.

The flashback history is complete. Mormon has caught up to the story with which he began this flashback. Now, Mormon must move the story forward. As a transition, Mormon declares the communal sorrow for their sins, and importantly, for the communal sin that led to Abinadi’s death.



## Limhi's People Covenant

### ***Mosiah 21:31–32***

31 Yea, they did mourn for their departure, for they knew not whither they had fled. Now they would have gladly joined with them, for they themselves had entered into a covenant with God to serve him and keep his commandments.

32 And now since the coming of Ammon, king Limhi had also entered into a covenant with God, and also many of his people, to serve him and keep his commandments.

### *Comments*

Mormon told of the conditions that led to the people's repentance. He wrote of the beginnings of prosperity that witness to the sincerity of that repentance. Now he declares the final stage of their change of heart. They enter into a covenant.

The covenant appears to be repeated. In verse 31 "they themselves had entered into a covenant with God to serve him and keep his commandments." In the very next verse, we again have "entered into a covenant with God . . . to serve him and keep his commandments." The only difference is that in verse 31 the people are more generic. In verse 32 it is specifically Limhi as the king and, therefore, representative of his people. Perhaps the repetition is for emphasis. Perhaps the addition of Limhi emphasizes that it is an official act on behalf of the people.

The phrase "also many of his people," seems to exclude some from the covenant. There is no indication that there were any who resisted, and the hope of temporal salvation was much more likely to have been universal. I suggest that the intent was to focus on Limhi and his people, not to suggest that there were any who dissented.

### ***Mosiah 21:33–36***

33 And it came to pass that king Limhi and many of his people were desirous to be baptized; but there was none in the land that had authority from God. And Ammon declined doing this thing, considering himself an unworthy servant.

34 Therefore they did not at that time form themselves into a church, waiting upon the Spirit of the Lord. Now they were desirous to become even as Alma and his brethren, who had fled into the wilderness.

35 They were desirous to be baptized as a witness and a testimony that they were willing to serve God with all their hearts; nevertheless they did prolong the time; and an account of their baptism shall be given hereafter.

36 And now all the study of Ammon and his people, and king Limhi and his people, was to deliver themselves out of the hands of the Lamanites and from bondage.

## *Comments*

The result of the covenant was to desire baptism. Interestingly, Ammon declines. The important background to this story is made clear in verse 34 where Alma<sub>1</sub>'s people are referenced. Alma<sub>1</sub> had created something that is here called a church, and used baptism as a declaration of the entrance into the covenants associated with that congregation. Limhi's people contrasted themselves with Alma<sub>1</sub>'s people in that they had perhaps consented to Abinadi's death, and had suffered the consequences. Alma<sub>1</sub>'s people had repented and had escaped. That was not both the temporal and spiritual desire of the people of Limhi.

In addition to Ammon's declaration that he was an unworthy servant, it is probable that Ammon hesitates because he is unfamiliar with what Alma<sub>1</sub> has done, and creating this kind of a covenant rightly belongs to his king, and not to him.

This ends the chapter than began with our chapter 17. There is no particular reason evident for the end of the chapter. The next chapter begins the story of this people's return to Zarahemla. I suggest that the change in chapter was due to Mormon returning to the large plate account. He has been working with the record of Zeniff but has now returned to the point where he clearly had Ammon's account. Mormon does not indicate when he returns to the large plates, but only when he uses a different source. Therefore, it would be consistent with his practice to create a new chapter when he moved to a different source, and it would be unmarked because it was a return to the large plates as the source for the story.

# Mosiah 22

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## Escaping Lamanite Bondage

### *Mosiah 22:1–3*

1 And now it came to pass that Ammon and king Limhi began to consult with the people how they should deliver themselves out of bondage; and even they did cause that all the people should gather themselves together; and this they did that they might have the voice of the people concerning the matter.

2 And it came to pass that they could find no way to deliver themselves out of bondage, except it were to take their women and children, and their flocks, and their herds, and their tents, and depart into the wilderness; for the Lamanites being so numerous, it was impossible for the people of Limhi to contend with them, thinking to deliver themselves out of bondage by the sword.

3 Now it came to pass that Gideon went forth and stood before the king, and said unto him: Now O king, thou hast hitherto hearkened unto my words many times when we have been contending with our brethren, the Lamanites.

### *Comments*

As the story turns to the way that the people of Limhi are saved from their dire circumstances, there is a suggestion that they attempt yet again the method that failed three times in a row. Perhaps they felt that they had repented sufficiently and that the Lord might be on their side this time. Even with their repentant state, the previous efforts had diminished the number of men who could be mustered into a fighting army. They were even weaker than they had been in the previous failed attempts.

As they attempt to find a way out, Gideon comes back into the story. As a military man he is clearly aware of the difficulties of fighting the Lamanites. He calls upon the king to make a suggestion and reminds the king that he has the people's interests at heart.

### *Mosiah 22:4–8*

4 And now O king, if thou hast not found me to be an unprofitable servant, or if thou hast hitherto listened to my words in any degree, and they have been of service to thee, even so I desire that thou wouldst listen to my words at this time, and I will be thy servant and deliver this people out of bondage.

5 And the king granted unto him that he might speak. And Gideon said unto him:  
6 Behold the back pass, through the back wall, on the back side of the city. The Lamanites, or the guards of the Lamanites, by night are drunken; therefore let us send a proclamation among all this people that they gather together their flocks and herds, that they may drive them into the wilderness by night.  
7 And I will go according to thy command and pay the last tribute of wine to the Lamanites, and they will be drunken; and we will pass through the secret pass on the left of their camp when they are drunken and asleep.  
8 Thus we will depart with our women and our children, our flocks, and our herds into the wilderness; and we will travel around the land of Shilom.

### *Comments*

Gideon has a plan that relies on deception rather than pure force. The idea of getting the Lamanites drunk will appear again as a ruse in the Book of Mormon. It appears to be a temptation to which they were susceptible. In later Aztec chronicles there are strong statements against those who would drink to excess, but the very fact that there are such strong condemnations of drunkenness suggests a social evil that was a continuing threat. Gideon planned to use that tendency to the Limhites' advantage.

Gideon suggests taking not only the people, but the flocks and herds. That is a lot of extra baggage that might burden them. He is apparently counting on a good head start over the Lamanite pursuers. It is also an indication that they are intending to begin a life in a new area. They do not intend to arrive completely destitute in their new homes.

### ***Mosiah 22:9–12***

9 And it came to pass that the king hearkened unto the words of Gideon.  
10 And king Limhi caused that his people should gather their flocks together; and he sent the tribute of wine to the Lamanites; and he also sent more wine, as a present unto them; and they did drink freely of the wine which king Limhi did send unto them.  
11 And it came to pass that the people of king Limhi did depart by night into the wilderness with their flocks and their herds, and they went round about the land of Shilom in the wilderness, and bent their course towards the land of Zarahemla, being led by Ammon and his brethren.  
12 And they had taken all their gold, and silver, and their precious things, which they could carry, and also their provisions with them, into the wilderness; and they pursued their journey.

### *Comments*

The plan is put into effect. In addition to the flocks and herds, verse 12 indicates that they also took their “gold, and silver, and their precious things.” They believed that they would be able to stay ahead of their pursuers, even with animals to herd and wealth to carry. This was not a desperate flight, but a controlled exodus.

It is certainly plausible that they counted upon Yahweh's protection in this journey. They may also have decided that the Lamanites might not mount a serious pursuit. They may have also understood that they no longer had options, and that the result of the pursuit might either be their success or their near total demise. They had no more options and took the best possible one.

### ***Mosiah 22:13–16***

13 And after being many days in the wilderness they arrived in the land of Zarahemla, and joined Mosiah's people, and became his subjects.

14 And it came to pass that Mosiah received them with joy; and he also received their records, and also the records which had been found by the people of Limhi.

15 And now it came to pass when the Lamanites had found that the people of Limhi had departed out of the land by night, that they sent an army into the wilderness to pursue them;

16 And after they had pursued them two days, they could no longer follow their tracks; therefore they were lost in the wilderness.

### ***Comments***

The flight is successful. They arrive in Zarahemla and are accepted into the Nephite community. Mormon finishes this episode with three details. The first is simply that they were accepted. The second is perhaps even more important for Mormon's text, because he notes that the records come with them. This not only includes the record of Zeniff that Mormon used for much of the story, but also includes the plates of Ether that will provide an important theme in Mormon's text.

The third, and the final closure of the story, is that the Lamanites did attempt to follow, but they could no longer find the tracks. The inability to find the tracks was miraculous. That many people and animals would have created clear and massive tracks. Nevertheless, divine favor erased them.

The lost Lamanite army will make its appearance later in the next chapter.



# Mosiah 23

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## ***Mosiah 23: Header***

*An account of Alma and the people of the Lord, who were driven into the wilderness by the people of King Noah.*

## ***Comments***

The original chapter in 1830 consisted of the material in our current chapters 23 through 27. Our current edition correctly notes that the account of Alma<sup>1</sup> only covers the material in our current chapters 23 and 24. Orson Pratt recognized that Mormon returned to the large plate material in our chapter 25. Mormon does not indicate when he returns to that source, though he has previously created a chapter break when he does. In this case, we can discern that return through the nature of the text rather than the explicit creation of a chapter.

The historical material that Mormon uses for our current chapters 23 and 24 came from the separate record of Alma<sup>1</sup>, and consists of his record of his people. Mormon had previously referenced this information, so we know that he had read it and planned to include it at this location.

## **Alma<sup>1</sup> Rejects Kingship**

### ***Mosiah 23:1–2***

<sup>1</sup> Now Alma, having been warned of the Lord that the armies of king Noah would come upon them, and having made it known to his people, therefore they gathered together their flocks, and took of their grain, and departed into the wilderness before the armies of king Noah.

<sup>2</sup> And the Lord did strengthen them, that the people of king Noah could not overtake them to destroy them.

## ***Comments***

The book of Mosiah is the most complex writing task that Mormon undertook. There are multiple threads of stories that are happening at similar times, but at different places. Telling one story necessarily put Mormon's story out of sync with the others. Thus, there are flashbacks within flashbacks.

Mormon began with the story of Ammon finding the people of Limhi. That event led to the explanation of who those people were; hence the story of Zeniff, then Noah. Telling Noah's story required that we meet Abinadi, and that triggered the story of Alma<sub>1</sub>. After introducing Alma<sub>1</sub>, Mormon set his story aside to finish with Noah and then move to Limhi. When that story caught up to the story of Ammon, he returned to the story of Alma<sub>1</sub>, which began before Limhi became king. It also occurred in a different location and was recorded on a different record.

Even the telling of the complexity is complex. The task Mormon had was to pull all those stories together. They would not be truly unified until both Limhi's people and Alma<sub>1</sub>'s people arrived in Zarahemla.

At this point, Mormon is shifting to Alma<sub>1</sub>'s story, so we move back in time. Mormon had told us that Noah attempted to find Alma<sub>1</sub>'s people, but failed (see Mosiah 18:34 and 19:1). That ending was given from Noah's viewpoint. Now he picks up right after he left off, but from Alma<sub>1</sub>'s point of view.

### ***Mosiah 23:3–5***

3 And they fled eight days' journey into the wilderness.

4 And they came to a land, yea, even a very beautiful and pleasant land, a land of pure water.

5 And they pitched their tents, and began to till the ground, and began to build buildings; yea, they were industrious, and did labor exceedingly.

#### ***Comments***

While discussing Nephi's story of the creation of his people, I noted that he paid attention to an ancient Near Eastern pattern for the establishment of a new people. Nephi's use of the theme led to his paralleling the Lehite exodus with Israel's exodus from Egypt. While Mormon doesn't emphasize the ethnogenetic elements, he nevertheless uses some of that basic outline. Alma<sub>1</sub>'s people flee through the wilderness and arrive at a new land, just as the Nephites had traveled over the water to a new land.

When Nephi wrote of his people arriving in the New World, he wrote that they found what they needed in order to live and that they began to prosper. Alma<sub>1</sub>'s people also come to a new land and begin to settle. They till the ground and began to build buildings. As did the Lehites, the people of Alma<sub>1</sub> began to prosper in their new land. As Mormon describes them, they are a new and righteous people. Because of the promise of the land, of course they would prosper, and their success becomes evidence of their righteousness.

### ***Mosiah 23:6–7***

6 And the people were desirous that Alma should be their king, for he was beloved by his people.



7 But he said unto them: Behold, it is not expedient that we should have a king; for thus saith the Lord: Ye shall not esteem one flesh above another, or one man shall not think himself above another; therefore I say unto you it is not expedient that ye should have a king.

### *Comments*

In Nephi's new community, they desired a king. In Alma<sub>1</sub>'s new community, they also desire a king. Nephi declared that he did not desire to be a king, and Alma<sub>1</sub> similarly declares that he does not want to be a king.

There is a difference, however. Nephi did become a king and established the tradition of kingship among the Nephites. Alma<sub>1</sub> teaches that his people do not need a king. The next several verses explain why he believes that kings are not necessary. This is an important section for Book of Mormon history because before the end of the book of Mosiah we will see these ideas again coming from Mosiah<sub>2</sub>'s mouth as he changes the Nephites from the reign of kings to the reign of judges.

### ***Mosiah 23:8–9***

8 Nevertheless, if it were possible that ye could always have just men to be your kings it would be well for you to have a king.

9 But remember the iniquity of king Noah and his priests; and I myself was caught in a snare, and did many things which were abominable in the sight of the Lord, which caused me sore repentance;

### *Comments*

These two verses present the dilemma of kingship. It should not be suggested that the Book of Mormon is against kingship. It is against the human abuse of the position of king. Alma<sub>1</sub> declares that it is a good system as long as the person who is king is just. While Alma<sub>1</sub> doesn't define what he means by just, it is certain that he had a brass plate indicating that justice and Yahweh were inextricably linked. Therefore, one definition of a just king would be one who followed Yahweh's laws.

Alma<sub>1</sub> had personal experience with an unjust king. Although he had served that king as a priest in his court, he had been awakened to the unjust nature of King Noah. The experience with Abinadi altered everything about Alma<sub>1</sub>'s future. It changed the way he understood scripture, it changed the way he understood kings, and it changed the way he understood the creation of a religious community. It was an experience so personally painful that he declined to become a king because of Noah's bad example.

### ***Mosiah 23:10–12***

10 Nevertheless, after much tribulation, the Lord did hear my cries, and did answer my prayers, and has made me an instrument in his hands in bringing so many of you to a knowledge of his truth.

11 Nevertheless, in this I do not glory, for I am unworthy to glory of myself.

12 And now I say unto you, ye have been oppressed by king Noah, and have been in bondage to him and his priests, and have been brought into iniquity by them; therefore ye were bound with the bands of iniquity.

### *Comments*

Alma<sub>1</sub>'s personal transformation is echoed in the transformation that his people also underwent. They, too, had been under Noah's sway, and they, too, had to make major changes to join this new community. Alma<sub>1</sub> reminds them that they also have reasons to regret the reign of an unjust king. Therefore, they should not desire a king, even though Alma<sub>1</sub> is a just man. Alma<sub>1</sub> is thinking not of himself, but of his people in the future.

Zeniff was a reasonably just king, but his son Noah became the model for an unjust king. Alma<sub>1</sub> might be just, but he could not assure that all who followed as king would continue to be just.

### ***Mosiah 23:13–15***

13 And now as ye have been delivered by the power of God out of these bonds; yea, even out of the hands of king Noah and his people, and also from the bonds of iniquity, even so I desire that ye should stand fast in this liberty wherewith ye have been made free, and that ye trust no man to be a king over you.

14 And also trust no one to be your teacher nor your minister, except he be a man of God, walking in his ways and keeping his commandments.

15 Thus did Alma teach his people, that every man should love his neighbor as himself, that there should be no contention among them.

### *Comments*

Verses 13 and 14 have parallel instructions about who the people should trust. Verse 13 speaks of the political arena and verse 14 speaks of the religious sphere. In both cases, Alma<sub>1</sub> teaches that they do not trust the position, but rather the quality of the person in that position.

In the political realm, Alma<sub>1</sub> sees a danger in the position of king itself. Without knowing the adage that absolute power corrupts absolutely, he understood it and feared it. Alma<sub>1</sub> wanted his people to be able to live under a just leadership based on the person, and not establish a powerful position that could be subverted by an unjust leader.

In the case of religious ideas, the selection of the leadership was similarly based on the righteousness of the person rather than a position. To understand this argument fully, we must remember that even religious positions tended to be hereditary among the Nephites. Even after Mosiah<sub>2</sub> created the rule of judges with a separate leader over religion, positions still tended to be hereditary.

As with most teaching in the Book of Mormon, walking according to Yahweh’s commandments had social implications. Those who walked in God’s ways would “love his neighbor as himself.” Additionally, “there should be no contention among them.”

### ***Mosiah 23:16–18***

16 And now, Alma was their high priest, he being the founder of their church.

17 And it came to pass that none received authority to preach or to teach except it were by him from God. Therefore he consecrated all their priests and all their teachers; and none were consecrated except they were just men.

18 Therefore they did watch over their people, and did nourish them with things pertaining to righteousness.

#### *Comments*

In Mosiah 18:35 we learned that there were about four hundred and fifty people who went with Alma<sub>1</sub>. That is not a very large number. It could sustain an agricultural community, but it is somewhat surprising that they would seek a king with so few people. There was clearly a strong cultural imperative for kings, something that explained the reason Nephi’s people also desired a king. What they apparently had was a theocracy, where Alma<sub>1</sub>, as the high priest was also the de facto head of the government.

As their high priest, he assumed the rights and authority to give others the authority to teach and perform ordinances. In Israel, it would have been the right of a king, but in Alma<sub>1</sub>’s community it rested with Alma<sub>1</sub>, as the combined religious and secular leader. Of course, divine recognition of that authority was also required—but Alma<sub>1</sub>, clearly had received that, even though it is not explicitly described.

Mormon reiterates the rule of just men by noting their actions, which was to care for others. That was part of the definition of a just ruler from verse 15 and it is shown in its fulfilment here.

### ***Mosiah 23:19–20***

19 And it came to pass that they began to prosper exceedingly in the land; and they called the land Helam.

20 And it came to pass that they did multiply and prosper exceedingly in the land of Helam; and they built a city, which they called the city of Helam.

#### *Comments*

The temporary end of the story of the establishment of Alma<sub>1</sub>’s people gives the naming of the land and the fact that “they did multiply and prosper exceedingly.” The reiteration of prosperity continues to highlight their righteousness.

However, real history dictated the story that Mormon told. This idyllic beginning was not the end of the story. There are troubles ahead, and Mormon turns to telling those. Contrary to the people of Limhi, these afflictions will not be due to the fulfillment of prophecy and their communal sin, but rather serve as a demonstration of God’s power in their ultimate deliverance.

### ***Mosiah 23:21–24***

21 Nevertheless the Lord seeth fit to chasten his people; yea, he trieth their patience and their faith.

22 Nevertheless—whosoever putteth his trust in him the same shall be lifted up at the last day. Yea, and thus it was with this people.

23 For behold, I will show unto you that they were brought into bondage, and none could deliver them but the Lord their God, yea, even the God of Abraham and Isaac and of Jacob.

24 And it came to pass that he did deliver them, and he did show forth his mighty power unto them, and great were their rejoicings.

### ***Comments***

Verses 21 through 24 give Mormon’s moral of the story in advance. As he sets out to tell the next phase of their story, Mormon notes that there are times when the Lord will chasten even his righteous people. He doesn’t explain why. He spends his efforts on the result, which is that by continuing to have faith, rather than reject God due to life’s difficulties, then God will lift them up in the end. Therefore, he declares that this will be the message: Yahweh “did deliver them, and he did show forth his mighty power unto them.”

But what of the unasked question of why? Mormon doesn’t answer, but Lehi did. Lehi gave a powerful discourse on the nature of, and the importance of, agency in 2 Nephi chapter 2. Agency is so important that without it there would be no purpose in the creation of the earth (see 2 Nephi 2:12). Although Lehi laid out the need for agency, his sermon did not highlight the unfortunate consequences of agency. God cannot protect us from another’s agency in action. Agency requires that God maintain a light hand on the affairs of the world. God certainly saves his children, and God can help his children overcome the worldly problems associated with agency, but he cannot act in such a way as to void agency. Should he do so, it would “destroy the wisdom of God and his eternal purposes” (2 Nephi 2:12).

Without perhaps understanding that he was giving such an excellent example, Mormon shows that agency operates at times to the detriment of even the righteous. They are not protected from the world at all times. However, through their faithfulness, God can and does save them.

## The Priests of Noah Rule over Alma<sub>1</sub>'s People

### *Mosiah 23:25–29*

25 For behold, it came to pass that while they were in the land of Helam, yea, in the city of Helam, while tilling the land round about, behold an army of the Lamanites was in the borders of the land.

26 Now it came to pass that the brethren of Alma fled from their fields, and gathered themselves together in the city of Helam; and they were much frightened because of the appearance of the Lamanites.

27 But Alma went forth and stood among them, and exhorted them that they should not be frightened, but that they should remember the Lord their God and he would deliver them.

28 Therefore they hushed their fears, and began to cry unto the Lord that he would soften the hearts of the Lamanites, that they would spare them, and their wives, and their children.

29 And it came to pass that the Lord did soften the hearts of the Lamanites. And Alma and his brethren went forth and delivered themselves up into their hands; and the Lamanites took possession of the land of Helam.

### *Comments*

Alma<sub>1</sub> and his people prospered in the land of Helam, but the Lamanites eventually discovered them. Alma<sub>1</sub> surrenders. Why does this happen? How the Lamanites found them is not discussed, but when we remember that the total number of people who began the community were only four hundred and fifty, even with births and perhaps the absorption of some other peoples, they would not have had enough men of fighting age to protect them against the Lamanite army that found them. Sheer numbers would have shown Alma<sub>1</sub> that surrender was the only option.

### *Mosiah 23:30–35*

30 Now the armies of the Lamanites, which had followed after the people of king Limhi, had been lost in the wilderness for many days.

31 And behold, they had found those priests of king Noah, in a place which they called Amulon; and they had begun to possess the land of Amulon and had begun to till the ground.

32 Now the name of the leader of those priests was Amulon.

33 And it came to pass that Amulon did plead with the Lamanites; and he also sent forth their wives, who were the daughters of the Lamanites, to plead with their brethren, that they should not destroy their husbands.

34 And the Lamanites had compassion on Amulon and his brethren, and did not destroy them, because of their wives.

35 And Amulon and his brethren did join the Lamanites, and they were traveling in the wilderness in search of the land of Nephi when they discovered the land of Helam, which was possessed by Alma and his brethren.

### *Comments*

Even during the return in time to tell the story of Alma<sub>1</sub>'s people, Mormon finds he has to also return to an earlier event to explain the current state of affairs. The army that had pursued Alma<sub>1</sub>'s people had become lost, but while they were lost, they came across the priests of Noah. The priests and their stolen wives had begun to till the land. As with other occasions, the women plead for mercy on their husbands, and it is granted.

There is no way to know how much time passed between the abduction and the time they were found, but perhaps it was sufficient that some of the women were pregnant and had learned to live with their new husbands, perhaps even to love them. Certainly, if they were to have children, there were bonds created that were important, thus the women would plead for their husbands in spite of having been their captives.

Mormon tells his short aside because of the role of these priests in the rest of the story of Alma<sub>1</sub>'s people, a role that, otherwise, would have had no explanation.

### ***Mosiah 23:36–39***

36 And it came to pass that the Lamanites promised unto Alma and his brethren, that if they would show them the way which led to the land of Nephi that they would grant unto them their lives and their liberty.

37 But after Alma had shown them the way that led to the land of Nephi the Lamanites would not keep their promise; but they set guards round about the land of Helam, over Alma and his brethren.

38 And the remainder of them went to the land of Nephi; and a part of them returned to the land of Helam, and also brought with them the wives and the children of the guards who had been left in the land.

39 And the king of the Lamanites had granted unto Amulon that he should be a king and a ruler over his people, who were in the land of Helam; nevertheless he should have no power to do anything contrary to the will of the king of the Lamanites.

### *Comments*

Mormon tells the story in a way that depicts the Lamanites as duplicitous. Actual history might have been a little different. Mormon also indicates that Alma<sub>1</sub> had surrendered his people to the Lamanites, and the resulting Lamanite domination was typical of the tribute system that was typically established. Alma<sub>1</sub>'s people did indeed retain their lives, but they entered into a tribute relationship.

The backstory of the priests of Noah comes to the fore when Amulon, one of those priests, is given the authority of the Lamanite king over Alma<sub>1</sub>'s people.

# Mosiah 24

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## ***Mosiah 24:1–3***

1 And it came to pass that Amulon did gain favor in the eyes of the king of the Lamanites; therefore, the king of the Lamanites granted unto him and his brethren that they should be appointed teachers over his people, yea, even over the people who were in the land of Shemlon, and in the land of Shilom, and in the land of Amulon.

2 For the Lamanites had taken possession of all these lands; therefore, the king of the Lamanites had appointed kings over all these lands.

3 And now the name of the king of the Lamanites was Laman, being called after the name of his father; and therefore he was called king Laman. And he was king over a numerous people.

## *Comments*

There was no chapter break at this point in 1830, thus we have the story of Amulon continuing after his introduction at the end of the previous chapter. After telling the story of the women defending their husbands, the Lamanites accept the former priests into their society. Amulon was apparently the leader, since he had their land named after him. He and the other priests are appointed as teachers.

These verses give us a little glimpse of Lamanite culture, which will become more evident later in the story of the sons of Mosiah<sub>2</sub> and their missionary journey. The king of the Lamanites has inherited his position from his father. Both are named Laman, but we cannot know if that is a personal name or a throne name. In any case, the Lamanite system set up the governance of other lands with local kings who were nevertheless beholden to the main king. This is a type of governmental system that is attested among the Classic Maya, based upon their carved texts.

## **Lamanites Prosper**

## ***Mosiah 24:4–7***

4 And he appointed teachers of the brethren of Amulon in every land which was possessed by his people; and thus the language of Nephi began to be taught among all the people of the Lamanites.

5 And they were a people friendly one with another; nevertheless they knew not God; neither did the brethren of Amulon teach them anything concerning the Lord their God, neither the law of Moses; nor did they teach them the words of Abinadi;

6 But they taught them that they should keep their record, and that they might write one to another.

7 And thus the Lamanites began to increase in riches, and began to trade one with another and wax great, and began to be a cunning and a wise people, as to the wisdom of the world, yea, a very cunning people, delighting in all manner of wickedness and plunder, except it were among their own brethren.

### *Comments*

The former priests of Noah were educated men, and they certainly could read. In antiquity, reading and writing were separate skills, but they clearly wrote. Mormon has them teaching the Nephite language and the ability to read and write to the Lamanites. While it is true that not all peoples in Mesoamerica had a written language, it would be surprising if the Lamanites in the region, suspected to be the land of Nephi, would not have already understood how to read and write. Mormon is indulging in a little ethnocentrism and having the Nephites become the cause of the better aspects of Lamanite culture. While likely not historical, it is certainly a technique that fits comfortably into ancient historical writing.

We also see that the Lamanites continue to fit the basic Nephite stereotyping of the Lamanites. They “began to be a cunning and a wise people, as to the wisdom of the world, yea, a very cunning people, delighting in all manner of wickedness and plunder.”

## **The Lord Delivers Alma<sub>1</sub>'s People**

### ***Mosiah 24:8–10***

8 And now it came to pass that Amulon began to exercise authority over Alma and his brethren, and began to persecute him, and cause that his children should persecute their children.

9 For Amulon knew Alma, that he had been one of the king's priests, and that it was he that believed the words of Abinadi and was driven out before the king, and therefore he was wroth with him; for he was subject to king Laman, yet he exercised authority over them, and put tasks upon them, and put task-masters over them.

10 And it came to pass that so great were their afflictions that they began to cry mightily to God.

### *Comments*

There is no enemy quite like one who was once a brother. Alma<sub>1</sub> had been one of the priests of Noah, together with Amulon. Amulon now has the power of a Lamanite king behind him, and certainly harbored animosity toward Alma<sub>1</sub>, likely for multiple reasons. That animosity led to persecution.



Mormon tells the tale of two peoples who were Nephites among the Lamanites; the people of Limhi and the people of Alma<sub>1</sub>. Both were peoples who were under Lamanite control and both were forced to provide the Lamanites benefits from their labors. Although they were similar, Mormon highlights the differences.

Limhi's people decided to attempt a military solution but failed three times. Only after great tribulations did they remember their God and become sufficiently repentant that they could have God hear and respond to their prayers. Alma<sub>1</sub>'s people, finding themselves in similar difficult circumstances, turn immediately to prayer.

### ***Mosiah 24:11–14***

11 And Amulon commanded them that they should stop their cries; and he put guards over them to watch them, that whosoever should be found calling upon God should be put to death.

12 And Alma and his people did not raise their voices to the Lord their God, but did pour out their hearts to him; and he did know the thoughts of their hearts.

13 And it came to pass that the voice of the Lord came to them in their afflictions, saying: Lift up your heads and be of good comfort, for I know of the covenant which ye have made unto me; and I will covenant with my people and deliver them out of bondage.

14 And I will also ease the burdens which are put upon your shoulders, that even you cannot feel them upon your backs, even while you are in bondage; and this will I do that ye may stand as witnesses for me hereafter, and that ye may know of a surety that I, the Lord God, do visit my people in their afflictions.

### ***Comments***

Amulon is so determined to punish Alma<sub>1</sub>'s people that he forbids their prayers. Rather than stop, however, they simply say them silently. Ancient societies were more communal, and certainly more oral than modern cultures. For those who could read, it was typically reading out loud. It was rare to have someone who could read silently. Thus, the idea that they could not pray vocally would have appeared to put a stop to prayer.

The importance of this verse for the ancient world is lost on modern readers who assume that prayer can be silent. For Alma<sub>1</sub>'s people, it was second best, but they were still able to pour out their hearts to God.

Yahweh answered their prayers, promising that they would be delivered. What is important in the response is that it was not immediate. The promise was given, but it took time. Once again, agency is involved. While the right time was yet to come, Yahweh assisted Alma<sub>1</sub>'s people by making them stronger so that their burdens were not as dire.

For a great many modern readers, we have the same problem of waiting for needed help, even when promised. We too can take heart in knowing that we can be strengthened to be able to better bear our burdens until such time as they can be removed.

## ***Mosiah 15–16***

15 And now it came to pass that the burdens which were laid upon Alma and his brethren were made light; yea, the Lord did strengthen them that they could bear up their burdens with ease, and they did submit cheerfully and with patience to all the will of the Lord.

16 And it came to pass that so great was their faith and their patience that the voice of the Lord came unto them again, saying: Be of good comfort, for on the morrow I will deliver you out of bondage.

### ***Comments***

The word of the Lord was fulfilled. The burdens were made light. They were light due to increased strength to bear them rather than a physical change in the burdens themselves. The faith of Alma<sub>1</sub>'s people was sufficient that Yahweh could save them. After an unknown amount of time had passed, the Lord declares that they will be delivered on the next day.

## ***Mosiah 17–20***

17 And he said unto Alma: Thou shalt go before this people, and I will go with thee and deliver this people out of bondage.

18 Now it came to pass that Alma and his people in the night-time gathered their flocks together, and also of their grain; yea, even all the night-time were they gathering their flocks together.

19 And in the morning the Lord caused a deep sleep to come upon the Lamanites, yea, and all their task-masters were in a profound sleep.

20 And Alma and his people departed into the wilderness; and when they had traveled all day they pitched their tents in a valley, and they called the valley Alma, because he led their way in the wilderness.

### ***Comments***

Limhi's people gathered their flocks and herds and fled past drunken guards. Alma<sub>1</sub>'s people experience a more direct miracle. They also gathered their flocks and herds, but they escaped past sleeping Lamanites who were not awakened by the noise that so many people and animals surely created. Perhaps Mormon is suggesting that their greater faithfulness permitted a greater miracle on their behalf.

## ***Mosiah 24:21–25***

21 Yea, and in the valley of Alma they poured out their thanks to God because he had been merciful unto them, and eased their burdens, and had delivered them out of bondage; for they were in bondage, and none could deliver them except it were the Lord their God.

22 And they gave thanks to God, yea, all their men and all their women and all their children that could speak lifted their voices in the praises of their God.

23 And now the Lord said unto Alma: Haste thee and get thou and this people out of this land, for the Lamanites have awakened and do pursue thee; therefore get thee out of this land, and I will stop the Lamanites in this valley that they come no further in pursuit of this people.

24 And it came to pass that they departed out of the valley, and took their journey into the wilderness.

25 And after they had been in the wilderness twelve days they arrived in the land of Zarahemla; and king Mosiah did also receive them with joy.

### *Comments*

The first thing the people do when they know that they have successfully escaped is to thank God in prayer. Too often we are the recipients of divine aid and fail to recognize the source of our blessing. They did not fail to recognize the hand of God.

The people continue through the wilderness until they come to Zarahemla.



# Mosiah 25

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## Mosiah<sub>2</sub> Gathers the People in Zarahemla

### *Mosiah 25:1–4*

1 And now king Mosiah caused that all the people should be gathered together.

2 Now there were not so many of the children of Nephi, or so many of those who were descendants of Nephi, as there were of the people of Zarahemla, who was a descendant of Mulek, and those who came with him into the wilderness.

3 And there were not so many of the people of Nephi and of the people of Zarahemla as there were of the Lamanites; yea, they were not half so numerous.

4 And now all the people of Nephi were assembled together, and also all the people of Zarahemla, and they were gathered together in two bodies.

### *Comments*

Verses 1 and 4 form a repetitive resumption. The middle two verses speak of the relative sizes of the political entities. When Mormon calls the Nephites descendants of Nephi, he was using that term in its generic meaning, not a lineal designation. We also learn that the people of Zarahemla were descendants of Mulek. This is the first time we learn that. We do not learn that Mulek was a son of Zedekiah until Helaman 8:21.

Concerning the relative sizes of the political entities, there were Nephites who merged with the more populous people of Zarahemla. Combined they were not half as many as the Lamanites. This relative size continues to reinforce the idea that the term Lamanite simply meant “not us” and that they represented all of the surrounding peoples, whether they had a lineal connection to Laman or not.

As Mormon moves from his aside on population sizes back to the story, he adds that as Mosiah<sub>2</sub> gathered the people, they gathered in two bodies. Without stating it, it is clear that the two bodies were Nephites and Zarahemlaites. They had merged, but it was an uneasy merger.

## ***Mosiah 25:5–11***

5 And it came to pass that Mosiah did read, and caused to be read, the records of Zeniff to his people; yea, he read the records of the people of Zeniff, from the time they left the land of Zarahemla until they returned again.

6 And he also read the account of Alma and his brethren, and all their afflictions, from the time they left the land of Zarahemla until the time they returned again.

7 And now, when Mosiah had made an end of reading the records, his people who tarried in the land were struck with wonder and amazement.

8 For they knew not what to think; for when they beheld those that had been delivered out of bondage they were filled with exceedingly great joy.

9 And again, when they thought of their brethren who had been slain by the Lamanites they were filled with sorrow, and even shed many tears of sorrow.

10 And again, when they thought of the immediate goodness of God, and his power in delivering Alma and his brethren out of the hands of the Lamanites and of bondage, they did raise their voices and give thanks to God.

11 And again, when they thought upon the Lamanites, who were their brethren, of their sinful and polluted state, they were filled with pain and anguish for the welfare of their souls.

### ***Comments***

Both the peoples of Limhi and Alma<sub>1</sub> arrived in Zarahemla at nearly the same time. After arrival, Mosiah<sub>2</sub> introduces them to the people by reading their records. We do not know if he read the whole of their records or selected sections, but ancient audiences would have had a better tolerance for long meetings than do modern readers more accustomed to modern media. Even during Joseph Smith's time, long sermons were hardly unusual. The level of entertainment was significantly different prior to the modern age.

What follows are descriptions of the reactions to Mosiah<sub>2</sub>'s readings. Mormon shows the various reactions by creating contrasts. There is joy for deliverance and sorrow for loss of life. There is joy in Yahweh's salvation, but sorrow for the state of the Lamanites.

## ***Mosiah 25:12–13***

12 And it came to pass that those who were the children of Amulon and his brethren, who had taken to wife the daughters of the Lamanites, were displeased with the conduct of their fathers, and they would no longer be called by the names of their fathers, therefore they took upon themselves the

name of Nephi, that they might be called the children of Nephi and be numbered among those who were called Nephites.

13 And now all the people of Zarahemla were numbered with the Nephites, and this because the kingdom had been conferred upon none but those who were descendants of Nephi.

### *Comments*

The significance of the labeling of names that Mormon used is underscored by the children of Amulon (as representative of all the priests of Noah) who decided that they are no longer to be designated by the name of their fathers, but rather that they should be called “children of Nephi.” This was a symbolic move which declared their political affiliation as well as a rejection of their fathers’ actions.

Mormon uses this action to note that even though he has indicated that there was still a separation between Nephites and Zarahemlites and that, for political purposes, they were all called under the name of Nephi. Thus, there are lineage connections and divisions, but the overall political allegiance is still defined as Nephite and Lamanite, or, us and them.

## **Churches Are Established throughout the Land**

### ***Mosiah 25:14–16***

14 And now it came to pass that when Mosiah had made an end of speaking and reading to the people, he desired that Alma should also speak to the people.

15 And Alma did speak unto them, when they were assembled together in large bodies, and he went from one body to another, preaching unto the people repentance and faith on the Lord.

16 And he did exhort the people of Limhi and his brethren, all those that had been delivered out of bondage, that they should remember that it was the Lord that did deliver them.

### *Comments*

We do not learn of the meeting between Mosiah<sub>2</sub> and Alma<sub>1</sub>. There must have been one so that Mosiah<sub>2</sub> would know that there was reason to have Alma<sub>1</sub> preach to the people. Alma<sub>1</sub> clearly impressed Mosiah<sub>2</sub>, and Alma<sub>1</sub>’s ideas will be seen in the events that lead to the reign of the judges.

Alma<sub>1</sub> does not preach to the whole group, however. It appears that the basic meeting breaks up, and Alma<sub>1</sub> travels to the different groups. It is probable that there were specific areas in Zarahemla where each separate group would reside. It would have been unusual for them to be very well integrated physically, particularly since we will see that there was an uneasy political and religious integration.

Specifically, Alma<sub>1</sub> has the opportunity to speak with Limhi’s people. They were, of course, much the same people, with Alma<sub>1</sub> having separated from them only recently.

## ***Mosiah 25:17–18***

17 And it came to pass that after Alma had taught the people many things, and had made an end of speaking to them, that king Limhi was desirous that he might be baptized; and all his people were desirous that they might be baptized also.

18 Therefore, Alma did go forth into the water and did baptize them; yea, he did baptize them after the manner he did his brethren in the waters of Mormon; yea, and as many as he did baptize did belong to the church of God; and this because of their belief on the words of Alma.

### *Comments*

Limhi and his people had already desired of Ammon that they be baptized. Ammon had declined. Now that they were in Zarahemla, King Mosiah<sub>2</sub> had clearly given Alma<sub>1</sub> authority under the Nephite government to perform religious rituals. It is therefore Alma<sub>1</sub> who baptizes Limhi and his people, symbolically uniting all that people under their new covenant. Unstated, but important, is that they are also baptized with the new meaning that Alma<sub>1</sub> has placed over the cleansing-from-sin aspect of baptism. It is also now an entry vehicle to the new community of faith. That is the next subject that Mormon addresses.

## ***Mosiah 25:19–21***

19 And it came to pass that king Mosiah granted unto Alma that he might establish churches throughout all the land of Zarahemla; and gave him power to ordain priests and teachers over every church.

20 Now this was done because there were so many people that they could not all be governed by one teacher; neither could they all hear the word of God in one assembly;

21 Therefore they did assemble themselves together in different bodies, being called churches; every church having their priests and their teachers, and every priest preaching the word according as it was delivered to him by the mouth of Alma.

### *Comments*

Mormon explicitly states that Alma<sub>1</sub> operates through King Mosiah<sub>2</sub>'s authority. What is also important is that Alma<sub>1</sub>'s innovation of the concept of church is implemented in Zarahemla. The difference stems from two aspects of Nephite society in Zarahemla. The first is the one that explicitly mentions that there were too many people to hear the gospel in a single congregation. Thus, there are multiple congregations that "did assemble themselves together in different bodies, being called churches." What is not as clear is the second aspect: that these divisions within the city also allowed for the separation from those who might not believe in the same way. The cultural and religious divide between the Nephites and Zarahemlites was both allowed and given an outward form.



Churches were a separate unit within the larger city. This differed from the communal practice of religion that had dominated both Israel and Israel's New World incarnation among the Nephites. Where the old way had priests who operated on behalf of all the community, churches operated with divisions in the community, and focused more on the smaller group than the people as a whole.

### ***Mosiah 25:22–24***

22 And thus, notwithstanding there being many churches they were all one church, yea, even the church of God; for there was nothing preached in all the churches except it were repentance and faith in God.

23 And now there were seven churches in the land of Zarahemla. And it came to pass that whosoever were desirous to take upon them the name of Christ, or of God, they did join the churches of God;

24 And they were called the people of God. And the Lord did pour out his Spirit upon them, and they were blessed, and prospered in the land.

### ***Comments***

The organization of the churches allowed for divisions, but there was an intended unity among them. They were all to preach the same gospel even while operating more locally. It is unclear whether the seven churches in the land of Zarahemla correspond to the municipalities or not. It is tempting to suggest that there was a church in each separate city, thus suggesting that there were seven cities beholdng to the Nephite hegemony. There could have been several smaller communities that each surrounded and that looked to a particular larger city as their center for political structure, religion, and perhaps, more importantly, their market.

Mormon ends the discussion of the creation of churches with the typical indication that they were blessed and prospered.



# Mosiah 26

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## The Rising Generation and Apostasy

### *Mosiah 26:1–4*

1 Now it came to pass that there were many of the rising generation that could not understand the words of king Benjamin, being little children at the time he spake unto his people; and they did not believe the tradition of their fathers.

2 They did not believe what had been said concerning the resurrection of the dead, neither did they believe concerning the coming of Christ.

3 And now because of their unbelief they could not understand the word of God; and their hearts were hardened.

4 And they would not be baptized; neither would they join the church. And they were a separate people as to their faith, and remained so ever after, even in their carnal and sinful state; for they would not call upon the Lord their God.

### *Comments*

The dramatic change in topic from the end of chapter 25 to the beginning of chapter 26 makes it quite understandable why Orson Pratt created a chapter break at this point. It seems so logical that it seems to require explanation as to why Mormon didn't break the chapter here. The original chapter XI comprises all our chapters 23 to 27. That chapter begins in the land of Nephi but moves to the land of Zarahemla. Mormon's intent was to provide the information that will explain the events in the land of Zarahemla, and this chapter begins to lay out the critical information that there were undercurrents in Zarahemla society that would result in massive changes.

The first change was the establishment of churches. However, lest Mormon's readers assume that the establishment of churches solved problems, he moves now to issues that continued in Zarahemla society. These verses serve as a contrast to the creation of the churches. While there are righteous believers in Zarahemla, there are also unbelievers.

Mormon begins by explaining how it happened that the people who were united under Mosiah<sub>2</sub>'s father, King Benjamin, could be now disunified. Mormon indicates that there were those who were too young to

have made the covenant. What he doesn't explain is how they came to see the option to disbelieve in the coming Messiah. There were, perhaps, external influences that led some who had not made the covenant to begin to move away from the belief in a coming Messiah. There were, perhaps, some of the previous generation who had not believed before, and whose conversion might not have been firm.

However the ideas began, they began to flourish. Even though churches had been established, they did not cover all in the society. There were those who would not be baptized. The establishment of churches allowed for a division in the society, and more than allowing a division, the establishment appears to have fostered it. There becomes a distinction between those who believe and those who do not.

### ***Mosiah 26:5–7***

5 And now in the reign of Mosiah they were not half so numerous as the people of God; but because of the dissensions among the brethren they became more numerous.

6 For it came to pass that they did deceive many with their flattering words, who were in the church, and did cause them to commit many sins; therefore it became expedient that those who committed sin, that were in the church, should be admonished by the church.

7 And it came to pass that they were brought before the priests, and delivered up unto the priests by the teachers; and the priests brought them before Alma, who was the high priest.

### ***Comments***

An easy comment to miss is Mormon's statement that "in the reign of Mosiah they were not half so numerous." Certainly, we read that they "were not half so numerous," but the ominous part is that this might only be true in the reign of Mosiah<sub>2</sub>. Mormon is foreshadowing changes, and he already knows that these dissensions will increase. Therefore, he tells us that it begins smaller, but hints that things will continue to decline.

The beginning of the internal conflict comes first because there is a specific division between church and non-church. That creates the condition that there would be those who did not believe as those in the church did, that they would attempt to convince those of the church that the ideas of the non-church believers were correct. They have success. Mormon indicates that their "flattering words" caused church members to "commit many sins." These were sins because they were drawing them away from their faithfulness to Yahweh's revealed covenant. It is also quite likely, because it is the essential definition of Nephite apostasy, that the departure from the covenant and church included a desire for social stratification, a desire to raise themselves above others.

There was now a new situation created by the concept of the church. What happens when someone in the church changes and comes into conflict with the teachings and practices of the church? When there was no church, that was purely a social issue. It is now complicated by the new layer of organization. The next story is about the resolution. As the leader of the church, the dissenters are brought before Alma<sub>1</sub>, the high priest.

## ***Mosiah 26:8–12***

8 Now king Mosiah had given Alma the authority over the church.

9 And it came to pass that Alma did not know concerning them; but there were many witnesses against them; yea, the people stood and testified of their iniquity in abundance.

10 Now there had not any such thing happened before in the church; therefore Alma was troubled in his spirit, and he caused that they should be brought before the king.

11 And he said unto the king: Behold, here are many whom we have brought before thee, who are accused of their brethren; yea, and they have been taken in divers iniquities. And they do not repent of their iniquities; therefore we have brought them before thee, that thou mayest judge them according to their crimes.

12 But king Mosiah said unto Alma: Behold, I judge them not; therefore I deliver them into thy hands to be judged.

### ***Comments***

The concept of a church was new, and the way it integrated into the larger society was also both new, and unexamined. When the first issue arises, Alma<sub>1</sub> takes it to King Mosiah<sub>2</sub>, even though Alma<sub>1</sub> has been made the head of the church. Under the previous understanding, it would certainly be an issue for the king. When all religion was determined by the community, the king was the head of the religion regardless of the religious officiators.

The concept of the church created a new way of thinking and created religious issues as separate from social and non-religious legal issues. Since the law had been given by Moses and codified by kings who acted as the religious leader, it would have been difficult to understand how the law applied to issues of these new church organizations.

King Mosiah<sub>2</sub> defines the new relationship by declaring that church matters are no longer kingly matters. They are part of the church itself, not the overall government. There is, for the first time in the Book of Mormon, a separation of church and state. Alma<sub>1</sub>, as the high priest, is designated as the proper person to deal with church issues.

## **Principles of Judgment for the Church**

### ***Mosiah 26:13–14***

13 And now the spirit of Alma was again troubled; and he went and inquired of the Lord what he should do concerning this matter, for he feared that he should do wrong in the sight of God.

14 And it came to pass that after he had poured out his whole soul to God, the voice of the Lord came to him, saying:

### *Comments*

When Mosiah<sub>2</sub> returns the question of what to do with church dissidents to Alma<sub>1</sub>, the separation of church and state is explicit. Alma<sub>1</sub> first went to the authority on the state, the king. Now he turns to the authority on religion. While Alma<sub>1</sub> continues to be the titular head, he understands that it is Yahweh who is ultimately the authority on religious matters. Therefore, he brings the question to God for an answer.

### ***Mosiah 26:15–18***

15 Blessed art thou, Alma, and blessed are they who were baptized in the waters of Mormon. Thou art blessed because of thy exceeding faith in the words alone of my servant Abinadi.

16 And blessed are they because of their exceeding faith in the words alone which thou hast spoken unto them.

17 And blessed art thou because thou hast established a church among this people; and they shall be established, and they shall be my people.

18 Yea, blessed is this people who are willing to bear my name; for in my name shall they be called; and they are mine.

### *Comments*

When Yahweh answers Alma<sub>1</sub>, he begins with declarations intended to show that Alma<sub>1</sub> has done well. Therefore, there are blessings pronounced upon those who have followed Alma<sub>1</sub>, and therefore, upon Alma<sub>1</sub> for his leadership.

Ultimately the blessing is that Alma<sub>1</sub> has brought people to a closer covenant with Yahweh. Yahweh declares: “blessed is this people who are willing to bear my name; for in my name shall they be called; and they are mine.” Although King Benjamin attempted to have all his people bear the name of the Messiah, the reality was that there were those who forsook that relationship. In the divisiveness of the social, political, and religious realms in Zarahemla, Alma<sub>1</sub> has preserved for Yahweh those who would truly bear his name.

### ***Mosiah 26:19–21***

19 And because thou hast inquired of me concerning the transgressor, thou art blessed.

20 Thou art my servant; and I covenant with thee that thou shalt have eternal life; and thou shalt serve me and go forth in my name, and shalt gather together my sheep.

21 And he that will hear my voice shall be my sheep; and him shall ye receive into the church, and him will I also receive.

### *Comments*

Yahweh turns to the particular issue that Alma<sub>1</sub> brought before him. Yahweh declares that it is right for Alma to present the question. That is important because Yahweh is the One God, and it could be considered disrespectful to bring things to him that Alma<sub>1</sub> should have worked out for himself. In this case, Alma<sub>1</sub>'s exercise of agency involved turning for advice from the one source that could legitimately offer such counsel.

Yahweh reaffirms his covenant with Alma<sub>1</sub>, both personally, and as a representative of Yahweh on earth. It is through Alma<sub>1</sub> that Yahweh's people will hear his will, Yahweh will accept into his covenant those whom Alma<sub>1</sub> receives into the covenant.

### ***Mosiah 26:22–24***

22 For behold, this is my church; whosoever is baptized shall be baptized unto repentance. And whomsoever ye receive shall believe in my name; and him will I freely forgive.

23 For it is I that taketh upon me the sins of the world; for it is I that hath created them; and it is I that granteth unto him that believeth unto the end a place at my right hand.

24 For behold, in my name are they called; and if they know me they shall come forth, and shall have a place eternally at my right hand.

### *Comments*

Yahweh reinforces the nature of this new covenant associated with the church. As the entry into the church, baptism takes on a new and more important role. It continues to represent repentance, but it also represents belonging to the community which accepts Yahweh's reiterated covenant.

Those who enter the church and are repentant accept the atoning mission of the Messiah. That is the essential aspect of what Abinadi preached, and which Alma<sub>1</sub> has reinforced. This is a church that looks forward explicitly to the coming Messiah more than back on the law of Moses, even though they still fall under, and obey, that law.

Because they are known by Yahweh's name, and are his, they will know him in the resurrection, and they will receive their just reward in the next world.

### ***Mosiah 26:25–28***

25 And it shall come to pass that when the second trump shall sound then shall they that never knew me come forth and shall stand before me.

26 And then shall they know that I am the Lord their God, that I am their Redeemer; but they would not be redeemed.

27 And then I will confess unto them that I never knew them; and they shall depart into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

28 Therefore I say unto you, that he that will not hear my voice, the same shall ye not receive into my church, for him I will not receive at the last day.

### *Comments*

Yahweh describes the eternal fates of two sets of people. In the previous verses, he described those who accepted him. In these verses, he addresses the fate of the second set. When those who would not accept him and take upon them his name in this world finally stand before Yahweh in judgment, he will declare that he never knew them.

The stakes of belief are not earthly. They are not political. They are eternal. In the common method of scripture, the division between good and evil, between God and the Devil, are made into binary opposites. Therefore, there are only two types mentioned. Those who accept the Yahweh as their God and Redeemer will be redeemed. Those who do not, will not. Yahweh declares that this applies to the covenant made to accept the gospel as part of the church.

If one hears Yahweh's voice, that person will be received into the church. That person will be the one who stands with God at the last day. Those who reject the church also reject the covenant and, therefore, God. They will not be redeemed in the last day.

### ***Mosiah 26:29–32***

29 Therefore I say unto you, Go; and whosoever transgresseth against me, him shall ye judge according to the sins which he has committed; and if he confess his sins before thee and me, and repenteth in the sincerity of his heart, him shall ye forgive, and I will forgive him also.

30 Yea, and as often as my people repent will I forgive them their trespasses against me.

31 And ye shall also forgive one another your trespasses; for verily I say unto you, he that forgiveth not his neighbor's trespasses when he says that he repents, the same hath brought himself under condemnation.

32 Now I say unto you, Go; and whosoever will not repent of his sins the same shall not be numbered among my people; and this shall be observed from this time forward.

### *Comments*

Yahweh has described, up to this point, the eternal consequences of acceptance of, and conformance to, our covenant with God. Now, he brings that understanding down to the way in which Alma, is to judge. What Yahweh has said is that he has the ultimate judgment, but that he is also the God of redemption and repentance. Therefore, the task for Alma, on earth is to judge humankind according to its particular sins. Unlike the polar opposites that are described for the eternities, the earthly realm shows more flexibility.



While there is always the possibility of transgression here on earth, there is also the possibility for repentance. Therefore, Yahweh declares that Alma<sub>1</sub> should judge on the basis of true repentance, not just the original transgression. Yahweh declares that when Alma<sub>1</sub> accepts the person's repentance, so too will God.

The principle of repentance is emphasized. The sentiment of repentance in verses 30 and 31 reflect the same concept as taught in Matthew 18:21–22, where Peter is told that he is to forgive seventy times seven. Here, it is more simply stated: “as often as my people repent will I forgive them their trespasses against me.”

The difference comes when one will not repent. Just as God says that he “never knew” those who unrepentantly trespassed, the official church policy is to not know the unrepentant sinner. The church exercises that principle of not knowing by having the person no longer numbered among the covenanted people. The church becomes the microcosm of the eternal principle. One either accepts the covenant or rejects it.

### ***Mosiah 26:33–36***

33 And it came to pass when Alma had heard these words he wrote them down that he might have them, and that he might judge the people of that church according to the commandments of God.

34 And it came to pass that Alma went and judged those that had been taken in iniquity, according to the word of the Lord.

35 And whosoever repented of their sins and did confess them, them he did number among the people of the church;

36 And those that would not confess their sins and repent of their iniquity, the same were not numbered among the people of the church, and their names were blotted out.

### ***Comments***

When we read that “when Alma had heard these words he wrote them down that he might have them, and that he might judge the people of that church according to the commandments of God,” we should understand that this was more than writing something down so that Alma<sub>1</sub> wouldn't forget. This was the creation of new scripture, a new rule for how the church was to operate and how the high priest was to make judgments.

The rest of the verses indicate that, just as we expect of Yahweh's faithful servant, Alma<sub>1</sub> did as he was instructed. Those who repented were numbered among the church. Those who did not, had their names blotted out. Of course, those who were unrepentant had already left the church as a belief system. The blotting of names was the more formal indication that the judgment had been made that they had rejected their covenant with Yahweh as the coming Messiah and true representative of the law of Moses.

## ***Mosiah 26:37–39***

37 And it came to pass that Alma did regulate all the affairs of the church; and they began again to have peace and to prosper exceedingly in the affairs of the church, walking circumspectly before God, receiving many, and baptizing many.

38 And now all these things did Alma and his fellow laborers do who were over the church, walking in all diligence, teaching the word of God in all things, suffering all manner of afflictions, being persecuted by all those who did not belong to the church of God.

39 And they did admonish their brethren; and they were also admonished, every one by the word of God, according to his sins, or to the sins which he had committed, being commanded of God to pray without ceasing, and to give thanks in all things.

### ***Comments***

There is no chapter break at this point in the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon. As with the change from our chapters 25 to 26, there is a subject change from chapter 26 to 27. Mormon ends this section of his story with the conclusion of how Alma<sub>1</sub> acted as not only a high priest in the previous religious organization, but now acted as a new type of high priest: one who had authority from the king, but an authority which was independent from the Nephite religious authority.

The conclusion here is to show that those who were in the church attempted to live the covenants. As with many of this type of statement in the Book of Mormon, Mormon describes the good in order to set the stage from the decline into difficulty. The difficulties are the next story, which Orson Pratt separated into a new chapter.

# Mosiah 27

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## Persecution of Believers

### *Mosiah 27:1–2*

1 And now it came to pass that the persecutions which were inflicted on the church by the unbelievers became so great that the church began to murmur, and complain to their leaders concerning the matter; and they did complain to Alma. And Alma laid the case before their king, Mosiah. And Mosiah consulted with his priests.

2 And it came to pass that king Mosiah sent a proclamation throughout the land round about that there should not any unbeliever persecute any of those who belonged to the church of God.

### *Comments*

The divisiveness within Zarahemla increased to the point of conflict. The conflict was in the form of persecution. The previous story Mormon included told of the division that Mosiah<sub>2</sub> made between decisions involving the state and those involving the church. Where the issues were internal to the church, Alma<sub>1</sub> was the one to resolve them.

That division meant that there was an even larger divide among the people. There was no pretense at religious unity, and those who were not of the church were increasing in numbers and becoming more open about their dislike of those in the church. Mormon tells the story only in terms of church and non-church, but the nature of the Zarahemla society and future events strongly suggest that there is an implicit division between those who came from the land of Nephi and those who had already been in the land of Zarahemla. Both this religious divide, and the future issues over kingship, are most logically to have generally followed that Nephite and Zarahemlaite division.

Because this was no longer internal to the church, but an issue that affected the whole community with its potential to divide, it became an issue for King Mosiah<sub>2</sub>. Mosiah<sub>2</sub> therefore declares that there should be no persecution. While this certainly protected the church believers, it also served as an attempt to remove an issue that could increase the divisions among Mosiah<sub>2</sub>'s people.

### ***Mosiah 27:3–7***

3 And there was a strict command throughout all the churches that there should be no persecutions among them, that there should be an equality among all men;

4 That they should let no pride nor haughtiness disturb their peace; that every man should esteem his neighbor as himself, laboring with their own hands for their support.

5 Yea, and all their priests and teachers should labor with their own hands for their support, in all cases save it were in sickness, or in much want; and doing these things, they did abound in the grace of God.

6 And there began to be much peace again in the land; and the people began to be very numerous, and began to scatter abroad upon the face of the earth, yea, on the north and on the south, on the east and on the west, building large cities and villages in all quarters of the land.

7 And the Lord did visit them and prosper them, and they became a large and wealthy people.

### ***Comments***

Mormon closes this story and sets up the next. As has been noted previously, when Mormon concludes with a positive or even glowing description, it is typically a setup for the problems that will come later. That is what we will see with verses 6 and 7. The result of Mosiah<sub>2</sub>'s actions are to settle the conflict and to have peace in the land. They therefore prosper.

It is important to understand that while prospering and becoming a large and wealthy people were good, it was a good derived from living the essential Nephite principles. In verses 3, 4 and 5, Mormon reiterates the Nephite principle of equality. Specifically, “every man should esteem his neighbor as himself, laboring with their own hands for their support.” This was true for priests and teachers as well. Even though this principle was prominent in King Benjamin’s speech, and this picture is painted for Benjamin’s son, Mosiah<sub>2</sub>, it is a principle with which Mormon himself was familiar at the end of the Nephite nation. It is an important underlying theme throughout the Book of Mormon.

## **Alma<sub>1</sub> and the Sons of Mosiah<sub>2</sub> Are Converted**

### ***Mosiah 27:8–9***

8 Now the sons of Mosiah were numbered among the unbelievers; and also one of the sons of Alma was numbered among them, he being called Alma, after his father; nevertheless, he became a very wicked and an idolatrous man. And he was a man of many words, and did speak much flattery to the people; therefore he led many of the people to do after the manner of his iniquities.

9 And he became a great hinderment to the prosperity of the church of God; stealing away the hearts of the people; causing much dissension among the people; giving a chance for the enemy of God to exercise his power over them.

## *Comments*

This is the story that Mormon was setting up in order to contrast it with the time of peace and prosperity. That internal peace is disrupted, and not simply by descendants of Zarahemla, but more importantly by the sons of the king and the high priest. The most important men in the society, with the exception only of their fathers, these sons had tremendous influence. They used their influence to lead many away from righteous principles and away from the covenants of the church. Note the final line of verse 9: “giving a chance for the enemy of God to exercise his power over them.” This is the negative aspect of the promise of the land. They were prosperous if they were righteous. Now that they were being drawn away from righteousness, the door was opened for a cursing upon the people.

How was it that such important sons might rebel? Had they not been taught by the best of fathers and mothers? Mormon is telling us that there were other factors at play. When the Nephites became prosperous, one of the unstated reasons and results was that there were more connections made with cities outside of the Zarahemla hegemony. Those cities were not believers but were probably representative of at least as much prosperity as the Nephites, and perhaps they were even more prosperous than them. In other words, living in a tempting world affected these sons. As prominent sons, they were in a position to benefit from the external connections, and perhaps were affected by them more strongly than others for that reason.

Parents have a responsibility to teach. Parents may honestly do their best to fulfill that responsibility. Nevertheless, agency allows children access to the ideas and temptations of the world, and can make that choice themselves, in spite of the earnest desires of their parents. The story of the rebellion of the sons of Mosiah<sub>2</sub> and Alma<sub>2</sub>, the younger will have a happy reconciliation with their father’s hopes and teachings, but other equally faithful parents will not see that end. For that reason, hope does not end with this life.

## ***Mosiah 27:10–12***

10 And now it came to pass that while he was going about to destroy the church of God, for he did go about secretly with the sons of Mosiah seeking to destroy the church, and to lead astray the people of the Lord, contrary to the commandments of God, or even the king—

11 And as I said unto you, as they were going about rebelling against God, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto them; and he descended as it were in a cloud; and he spake as it were with a voice of thunder, which caused the earth to shake upon which they stood;

12 And so great was their astonishment, that they fell to the earth, and understood not the words which he spake unto them.

## Comments

The previous verses introduced readers to Alma<sub>2</sub> the younger as well as the sons of Mosiah<sub>2</sub>. The fact that Alma<sub>2</sub> was identified by name, but the sons of Mosiah<sub>2</sub> remained generic, signified that this story is about Alma<sub>2</sub>. That story begins in earnest in these verses.

Alma<sub>2</sub> and the sons of Mosiah<sub>2</sub> are traveling together and are involved in some form of action that Mormon suggests is seeking to destroy the church. Since we have the word *church* here, it is probable that they are attempting to return to the earlier way of life, prior to Alma<sub>1</sub> the elder's establishment of churches.

Prescient of what would happen to Saul on the road to Damascus, an angel appears to the brothers. The actual conditions differ in the physical surroundings. There is a voice of thunder and a shaking of the earth. There are more references to Yahweh as a God of the earth in the Book of Mormon than remain in the Bible, and the voice of thunder and shaking of the earth are designed to tell Alma<sub>2</sub> and the sons of Mosiah<sub>2</sub> that the angel really is appearing with Yahweh's authority. The experience overwhelms them, and all fall to the ground.

## **Mosiah 27:13–15**

13 Nevertheless he cried again, saying: Alma, arise and stand forth, for why persecutest thou the church of God? For the Lord hath said: This is my church, and I will establish it; and nothing shall overthrow it, save it is the transgression of my people.

14 And again, the angel said: Behold, the Lord hath heard the prayers of his people, and also the prayers of his servant, Alma, who is thy father; for he has prayed with much faith concerning thee that thou mightest be brought to the knowledge of the truth; therefore, for this purpose have I come to convince thee of the power and authority of God, that the prayers of his servants might be answered according to their faith.

15 And now behold, can ye dispute the power of God? For behold, doth not my voice shake the earth? And can ye not also behold me before you? And I am sent from God.

## Comments

This is Alma<sub>2</sub>'s story, and it begins with him and the sons of Mosiah<sub>2</sub> on the ground. Then the angel calls Alma<sub>2</sub> to stand. He may have fallen to the ground in fear, but being called to stand before an angel of God and be personally chastised would have made it hard to stand at all.

Alma<sub>2</sub> is told that the prayers of many, including his father, have led to this intervention. The angel states that he comes with power and authority of God. When the angel also asks “can ye dispute the power of God?”, it is certain that Alma<sub>2</sub> could not, and almost certain that he could not have spoken to say so.

This event is both hopeful and frustrating for parents who have children who do not follow the path the parents have taught. Surely these parents, too, pray for their children. There are times when the prayers do seem to have the ultimate effect of changing the children's hearts even though not as dramatically as

with Alma<sub>2</sub>. However, many parents continue to fervently pray, and no similar change is forthcoming. Yet. We do not know the Lord's timing, and must continue to have faith that his hand is over all.

### ***Mosiah 27:16–17***

16 Now I say unto thee: Go, and remember the captivity of thy fathers in the land of Helam, and in the land of Nephi; and remember how great things he has done for them; for they were in bondage, and he has delivered them. And now I say unto thee, Alma, go thy way, and seek to destroy the church no more, that their prayers may be answered, and this even if thou wilt of thyself be cast off.

17 And now it came to pass that these were the last words which the angel spake unto Alma, and he departed.

#### *Comments*

The message of the angel began with asking why Alma<sub>2</sub> persecuted the church. The angel noted that the church was truly Yahweh's church. That meant that fighting against the church was fighting directly against Yahweh.

Now the angel admonishes Alma<sub>2</sub> to remember his father's experience of bondage in the land of Helam. Yahweh freed the people. By implication, Alma<sub>2</sub> is also under a form of bondage. He is also captive of spiritual Lamanites, rather than physical ones, but the effect is the same. He is to remember the deliverance from Helam because it can presage his own deliverance from spiritual bondage through Yahweh's mercy and power.

### ***Mosiah 27:18–20***

18 And now Alma and those that were with him fell again to the earth, for great was their astonishment; for with their own eyes they had beheld an angel of the Lord; and his voice was as thunder, which shook the earth; and they knew that there was nothing save the power of God that could shake the earth and cause it to tremble as though it would part asunder.

19 And now the astonishment of Alma was so great that he became dumb, that he could not open his mouth; yea, and he became weak, even that he could not move his hands; therefore he was taken by those that were with him, and carried helpless, even until he was laid before his father.

20 And they rehearsed unto his father all that had happened unto them; and his father rejoiced, for he knew that it was the power of God.

#### *Comments*

It is hardly surprising that at the end of this divine chastisement, all fall again to the earth. It was an overwhelming experience. Note that the idea of the voice of thunder and the shaking of the earth are repeated. Those were not incidental parts of the experience, but significant signs of the divine power that was present.

The result of the experience is that Alma<sub>2</sub> becomes temporarily unable to speak. He is unable to walk or even move his hands. Therefore, he is taken to his father. Alma<sub>1</sub>, the elder recognizes the hand of God. Even facing a weakened son, he rejoiced because he understood that his son was in the throes of a spiritual transformation.

### ***Mosiah 27:21–23***

21 And he caused that a multitude should be gathered together that they might witness what the Lord had done for his son, and also for those that were with him.

22 And he caused that the priests should assemble themselves together; and they began to fast, and to pray to the Lord their God that he would open the mouth of Alma, that he might speak, and also that his limbs might receive their strength—that the eyes of the people might be opened to see and know of the goodness and glory of God.

23 And it came to pass after they had fasted and prayed for the space of two days and two nights, the limbs of Alma received their strength, and he stood up and began to speak unto them, bidding them to be of good comfort:

### ***Comments***

Alma<sub>1</sub> recognized what happened to his son and doubtless knew that his son would recover. He presented his son to the multitude so that there would be a larger witness to what was happening. Alma<sub>2</sub> had attempted to lead the people astray, and the people needed to see the result. There needed to be an equivalent public demonstration of the change. Thus, many pray for him, and Alma<sub>2</sub> recovered and stood to speak.

In Alma 36:16 we will learn that Alma<sub>2</sub> was wrapped up in the spirit for three days and three nights, but here it says only two days and two nights. John W. Welch noted that this difference was probably due to the fact that the priests fasted. The fasting had to begin in the morning of the next day. Hence, there were three days and three nights for Alma<sub>2</sub>, but two days and two nights for the fasting priests.

## **Alma<sub>1</sub> Awakens as Born of God**

### ***Mosiah 27:24–28***

24 For, said he, I have repented of my sins, and have been redeemed of the Lord; behold I am born of the Spirit.

25 And the Lord said unto me: Marvel not that all mankind, yea, men and women, all nations, kindreds, tongues and people, must be born again; yea, born of God, changed from their carnal and fallen state, to a state of righteousness, being redeemed of God, becoming his sons and daughters;



26 And thus they become new creatures; and unless they do this, they can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God.

27 I say unto you, unless this be the case, they must be cast off; and this I know, because I was like to be cast off.

28 Nevertheless, after wading through much tribulation, repenting nigh unto death, the Lord in mercy hath seen fit to snatch me out of an everlasting burning, and I am born of God.

### *Comments*

Alma<sub>2</sub> testifies that he has not only repented but has been changed. When King Benjamin gave his people a new covenant, he noted that they had become children of God because “this day he hath spiritually begotten you” (Mosiah 5:7). Alma<sub>2</sub> has a personal, and more intense, experience with that transformation. He also says that he has been born of God. He declares that all must similarly become born of God, must be redeemed of God, and all must become his sons and daughters.

Alma<sub>2</sub> is reiterating the covenant Benjamin made. As Mormon began this part of the story he had indicated that “there were many of the rising generation that could not understand the words of King Benjamin, being little children at the time he spake unto his people” (Mosiah 26:1). Now, at the close, Alma<sub>2</sub> reiterates Benjamin’s covenant. Those who might have been too young were now Alma<sub>2</sub>’s peers, and Alma<sub>2</sub> declared the essentiality of that very covenant.

### ***Mosiah 27:29–31***

29 My soul hath been redeemed from the gall of bitterness and bonds of iniquity. I was in the darkest abyss; but now I behold the marvelous light of God. My soul was racked with eternal torment; but I am snatched, and my soul is pained no more.

30 I rejected my Redeemer, and denied that which had been spoken of by our fathers; but now that they may foresee that he will come, and that he remembereth every creature of his creating, he will make himself manifest unto all.

31 Yea, every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess before him. Yea, even at the last day, when all men shall stand to be judged of him, then shall they confess that he is God; then shall they confess, who live without God in the world, that the judgment of an everlasting punishment is just upon them; and they shall quake, and tremble, and shrink beneath the glance of his all-searching eye.

### *Comments*

These verses close Alma<sub>2</sub>’s public discourse. After declaring that he had been born of God (and that all must), he returns to his personal experience. He was in need of personal forgiveness and redemption. It is important for our understanding of Nephite religion that Alma<sub>1</sub>, specifically notes that he has “rejected

my Redeemer, and denied that which had been spoken of by our fathers.” This is his declaration that he had not believed in the coming Messiah. He had rejected the teachings of Abinadi that Alma<sub>1</sub> had not only accepted, but which had transformed his life. One can only imagine the sorrow Alma<sub>1</sub> felt to see his son reject the very thing that had been so important in Alma<sub>1</sub>’s life.

That is now in the past, however, Alma<sub>2</sub> has also been transformed, and bears testimony of that Redeemer. Note that he speaks of every knee bowing, without changing the subject. Alma<sub>2</sub> is declaring that the Redeemer who was spoken of by the fathers is the very Yahweh who will judge the world.

### ***Mosiah 27:32–33***

32 And now it came to pass that Alma began from this time forward to teach the people, and those who were with Alma at the time the angel appeared unto them, traveling round about through all the land, publishing to all the people the things which they had heard and seen, and preaching the word of God in much tribulation, being greatly persecuted by those who were unbelievers, being smitten by many of them.

33 But notwithstanding all this, they did impart much consolation to the church, confirming their faith, and exhorting them with long-suffering and much travail to keep the commandments of God.

#### ***Comments***

Alma<sub>2</sub> begins to undo the damage that he and his companions had perpetrated. They travel through the land preaching according to their new understanding. This is the concluding statement for Alma<sub>2</sub>’s story. The next major story will revolve around the sons of Mosiah<sub>2</sub>. Although they have not yet been important in this conversion story, their story is coming.

At the end of Alma<sub>2</sub>’s story, they are simply “those who were with Alma at the time the angel appeared unto them.” That changes in the next verses.

### ***Mosiah 27:34–37***

34 And four of them were the sons of Mosiah; and their names were Ammon, and Aaron, and Omner, and Himni; these were the names of the sons of Mosiah.

35 And they traveled throughout all the land of Zarahemla, and among all the people who were under the reign of king Mosiah, zealously striving to repair all the injuries which they had done to the church, confessing all their sins, and publishing all the things which they had seen, and explaining the prophecies and the scriptures to all who desired to hear them.

36 And thus they were instruments in the hands of God in bringing many to the knowledge of the truth, yea, to the knowledge of their Redeemer.

37 And how blessed are they! For they did publish peace; they did publish good tidings of good; and they did declare unto the people that the Lord reigneth.

### *Comments*

These verses end Mormon's original chapter XI, which covered our current chapters 23–27. Mormon began with the story of Alma<sub>1</sub> the elder in Helam, speaks of the creation of churches, and now the conversion of Alma<sub>2</sub> the younger and the sons of Mosiah<sub>2</sub>. The next chapters will deal with more political issues.

Important to those issues are the sons of Mosiah<sub>2</sub>, and therefore, they are named in verse 34. They were obliquely included in the end of Alma<sub>2</sub>'s story of preaching, and this information is essentially repeated here. The sons of Mosiah<sub>2</sub> also travel through the land of Zarahemla preaching repentance. The repetition is needed precisely because they were unnamed before. They are named now, and listed separately, because they become the focus of the next major story, told in the next chapter.



# Mosiah 28

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## Sons of Mosiah<sub>2</sub> Go to Preach among the Lamanites

### *Mosiah 28:1–2*

1 Now it came to pass that after the sons of Mosiah had done all these things, they took a small number with them and returned to their father, the king, and desired of him that he would grant unto them that they might, with these whom they had selected, go up to the land of Nephi that they might preach the things which they had heard, and that they might impart the word of God to their brethren, the Lamanites—

2 That perhaps they might bring them to the knowledge of the Lord their God, and convince them of the iniquity of their fathers; and that perhaps they might cure them of their hatred towards the Nephites, that they might also be brought to rejoice in the Lord their God, that they might become friendly to one another, and that there should be no more contentions in all the land which the Lord their God had given them.

### *Comments*

Mormon begins a new chapter with a new story. The intent of this new chapter is to introduce the political problem created when the sons of Mosiah<sub>2</sub> decline political leadership in order to instead go on a missionary journey to the Lamanites. This part of the story begins here and continues through verse 10, where Mormon will interrupt the narrative in such a way that he will decide to create a new chapter to return to the essential story he begins with these verses.

The story begins with the repentance of the sons of Mosiah<sub>2</sub>. That change of heart has them desiring to “preach the things which they had heard.” Specifically, they desire to preach those things to the Lamanites. Why the Lamanites? If their own nation was divided, why go to the Lamanites?

There is no answer to that question in the text. Piecing together a plausible explanation suggests that the ideas that they had previously preached, and of which they had repented, had come from the influence of the Lamanites. Thus, they may have felt compelled to preach the truth to those who had influenced their previous apostasy.

### ***Mosiah 28:3–5***

3 Now they were desirous that salvation should be declared to every creature, for they could not bear that any human soul should perish; yea, even the very thoughts that any soul should endure endless torment did cause them to quake and tremble.

4 And thus did the Spirit of the Lord work upon them, for they were the very vilest of sinners. And the Lord saw fit in his infinite mercy to spare them; nevertheless they suffered much anguish of soul because of their iniquities, suffering much and fearing that they should be cast off forever.

5 And it came to pass that they did plead with their father many days that they might go up to the land of Nephi.

#### ***Comments***

The sons of Mosiah<sub>2</sub> had been “the very vilest of sinners.” Why such strong language if they had simply ceased to believe what their father and Alma<sub>2</sub>’s father believed? Theirs was not simply the sin of disbelief. So many fall under that condemnation, and do so more than once in their lives. Belief and understanding can change.

What was different for the sons of Mosiah<sub>2</sub> was that they had sought to destroy the church (Mosiah 27:10). Rather than keep their sin as an individual consequence, they attempted to influence others and actively deny the correct doctrine to others. That was the serious aspect of their sin, not simply a lack of belief or faith.

As part of their massive change of heart, they petition their father to allow them to preach to the Lamanites in the land of Nephi. This was the Nephite land of inheritance, and the land from which Alma<sub>1</sub>, the elder and the people of Limhi had fled. It was a land where they probably spoke the language, and possibly had some connections that had influenced their previous apostasy.

### ***Mosiah 28:6–9***

6 And king Mosiah went and inquired of the Lord if he should let his sons go up among the Lamanites to preach the word.

7 And the Lord said unto Mosiah: Let them go up, for many shall believe on their words, and they shall have eternal life; and I will deliver thy sons out of the hands of the Lamanites.

8 And it came to pass that Mosiah granted that they might go and do according to their request.

9 And they took their journey into the wilderness to go up to preach the word among the Lamanites; and I shall give an account of their proceedings hereafter.

#### ***Comments***

Mosiah<sub>2</sub> takes the question to the Lord, and the Lord sends the sons of Mosiah<sub>2</sub> on their mission. It will be an important, and a successful, mission. After Mormon introduces the reason that the sons of Mosiah<sub>2</sub> will

not be in the land of Zarahemla, he simply notes that he will tell their story later. The point of telling this much of their story is to set up the story of the change to the political organization in the land of Zarahemla.

## Mosiah<sub>2</sub> Translates the Jaredite Plates

### *Mosiah 28:10*

10 Now king Mosiah had no one to confer the kingdom upon, for there was not any of his sons who would accept of the kingdom.

### *Comments*

When his sons left, Mosiah<sub>2</sub> was left without a political heir. Even though the sons were alive, they were out of communication in a different country. There was no knowing when or if they would ever return.

There is nothing in the text that indicates that Mosiah<sub>2</sub> was growing old, so there is no indication that a change in the ruler was imminent. However, in a monarchy, succession is important and occurs with greater continuity if there is an heir in place. Without a clear heir, the society is opened to the probability of jockeying for political position. Clans with some claim to the throne would begin to assert themselves against other claimants. Even without open rebellion or civil war, civil discord was virtually assured. It was not a condition that Mosiah<sub>2</sub> wanted to accept.

Mosiah<sub>2</sub> therefore sets in motion events that would establish the continuity of government and forestall the political unrest. As he begins to tell that story, however, he is pulled into a tangent for the next nine verses.

### *Mosiah 28:11–12*

11 Therefore he took the records which were engraven on the plates of brass, and also the plates of Nephi, and all the things which he had kept and preserved according to the commandments of God, after having translated and caused to be written the records which were on the plates of gold which had been found by the people of Limhi, which were delivered to him by the hand of Limhi;

12 And this he did because of the great anxiety of his people; for they were desirous beyond measure to know concerning those people who had been destroyed.

### *Comments*

Mormon begins to tell the story of the change in government by discussing the transfer of records. The records were part of the set of sacred items that were traditionally passed from one king to the next. Therefore, according to tradition, he prepares to transfer the plates of brass and the plates of Nephi. However, when the people of Limhi arrived, they came with their own records. Not only did they have their equivalent of

the plates of Limhi, their record of Zeniff, but they also had twenty-four plates that were discovered in a destroyed land, and which they desired to be translated.

It is those plates that send Mormon onto his aside. He discusses the desire for their translation, and then uses Mosiah<sub>2</sub> as the translator. All of this information is interesting and important, but none of it is directly related to the transfer of rulership. This is where Mormon inserts important information that takes him away from his intended storyline.

### ***Mosiah 28:13–16***

13 And now he translated them by the means of those two stones which were fastened into the two rims of a bow.

14 Now these things were prepared from the beginning, and were handed down from generation to generation, for the purpose of interpreting languages;

15 And they have been kept and preserved by the hand of the Lord, that he should discover to every creature who should possess the land the iniquities and abominations of his people;

16 And whosoever has these things is called seer, after the manner of old times.

### ***Comments***

When Mormon introduced the plates of Ether in Mosiah chapter 8, Limhi asks Ammon if he can translate them. Ammon responds that he knows of a man who can, a man who is a seer. At the time, Mosiah<sub>2</sub>'s name is not given, but it is clear in these verses that it is indeed Mosiah<sub>2</sub>, and that Mosiah<sub>2</sub> is indeed a seer.

The criteria of what makes one a seer is the possession of two stones fastened into the two rims of a bow. That description fits the interpreters that Joseph Smith received along with Mormon's plates. Not simply the possession of the stones, but the ability to use them, made one a seer. Thus, Mosiah<sub>2</sub> was a seer, and Joseph Smith was a seer.

There is no description of how Mosiah<sub>2</sub> used these two stones to translate. However, there must have been some similarity to the way Joseph Smith later used them. These two stones were typically called interpreters in the Book of Mormon, and Joseph Smith used that term until it was suggested that they might be similar to the Urim and Thummim of the Bible. That term became the common way they were discussed, but, while it correctly associates these two stones with divinatory implements of biblical times, it allows for the confusion that the Old World Urim and Thummim somehow appeared in the New World. That was not the case, and these stones were different.

We will also hear of interpreters that were sealed up with the plates of Ether. These might be them, but even before the plates of Ether arrived, Mosiah<sub>2</sub> had interpreters and knew how to use them. It was for that reason that he was already called a seer, and had already translated an old stone, before the plates of Ether and the Jaredite interpreters ever arrived in Zarahemla.



## ***Mosiah 28:17–19***

17 Now after Mosiah had finished translating these records, behold, it gave an account of the people who were destroyed, from the time that they were destroyed back to the building of the great tower, at the time the Lord confounded the language of the people and they were scattered abroad upon the face of all the earth, yea, and even from that time back until the creation of Adam.

18 Now this account did cause the people of Mosiah to mourn exceedingly, yea, they were filled with sorrow; nevertheless it gave them much knowledge, in the which they did rejoice.

19 And this account shall be written hereafter; for behold, it is expedient that all people should know the things which are written in this account.

### *Comments*

Mormon concludes his aside with a quick note about what Mosiah<sub>2</sub> found on the plates. It was the account of a destroyed people who also had ties to the Old World and to the ancient sacred stories on the brass plates. Mosiah<sub>2</sub> was saddened for their destruction. Mormon will use the Jaredites as the prime exemplars of a destroyed nation, the literal examples of how and why the Nephite nation would be destroyed.

Mormon promises that the account of that people would be known. He appears to have left the fulfillment of that prophecy to Moroni. There is no indication in Mormon's writing that he intended to do it himself. Moroni serves as editor of Ether's record in a similar way as Mormon edited the plates of Nephi.

This verse ended the chapter in the 1830 version. Orson Pratt decided to move the first sentences of the next chapter to the end of our chapter 28.

## **The Records Are Delivered to Alma<sub>1</sub>**

### ***Mosiah 28:20***

20 And now, as I said unto you, that after king Mosiah had done these things, he took the plates of brass, and all the things which he had kept, and conferred them upon Alma, who was the son of Alma; yea, all the records, and also the interpreters, and conferred them upon him, and commanded him that he should keep and preserve them, and also keep a record of the people, handing them down from one generation to another, even as they had been handed down from the time that Lehi left Jerusalem.

### *Comments*

Mormon decided that he was far enough off track that he wanted a new chapter beginning for the story of the political change. He had begun to tell the story when he noted that he gathered the records. This verse provides the repetitive resumption that indicates that the insertion of tangential information has ended. We are back on track.

What Mormon had intended with the introduction of the records was to show that they were given to Alma<sub>2</sub>, the son of Alma<sub>1</sub>. That same Alma<sub>2</sub> will become the first chief judge. We cannot know if Mormon tells this part of the story first because it came before Alma<sub>2</sub> was seated as the first chief judge, or if Mosiah<sub>2</sub> prepared the records because he knew that Alma<sub>2</sub> would be the first chief judge.

There is no chapter break here. This was the introduction to the ending of the book of Mosiah. We know that ending as chapter 29.

# Mosiah 29

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## Mosiah<sub>2</sub> Establishes the Reign of the Judges

### *Mosiah 29:1–3*

1 Now when Mosiah had done this he sent out throughout all the land, among all the people, desiring to know their will concerning who should be their king.

2 And it came to pass that the voice of the people came, saying: We are desirous that Aaron thy son should be our king and our ruler.

3 Now Aaron had gone up to the land of Nephi, therefore the king could not confer the kingdom upon him; neither would Aaron take upon him the kingdom; neither were any of the sons of Mosiah willing to take upon them the kingdom.

### *Comments*

As noted at the end of the previous chapter, the final verse of our chapter 28 was originally at the beginning of this final chapter of Mosiah. It began with “after king Mosiah had done these things” (Mosiah 28:20). The current first verse begins with “Now when Mosiah had done this.” This strange repetition was required to recover from the inserted aside about the translation of the plates of Ether. That information was important but is not the reason for this particular chapter. Thus, Mormon ends the transmission of the various plates and begins in earnest to tell the important story of the shift from monarchy to judges.

When Mosiah<sub>2</sub> asks the people who should be their king, he is probably following a typical process. While we do not often see the full process, it appears that the voice of the people was a part of the change from one king to another, even when the presumptive heir was clear. Thus, in Mosiah 7:9 we see that Noah was made king after Zeniff by the voice of the people. As the son, it was clear that Noah was to become king. Nevertheless, the voice of the people came into play.

We see the same action in these verses. King Mosiah<sub>2</sub> asks for the voice of the people, and as expected, Aaron is declared the rightful heir. The problem was that Aaron was gone. Not only that, but any other of Mosiah<sub>2</sub>'s sons, who might have fulfilled the role of heir, were also gone. Now the governmental succession was officially in crisis.

## ***Mosiah 29:4–7***

4 Therefore king Mosiah sent again among the people; yea, even a written word sent he among the people. And these were the words that were written, saying:

5 Behold, O ye my people, or my brethren, for I esteem you as such, I desire that ye should consider the cause which ye are called to consider—for ye are desirous to have a king.

6 Now I declare unto you that he to whom the kingdom doth rightly belong has declined, and will not take upon him the kingdom.

7 And now if there should be another appointed in his stead, behold I fear there would rise contentions among you. And who knoweth but what my son, to whom the kingdom doth belong, should turn to be angry and draw away a part of this people after him, which would cause wars and contentions among you, which would be the cause of shedding much blood and perverting the way of the Lord, yea, and destroy the souls of many people.

### ***Comments***

Mosiah<sub>2</sub> sends a written word. Although modern readers easily see a leaflet or flier with the information that each person might read, that would have been unusual in the ancient world. Although Nephite society clearly had those who could read and write, it is quite likely that those talents were restricted to a few members of the society. What likely happened was similar to what occurred in the Old World. The written word would be taken by a person who could read, and it would be read out loud to the various groups.

We have seen the people of Zarahemla divided into at least two large groups, which likely represented descendants of Nephi and of Zarahemla (who were ultimately descendants of Mulek). However, inside those divisions it is probable that there were also tribal divisions, or at least great families, where those who were of a similar descent would live in general proximity to others. It is therefore likely that this proclamation was read to these large family groups.

The import of the message is that King Mosiah<sub>2</sub> understood that the lack of a designated heir could lead to “shedding much blood and perverting the way of the Lord.” Therefore, he will propose an innovative solution.

## ***Mosiah 29:8–10***

8 Now I say unto you let us be wise and consider these things, for we have no right to destroy my son, neither should we have any right to destroy another if he should be appointed in his stead.

9 And if my son should turn again to his pride and vain things he would recall the things which he had said, and claim his right to the kingdom, which would cause him and also this people to commit much sin.

10 And now let us be wise and look forward to these things, and do that which will make for the peace of this people.

## *Comments*

In this part of the message, Mosiah<sub>2</sub> explains the problem created when his sons declined to become the designated heir. The problem was twofold. The first was that it would lead to someone else attempting to become king, with multiple factions struggling for supremacy. Then, when that man was selected as king, one of Mosiah<sub>2</sub>'s sons might return and claim the throne by right of inheritance.

Thus, there was the chance of civil unrest in order to select a new king, but further unrest was possible even when that was settled, should one of the sons of Mosiah<sub>2</sub> return. Therefore, Mosiah<sub>2</sub> requests: "let us be wise and look forward to these things, and do that which will make for the peace of this people."

## ***Mosiah 29:11–13***

11 Therefore I will be your king the remainder of my days; nevertheless, let us appoint judges, to judge this people according to our law; and we will newly arrange the affairs of this people, for we will appoint wise men to be judges, that will judge this people according to the commandments of God.

12 Now it is better that a man should be judged of God than of man, for the judgments of God are always just, but the judgments of man are not always just.

13 Therefore, if it were possible that you could have just men to be your kings, who would establish the laws of God, and judge this people according to his commandments, yea, if ye could have men for your kings who would do even as my father Benjamin did for this people—I say unto you, if this could always be the case then it would be expedient that ye should always have kings to rule over you.

## *Comments*

King Mosiah<sub>2</sub> proposes that he will continue to be king, but that he will be the last. Changing to a system of judges would give the nation the opportunity to avoid the issue of continuity of succession by creating a new system and establishing a government that would not be beholden to the possible return of one of Mosiah<sub>2</sub>'s sons who might claim kingship.

What is interesting is the set of arguments Mosiah<sub>2</sub> provides for this change. The first is that it is better that a man should be judged of God. We recognize that this is a truism, but why is it part of Mosiah<sub>2</sub>'s argument? Note that in verse 13 he says, "therefore, if it were possible that you could have just men to be your kings . . . it would be expedient that ye should always have kings to rule over you." The essential argument is that a good king ruled under and by the authority of Yahweh. Thus, a just king was just in that he followed the law of Moses and the understanding of the prophets.

The argument was not simply that it was good if the king were a good person, but that kings were to be preferred if and when they were in accord with, and perhaps in communication with, Yahweh, or at least Yahweh's will.

## ***Mosiah 29:14–15***

14 And even I myself have labored with all the power and faculties which I have possessed, to teach you the commandments of God, and to establish peace throughout the land, that there should be no wars nor contentions, no stealing, nor plundering, nor murdering, nor any manner of iniquity;

15 And whosoever has committed iniquity, him have I punished according to the crime which he has committed, according to the law which has been given to us by our fathers.

### ***Comments***

After declaring in the previous verses that a just king should follow Yahweh's precepts, Mosiah<sub>2</sub> declares that he has done so. The particular Nephite elaboration of what a just king should be was declared in King Benjamin's discourse. Mosiah<sub>2</sub> learned from his father and declares similar evidence that he has ruled righteously. The evidence is that he has labored to teach Yahweh's commandments and sought peace in the land. He has not condoned plundering nor murdering. We have seen in other locations that those are terms that are associated with other kings in the Mesoamerican world and are used as specific ways to differentiate Nephite kings from the other kings in the region.

Most importantly for what follows is that Mosiah<sub>2</sub> has instituted laws that he follows. Kings have the right to execute judgment, and it is possible that they could do so in a case by case basis. Mosiah<sub>2</sub> indicates that he has followed laws against which people could be judged, thus assuring that all would be judged equally according to the laws governing all the Nephite nation. He will be pronouncing further laws that are appropriate to the change in the nature of rulership.

## ***Mosiah 29:16–18***

16 Now I say unto you, that because all men are not just it is not expedient that ye should have a king or kings to rule over you.

17 For behold, how much iniquity doth one wicked king cause to be committed, yea, and what great destruction!

18 Yea, remember king Noah, his wickedness and his abominations, and also the wickedness and abominations of his people. Behold what great destruction did come upon them; and also because of their iniquities they were brought into bondage.

### ***Comments***

The influence of Alma<sub>1</sub>, the elder is clear in the arguments that Mosiah<sub>2</sub> is presenting. In the previous verses Mosiah<sub>2</sub> had indicated that if a people always had righteous men as kings, that it would be best to have a king. Nevertheless, as Mosiah<sub>2</sub> points out, the example of King Noah proves that this does not always happen.

Alma<sub>1</sub> personally experienced the problem of an unrighteous king. When his people asked him to be their king in Helam, note how similar his argument was to that we are seeing from Mosiah<sub>2</sub>:

But he said unto them: Behold, it is not expedient that we should have a king; for thus saith the Lord: Ye shall not esteem one flesh above another, or one man shall not think himself above another; therefore I say unto you it is not expedient that ye should have a king. Nevertheless, if it were possible that ye could always have just men to be your kings it would be well for you to have a king. But remember the iniquity of king Noah and his priests; and I myself was caught in a snare, and did many things which were abominable in the sight of the Lord. (Mosiah 23:7–9)

Although Mosiah<sub>2</sub> does not credit Alma<sub>1</sub> with this perspective, it is clear that Alma<sub>1</sub> had an influence on Mosiah<sub>2</sub>'s thinking. Therefore, not only did Alma<sub>1</sub> influence the creation of churches, which changed the religious landscape in Zarahemla, but he also influenced the political landscape. Perhaps more than any single person since Nephi himself did one man so dramatically affect the nature of Nephite society.

### ***Mosiah 29:19–21***

19 And were it not for the interposition of their all-wise Creator, and this because of their sincere repentance, they must unavoidably remain in bondage until now.

20 But behold, he did deliver them because they did humble themselves before him; and because they cried mightily unto him he did deliver them out of bondage; and thus doth the Lord work with his power in all cases among the children of men, extending the arm of mercy towards them that put their trust in him.

21 And behold, now I say unto you, ye cannot dethrone an iniquitous king save it be through much contention, and the shedding of much blood.

### ***Comments***

Mosiah<sub>2</sub> continues with the bad example set by Noah. Because of Noah's actions, his people were brought into bondage to the Lamanites. It was a long and difficult process of repentance that was required before the Lord delivered them from bondage. The point is not so much the bondage, but the way in which that might have been prevented.

Mosiah<sub>2</sub> declares that the problem is trying to remove a king. Since a king rules by the presumption of inherited right, there is no mechanism to remove a bad king that does not result in the "shedding of much blood." Thus, the cure is possibly as bad as the consequences of remaining under the rule of such a king as Noah.

## ***Mosiah 29:22–24***

22 For behold, he has his friends in iniquity, and he keepeth his guards about him; and he teareth up the laws of those who have reigned in righteousness before him; and he trampleth under his feet the commandments of God;

23 And he enacteth laws, and sendeth them forth among his people, yea, laws after the manner of his own wickedness; and whosoever doth not obey his laws he causeth to be destroyed; and whosoever doth rebel against him he will send his armies against them to war, and if he can he will destroy them; and thus an unrighteous king doth pervert the ways of all righteousness.

24 And now behold I say unto you, it is not expedient that such abominations should come upon you.

### *Comments*

Mosiah<sub>1</sub> explains why the removal of a bad king typically leads to the shedding of blood. Such a king protects himself, surrounding himself not only with guards, but with those who benefit from the king's policies. The king then enacts laws that promote his particular ways of deviating from Yahweh's social laws.

Mosiah<sub>2</sub> had declared in verse 14 that he had led his people to peace, and here indicates that the opposite of his righteous rule would be a king who led his people into war. The result of this series of arguments is that "it is not expedient that such abominations should come upon you." The solution will be a change in the way that the Nephite government operated.

## ***Mosiah 29:25***

25 Therefore, choose you by the voice of this people, judges, that ye may be judged according to the laws which have been given you by our fathers, which are correct, and which were given them by the hand of the Lord.

### *Comments*

Mosiah<sub>2</sub> declares that they would use the voice of the people to establish judges who would judge "according to the laws which have been given you by our fathers, which are correct, and which were given them by the hand of the Lord." Thus, Yahweh would continue to be their lawgiver, and the judges would be in place to govern in accord with established law.

It is important to understand that this is not a declaration that Mosiah<sub>2</sub> established voting and elections. We will see that judges will also become hereditary positions, and the voice of the people never functions as a vote. We remember that the voice of the people was a mechanism that functioned under the monarchy as well, so there isn't a major change. The difference is that there would no longer be a king who was presumed to speak with and for Yahweh directly in the way laws were enacted. The judges would tend to work within the laws which the fathers received from Yahweh.



## ***Mosiah 29:26–29***

26 Now it is not common that the voice of the people desireth anything contrary to that which is right; but it is common for the lesser part of the people to desire that which is not right; therefore this shall ye observe and make it your law—to do your business by the voice of the people.

27 And if the time comes that the voice of the people doth choose iniquity, then is the time that the judgments of God will come upon you; yea, then is the time he will visit you with great destruction even as he has hitherto visited this land.

28 And now if ye have judges, and they do not judge you according to the law which has been given, ye can cause that they may be judged of a higher judge.

29 If your higher judges do not judge righteous judgments, ye shall cause that a small number of your lower judges should be gathered together, and they shall judge your higher judges, according to the voice of the people.

### ***Comments***

The voice of the people does perhaps become more important in the reign of the judges because it becomes a method for the removal of an unrighteous judge. Mosiah<sub>2</sub> had indicated that it was difficult to remove an unrighteous king without bloodshed, and it is that context that provides the background to this part of his instructions. The people typically desire that which is right, therefore they would support righteous judges.

Nevertheless, it is possible that the people would not desire righteousness. That can occur, but that is a case of apostasy and will invoke the negative aspect of the promise of the land. When the people are no longer righteous, they not only lose their divine protection, but will be visited with destruction.

The method of removal is to be orderly, however. A judge who does not judge according to established law would be brought to a higher judge. Even the higher judge could be removed with the combined judgments of lower judges. Thus, there is an established way that the people could remove an unrighteous judge without resorting to bloodshed.

## ***Mosiah 29:30–32***

30 And I command you to do these things in the fear of the Lord; and I command you to do these things, and that ye have no king; that if these people commit sins and iniquities they shall be answered upon their own heads.

31 For behold I say unto you, the sins of many people have been caused by the iniquities of their kings; therefore their iniquities are answered upon the heads of their kings.

32 And now I desire that this inequality should be no more in this land, especially among this my people; but I desire that this land be a land of liberty, and every man may enjoy his rights and privileges alike, so long as the Lord sees fit that we may live and inherit the land, yea, even as long as any of our posterity remains upon the face of the land.

## *Comments*

The voice of the people has been elevated to a more important status; thus Mosiah<sub>2</sub> admonishes the people that they too have the responsibility to act “in the fear of the Lord.” One of the consequences of the greater responsibility is a shift in the nature of how the community is perceived. When there is a king, the people follow the king and the king’s unrighteousness is laid at his own feet for leading his people astray.

With the increased importance of the voice of the people comes an increased responsibility. Because the people have been more empowered, they are also potentially more culpable. They are not to blame if leaders fall into sin, but only if they allow those leaders to remain in positions where they can influence the people to also stray from Yahweh’s commandments.

Mosiah<sub>2</sub> finishes this section with a renewal of the promise of the land. It continues to be a land of liberty, but only upon principles of righteousness. Although the nature of the government is changing, the essential covenant remains. The people are simply even more responsible for social righteousness that will allow all to prosper.

## ***Mosiah 29:33–36***

33 And many more things did king Mosiah write unto them, unfolding unto them all the trials and troubles of a righteous king, yea, all the travails of soul for their people, and also all the murmurings of the people to their king; and he explained it all unto them.

34 And he told them that these things ought not to be; but that the burden should come upon all the people, that every man might bear his part.

35 And he also unfolded unto them all the disadvantages they labored under, by having an unrighteous king to rule over them;

36 Yea, all his iniquities and abominations, and all the wars, and contentions, and bloodshed, and the stealing, and the plundering, and the committing of whoredoms, and all manner of iniquities which cannot be enumerated—telling them that these things ought not to be, that they were expressly repugnant to the commandments of God.

## *Comments*

Mormon has been quoting from the document Mosiah<sub>2</sub> sent to be read to the people. Now he summarizes. Apparently, Mosiah<sub>2</sub> felt that the greatest need was to justify the change; therefore, he provided even more discussion of why it could be disadvantageous to have a king. Both the Nephites and Zarahemlaite had kings from their beginning, and the shift was a major change in the way the people thought. Thus, it was probable that multiple arguments were required. Mormon lived long after the change and did not see the need for further discussion of those problems. Therefore, he summarized, rather than quoted, that part of the document.

## The Reign of the Judges Begins

### ***Mosiah 29:37–39***

37 And now it came to pass, after king Mosiah had sent these things forth among the people they were convinced of the truth of his words.

38 Therefore they relinquished their desires for a king, and became exceedingly anxious that every man should have an equal chance throughout all the land; yea, and every man expressed a willingness to answer for his own sins.

39 Therefore, it came to pass that they assembled themselves together in bodies throughout the land, to cast in their voices concerning who should be their judges, to judge them according to the law which had been given them; and they were exceedingly rejoiced because of the liberty which had been granted unto them.

### *Comments*

Verse 37 reminds us that the text we have just seen, that quoted Mosiah<sub>2</sub>, was quoting a document, not a speech. He sent that document to his people. They responded favorably. Notice that one of the consequences of this change in the way the government worked was to shift communal responsibility from the king to the community itself. Therefore, it became critical that “every man expressed a willingness to answer for his own sins.” While answering for one’s own sins might seem out of place in a political discussion, given the conjunction of politics and religion in Nephite society, it was precisely the point.

The selection of the first judges appears to have had more communal participation than later judges would have. After establishing this set of judges, the positions appear to return to the assumption of inherited service. In order for that assumption to have been acceptable, it is not unreasonable to speculate that the lower judges were selected from the tribes or clans that would be governed by those judges.

### ***Mosiah 29:40–41***

40 And they did wax strong in love towards Mosiah; yea, they did esteem him more than any other man; for they did not look upon him as a tyrant who was seeking for gain, yea, for that lucre which doth corrupt the soul; for he had not exacted riches of them, neither had he delighted in the shedding of blood; but he had established peace in the land, and he had granted unto his people that they should be delivered from all manner of bondage; therefore they did esteem him, yea, exceedingly, beyond measure.

41 And it came to pass that they did appoint judges to rule over them, or to judge them according to the law; and this they did throughout all the land.

## *Comments*

King Mosiah<sub>2</sub> continued as king, but also appears to set the government of judges in motion. It is speculation, but it would have been prudent to institute the reign of judges while he was yet king, so that any issues could be brought to him as the king and recognized leader. When he sorted out the issues, they could be claimed to come through his divine authority.

The remembered legacy was the one that Benjamin had desired. Mosiah<sub>2</sub> was remembered for not delighting in the shedding of blood and the establishment of peace. As with Benjamin, he took credit for things he did not do, such as not exacting riches from them. Mosiah<sub>2</sub>, as did his father, represented the best of Nephite governing ideals.

## ***Mosiah: 29:42–44***

42 And it came to pass that Alma was appointed to be the first chief judge, he being also the high priest, his father having conferred the office upon him, and having given him the charge concerning all the affairs of the church.

43 And now it came to pass that Alma did walk in the ways of the Lord, and he did keep his commandments, and he did judge righteous judgments; and there was continual peace through the land.

44 And thus commenced the reign of the judges throughout all the land of Zarahemla, among all the people who were called the Nephites; and Alma was the first and chief judge.

## *Comments*

To this point, Mormon has described the beginning of the reign of judges generically, without reference to anyone filling the positions. Now we find that the first chief judge is Alma<sub>2</sub>. Where the government and religious leadership had been split between Mosiah<sub>2</sub> and Alma<sub>1</sub>, they were now reunited in Alma<sub>2</sub>.

The confirmation that this change was divinely ordained comes in the form of the standard statement that things were well after a major change. In this case, Alma<sub>2</sub> always “did walk in the ways of the Lord, and he did keep his commandments.” This is the statement that shows that the Nephites prospered, and that the prosperity came as a result of aligning themselves with Yahweh’s laws and desires.

## ***Mosiah 29:45–47***

45 And now it came to pass that his father died, being eighty and two years old, having lived to fulfil the commandments of God.

46 And it came to pass that Mosiah died also, in the thirty and third year of his reign, being sixty and three years old; making in the whole, five hundred and nine years from the time Lehi left Jerusalem.

47 And thus ended the reign of the kings over the people of Nephi; and thus ended the days of Alma, who was the founder of their church.

### *Comments*

Mormon ends the book of Mosiah with the passing of the two most important men discussed in the book, King Mosiah<sub>2</sub> and Alma<sub>1</sub>. In terms of ancient lifespans, both men were aged, but Alma<sub>1</sub> was impressively older, passing away at eighty-two years of age.

As noted at the beginning of our book of Mosiah, we do not have the original beginning of the book. It certainly began with the establishment of the change from a solely Nephite king to a king over both Nephites and Zarahemlaites. It ended with another political change with the beginning of the reign of the judges. Although a modern reader sees both religion and politics in the chapter, they were anciently so closely related as to be difficult to separate. Thus, while there were religious ramifications, the book of Mosiah has been a story of political change.

