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King Benjamin's Speech in the Context of Ancient Israelite Festivals

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CHAPTER 6

KING BENJAMIN'S SPEECH
IN THE CONTEXT OF
ANCIENT ISRAELITE FESTIVALS

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Years of research have identified many threads of evidence in the Book of Mormon that tie back into the observance of ancient Israelite festivals. While traces of several preexilic Israelite festivals have been found in various places in the Book of Mormon, no source has been more fertile than King Benjamin's speech. To a greater degree than most people might have suspected, characteristics of the speech that mark the occasion as a day of holy Israelite observances are both rich and specific. Several texts and surrounding contexts highlight the importance of this public occasion as a significant religious event.

During the first two weeks of each fall season, all the people living under the law of Moses kept certain days holy, marking the celebration of the turn of a new year, the continuation of God's reign, and the abundance of God's goodness. Although it is impossible to reconstruct with precision what transpired in antiquity on those days, it appears that such Israelite celebrations probably included religious convocations, rituals, and festivals that served to

renew the allegiance of the people to their heavenly and earthly kings, to purify the group from all unholiness, and to strengthen their commitment to revealed principles of personal and community righteousness. Several kings in ancient Israel selected this time of the year for the official inauguration of their reign or the installation of their successor to the throne. From several similar indications, it would appear that King Benjamin likewise planned to celebrate the culminating day of his life—the coronation of his firstborn son Mosiah—on or around this high and holy season in the traditional Israelite religious calendar. No other time of the year would have been more suited for the installation of a new regent or for renewing the covenant relationship between God, king, and people—the essence of any Israelite monarchy.

The discoveries reported and developed in this chapter are attributable to the research, collaboration, and combined criticism of many people. As early as 1957, Hugh W. Nibley proposed the theory that Benjamin's speech was an ancient year-rite festival,¹ a theme that he develops further in his newly prepared chapter in this volume. His 1939 doctoral dissertation drew on Roman and other pagan sources to apply a typology of the classical year-rite festivals to the Roman games,² and his intense familiarity with these popular religious or quasi-religious practices in diverse parts of the ancient world readily led him in 1957 to identify certain parallels between the typical annual pagan ritual and Benjamin's speech.³ Nibley's genius for drawing cultural associations broke new ground forty years ago by inviting Book of Mormon scholars to view Benjamin's speech in an entirely new light.

However, even though Nibley's initial approach included a few references to the Israelite Feast of Tabernacles in connection with his analysis of the standard year-rite

phenomenon of many ancient civilizations,⁴ his original pagan year-rite theory attracted few fully settled followers. More research and further investigation was invited and needed. The main question Nibley left unresolved was why an inspired king in the house of Israel would ever be inclined to mimic or dignify the practices of a pagan year-rite cult.

A possible answer to this question began to emerge in the 1970s and took clearer shape in the 1980s. Rather than ranging far afield among widely scattered ancient civilizations, but without rejecting the value of comparative cultural studies, Latter-day Saint scholars in those years focused their attention more extensively on the Old Testament as well as many features of subsequent related Jewish history, literature, and ceremony grounded in the Hebrew Bible. Interesting bonds were discovered between Benjamin's speech and the laws, statutes, and ordinances revealed by Jehovah to the prophets of Israel who preceded and influenced Lehi and Nephi. The following chapter consolidates the results of this research and reports ideas contributed by many individuals.⁵ In writing and editing this chapter, we express appreciation for the collegial willingness of this group to explore and share the many possibilities that seem, in our best judgment, to shed light on the setting and significance of Benjamin's address.

Israelite Festivals in the Book of Mormon: General Considerations and Caveats

Every civilization or culture, it seems, enjoys holidays or special times of the year. Christmas, Thanksgiving, Easter, Halloween, and the Fourth of July are among the main holidays celebrated in the United States. Other nations have similar holidays. Certain traditions associated with each of

these days are of characteristic importance to their native cultures, especially as these celebrations perpetuate and reinforce the main institutions of that society, whether in the domain of church, state, or family. As important as such secular and religious holidays may be in the modern world, religious festivals and holy days carried even greater significance in the ancient world, particularly in Israel.

Under the law of Moses, Israelites were required to observe three main holy days each year (see Exodus 23:14–19). The first was the well-known spring festival of *Pesach* (Passover), which began the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The second was *Shavuot* (Pentecost), occurring fifty days after Passover. The third was an autumn festival complex that later developed into the composite two- or three-week-long observance of the three related celebrations of *Rosh ha-Shanah* (New Year and Day of Judgment), *Yom Kippur* (Day of Atonement), and *Sukkot* (Feast of Tabernacles).

These holy days held enormous religious, political, and family significance, especially since God had commanded their observance: “Three times thou shalt keep a feast unto me in the year” (Exodus 23:14). Details concerning the celebration of each holiday are found in a number of festival calendars and instructions in the Old Testament (for example, see Exodus 23:14–17; 34:18–23; Leviticus 23; Numbers 28–29; Deuteronomy 16). Accordingly, no person could claim to keep the law of Moses and not observe these special holy days, which would have been kept at least as intently as the strictly observed regular weekly sabbaths.

As guided by the Lord and his prophets, Lehi and his people diligently kept the law of Moses. Nephi affirmed, in the sixth century B.C., that his people “did observe to keep the judgments, and the statutes, and the commandments of the Lord in all things, according to the law of Moses” (2 Nephi 5:10), and that they did “keep the law of Moses, and look

forward with steadfastness unto Christ, until the law shall be fulfilled" (2 Nephi 25:24). In 74 B.C., some fifty years after Benjamin's speech, the Nephites were still keeping the law of Moses: "Yea, and the people did observe to keep the commandments of the Lord; and they were strict in observing the ordinances of God, according to the law of Moses" (Alma 30:3). The Nephites were to continue to keep the law of Moses until it was fulfilled entirely by the death and resurrection of Christ (see 3 Nephi 1:24–25), and the Lamanites observed the law of Moses in the days of their righteousness (see Alma 25:15; Helaman 13:1). It stands to reason, therefore, that the Nephites in Benjamin's day would have kept holy observances that were appropriately similar to the festivals and holy days required by the Old Testament texts that the Nephites possessed on the plates of brass.

How the Nephites and Lamanites understood and applied those ancient biblical regulations, however, remains obscure. Jewish practices evolved, at least to some degree, during the period of the Babylonian captivity that began after Lehi and his family left the Holy Land. We do not mean to imply that the Nephites or Lamanites followed "the later varieties of Jewish law that proliferated among various Jewish communities several centuries after Lehi left Jerusalem,"⁶ but it is still logical to conclude that these Nephites and Lamanites were committed to observe the ancient holy days as best they could in the essential forms in which those festivals were known under the preexilic law of Moses. Indeed, as has been argued extensively elsewhere, "the prophets of the Book of Mormon present a thoroughly Christian theology and religion" but all "against a background of ancient Israelite law and culture."⁷ For example, Benjamin prepared his people for the end of the law of Moses when he stressed the importance of the atonement of Jesus Christ, repentance, and charity. Benjamin realized, as

would the Jews eventually on the destruction of their temple in Jerusalem by the Romans, that “without repentance no sacrificial rites were of any avail. With the cessation of sacrifices, therefore, repentance was left as the sole condition of the remission of sins,”⁸ placing emphasis on prayer and charity. Nevertheless, Benjamin and his subjects still recognized that the end of the law would not come until God himself would announce that momentous transition, as finally occurred in 3 Nephi 9:17–22.

In the meantime, the Nephites kept careful calendrical watch of their times and seasons, a necessary precondition in any society for the timely observance of specific days as legal holidays or annual festivals. Abundant evidence in the Book of Mormon shows that the people in the Nephite culture generally paid great attention to their calendar. In his editing, Mormon carefully kept track of years, months, and even days; the years from the time Lehi left Jerusalem, the years of the reign of the judges, the years from the appearance of the sign of Jesus’ birth, and sometimes the months and days within those years were meticulously noted.⁹ Throughout Jewish history, one of the most important reasons for keeping an accurate standardized calendar was to regulate and facilitate the observance of specific holidays,¹⁰ especially since the law of Moses stipulated a precise day for most of the festivals. Bitter and divisive arguments over who had the right calendar in fact became deep and fundamental points of theological dispute among the Pharisees, the Essenes at Qumran, and other Jewish groups of that period.¹¹ Into the modern period, Jewish law still concerns itself with calendrical issues, such as what happens in regard to the observance of a festival when a Jew crosses the international date line and gains or loses a day.¹² Thus, one of the unstated reasons why the Nephites kept such careful track of their days, months, and years may well have been to cre-

ate a strict framework within which they could properly observe their weekly sabbaths, annual holy days, sabbatical years, and jubilee releases, as well as identifying certain anniversaries in their individual lives that had legal significance under the law of Moses (such as retirement from routine priestly duties at age fifty according to Numbers 8:25).

While the Book of Mormon never mentions Passover, the Feast of Tabernacles, or any other religious holiday specifically by name, several reasons can be suggested to explain this omission. The ancient writers may have assumed that their readers would naturally understand. A person does not have to say the word *Christmas* to refer implicitly to that special day. Even a casual mention of “wise men” or “decorating a tree” is enough. In just the same way, the words *Passover* or *Pentecost* do not need to appear in the Book of Mormon to evoke images alluding to the Israelite holidays.¹³ Alternatively, Mormon may have found such points to be irrelevant to his purposes, since he was writing after the time when the law of Moses had been fulfilled in Christ. Moreover, one must remember that the Book of Mormon was not designed to be prescriptive in the same way as are the codes found in the Torah. Thus, although Mosaic festivals receive only indirect attention in the Book of Mormon, this does not mean that they lacked importance in Nephite society, only that further details about them were not chosen for inclusion in the final abridgments of the narratives or speeches preserved in the Book of Mormon. Other Nephite records also existed, and they may well have contained extensive descriptions of their religious and social observances. Indeed, the weekly sabbath is rarely mentioned in the Book of Mormon (see only Jarom 1:5; Mosiah 13:16–19; 18:23), yet is it unthinkable that the righteous Nephites, throughout their history, did not remember to keep the sabbath day; and one must remember that the annual

holy days and sabbatical years were also part of the ancient law of the sabbath.

While the annual festivals are not mentioned expressly in the Book of Mormon, perhaps allusions to these festival names were more apparent in the original Nephite languages than they are in the English translation. For example, these Hebrew names have meanings: in Hebrew, *Pesach* literally means “exemption”; *Sukkot* means “tabernacles” or “booths”; *Yom Kippur* is “day of atonement.” Thus the reference to the word *tents*¹⁴ in Mosiah 2:5 and the repeated mention of *atonement* in Mosiah 3 may well have caused a Nephite to think of the respective names of those holidays.

Whether expressly mentioned or not, evidence located in the Book of Mormon, particularly in King Benjamin’s speech, supports the claim that those particular festivals which were most likely known to Israel in Lehi’s day were indeed observed in the lands of Nephi and Zarahemla. Of course—and we repeat—it is difficult to determine which festivals were observed in preexilic Israel before the destruction of Jerusalem in 587/586 B.C., and how those religious feasts were celebrated in that era of Israelite history. No person alive today, of course, has ever witnessed an ancient Israelite celebration, and biblical scholars differ considerably in their views about the nature of the festivals in ancient civilizations, let alone the possible connections or borrowings between them.

Nevertheless, considerable evidence about ancient Israelite practices can be gleaned from many biblical passages. If those biblical texts were written before the time of Lehi, they become particularly useful and relevant to the study of Book of Mormon world views. It must be noted, however, that some biblical passages may reflect Jewish customs or practices that were influenced or modified in Babylon or Palestine only after Lehi’s departure. In that case their value

for understanding the Book of Mormon is diminished, although to address the theories and uncertainties involved in Old Testament chronological criticism exceeds the scope of this chapter. Accordingly, as various features of these festivals are discussed below, emphasis will be placed on those practices that can be traced most clearly to the earlier biblical periods, although later Jewish sources are not considered completely irrelevant to the discussion of King Benjamin's speech.

We are aware that it would simplify and tighten our presentation if we were to limit our sources to the preexilic materials; indeed, we believe that most of our points are supported by early data. We have chosen, however, to include later Israelite and Jewish sources, both for the sake of completeness and because research in this area may enrich our understanding. Moreover, many of the detailed and elaborate descriptions of Jewish festivals found in the Talmud and other later Jewish literature may well reflect long-standing Israelite traditions, even though it is not always possible to know which texts or details are archaic and which emerged as later innovations. Thus, while we are keenly aware that these later sources are much weaker than the earlier texts for our purposes, they still offer useful information. Even today, most of the basic elements in Jewish observances of these festivals strive to follow the instructions and patterns found in the ancient Torah scrolls pertaining to these festivals. For this reason, when one reads popular Jewish guides to the prayer services of these festival days today, numerous themes and even some phrases jump out at the reader as points of commonality between the Bible, long-standing Jewish tradition, and parts of Benjamin's speech. For example, during Yom Kippur and Rosh ha-Shanah, prayers praising him "who has granted us life" (*She-hecheyanu*), prayers signifying "the acceptance of

God's sovereignty" (the *Shema*), prayers recognizing the commandment to love (*Və'ahavta*), and prayers describing thirteen attributes of God (*El melech yoshev*) are recited.¹⁵ All these modern prayers are grounded in ancient biblical texts and several similar features are also prominent in Benjamin's speech, sometimes being expressed in quite similar terminology and phraseology.

General observations and caveats such as these lead us to the following position regarding the comparative use of biblical and Jewish sources in studying Benjamin's speech:

- When Book of Mormon concepts and practices are consistent with well-established early biblical materials, the relevance of these parallels to Benjamin's speech seems relatively clear. In these cases, one may fairly confidently assert that Benjamin was aware of those early biblical texts and traditions, which he consciously followed.
- When features of ancient biblical routines and institutions are unclear, it becomes impossible, of course, to determine with certainty whether Benjamin's speech resembled or differed from actual ancient Israelite concepts and practices. Nevertheless, in such cases it is interesting to study the possible reconstructions that have been advanced by biblical researchers and to compare their proposals with elements in Benjamin's speech, many of which are consonant with those sophisticated theories and scholarly results.
- With respect to the use of later rabbinic and Jewish traditions that were first committed to writing long after Lehi left Jerusalem, it may sometimes be argued that the origins of those rules and regulations found in the oral law can be dated back to the time of Lehi, even though the archaic written sources may be silent on the particular point involved.¹⁶ If materials found in the oral Jewish tradition are similar to factors in Benjamin's speech, it

becomes even more plausible that the oral tradition dates back far enough for it to have been known by Lehi, although one cannot rule out the possibility that the Jewish and Nephite practices simply developed independently along parallel lines.

There are many possibilities here, and we wish neither to overstate nor understate the possible significance of these Jewish comparisons in probing the context of Benjamin's assembly. Thus, in presenting the findings reported below, we usually will identify or signal the time period or source from which each piece of evidence derives. The biblical texts are the earliest and most relevant; the Mishnah (first and second century A.D.) and Talmud (second through fifth centuries A.D.) are later and constitute secondary evidence; Jewish traditions, customs, and liturgies are more recent and are less probative yet, but still interesting. Readers are free to weigh these bits of information as they wish in determining the degree to which these details may shed light on the festival celebration that was observed and enjoyed by King Benjamin and his people.

Finally, caution must be employed in dealing with evidence not only from the Old World, but also from the New. Beyond the problem of tracing the origins and identifying the elements of ancient Israelite and Jewish festivals, additional difficulties arise because it is not clear exactly what form of the law of Moses appeared on the plates of Laban and was brought to the New World by Lehi and his descendants, nor is it known how those rules were implemented.¹⁷ The version of law found on the plates of brass may not have been exactly the same as the legal provisions—found mainly in the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy—that have come down to us in the Bible today.¹⁸ Nevertheless, sufficient evidence is available to support a strong presumption that Lehi and his descendants

had written legal materials quite similar to many passages in the King James Version of Exodus and Deuteronomy (for example, in Mosiah 13, Abinadi quotes the Ten Commandments from Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5). Accordingly, unless a good reason exists for doubting that the Nephites knew of a particular passage in the Torah, one may cautiously proceed on the tentative assumption that they adequately understood and appropriately followed that provision.

In spite of these challenges and uncertainties, attempting to identify the possible ancient Israelite holy days or festival season on which or during which a Book of Mormon speech or event may have taken place is significant and rewarding for several reasons: First, finding evidence of such observances tends to confirm the internal consistency of the Book of Mormon by showing that its peoples kept the law of Moses as they claimed. Second, knowing something of the potential background or context of a passage from the Book of Mormon promotes a better understanding of the possible meanings of its words and phrases. Third, because much of the following information about ancient Israelite or Jewish festivals pertinent to King Benjamin's speech was simply unknown by and—as far as we can discover—unknowable to Joseph Smith in 1829,¹⁹ such accuracy supports the claim that the Book of Mormon was translated from an ancient Israelite record, as Joseph Smith explained.

With these general comments and caveats in mind, and without claiming to be exhaustive in our coverage or dispositive in our conclusions, we turn our attention to the exploration of specific details that link King Benjamin's speech to the main fall festivals celebrated in ancient Israel.

The Autumn Festival Complex

Of the three annual festival times in ancient Israel, the autumn festival complex was the most important and certainly the most popular in ancient Israel.²⁰ In early times it apparently was called the Feast of Ingathering. According to many scholars, the various components of the autumn festival were celebrated as a single season of celebration in the earliest periods of Israelite history.²¹ Its many elements were not sharply differentiated until later times, when the first day of the seventh month became Rosh ha-Shanah (New Year), followed by eight days of penitence, then followed on the tenth day of the month by Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) and on the fifteenth day by Sukkot (Festival of Tabernacles), concluding with a full holy week.

As this study will show, it appears to us that Benjamin's speech touches on all the major themes of these sacred days, treating them as parts of a single festival complex, consistent with what one would expect in a preexilic Israelite community in which the fall feasts were not sharply differentiated but were still closely associated as parts of one large autumn festival. That the elements of the three Israelite fall festivals appear in one integrated text in the book of Mosiah provides circumstantial evidence agreeing with the scholarly conclusion that the divisions into distinct Jewish festivals may have taken place after Lehi and his family left Israel.²²

Many pieces of evidence support the view that an ancient Israelite autumn festival was observed at the time of King Benjamin. Although Benjamin's assembly may have involved only some of the features of these holy days, we

believe that it makes good sense if one understands Benjamin's speech as taking place during the season of the year when the Nephites would have been turning their hearts and minds to the kinds of themes and concerns that characterized this time of annual religious renewal and activity in ancient Israel. The purpose of this study is to facilitate this inquiry. The later designations of New Year, Day of Atonement, and Feast of Tabernacles will be used, though this distinction need not have been clear in the minds of the Nephites, and, as will be indicated, many of the themes associated with these holy days apply to one or more of the individual festivals.

The New Year

Of the elements of the autumn festival in ancient Israel, one of the most interesting but least certain is the observation of the New Year.²³ In postexilic Judaism, the New Year became known as Rosh ha-Shanah, literally the "head of the year." However, this phrase appears only once in the Old Testament (Ezekiel 40:1), and in this case it does not appear to be referring to a New Year but rather to "the beginning of the year."²⁴ Many scholars even deny the existence of a New Year feast day in preexilic Israel.²⁵ Others reconstruct an Israelite New Year on indirect evidence and on the basis of New Year festivals in surrounding cultures.²⁶ Several important elements in the Jewish celebration, however, were probably not like New Year celebrations in other cultures; it was "not a time of revelry, but an occasion of the deepest religious import."²⁷ We will proceed on the assumption that a New Year festival existed in some form in ancient Israel and then compare Benjamin's speech with materials from both its proposed preexilic reconstructions and the postexilic Jewish traditions.

The first point to be made with regard to the New Year is that ancient calendar systems are extremely complex and have been the object of a great deal of study. The Nephite New Year was apparently set in the “first” month;²⁸ however, the dating of this festival in Israel was not always so defined. Exodus 12:2 appears to introduce a change from earlier practices. Later, Rosh ha-Shanah was celebrated on the first day of the seventh month. There appears to be evidence for years starting both on the first month and on the seventh month in preexilic Israel.²⁹ D. J. A. Clines examined all the evidence and concluded that no strong arguments exist for either a spring or autumn calendrical New Year.³⁰

However, a distinction is made for many social purposes between the calendrical year and the agricultural year. Since the Feast of Tabernacles is an agriculturally based festival, it would follow the agricultural calendar. The reckoning of the sabbatical and jubilee years is also based on the agricultural year. Since the New Year is associated with both the Feast of Tabernacles and the sabbatical and jubilee years, it seems likely that it also would have been based on the agricultural year rather than the calendrical year,³¹ which would argue for its observance, in some form, together with the other agricultural festivals that clearly belonged to the seventh month of the calendrical cycle. This may sound strange until we realize that in modern Western culture we also encounter various “years,” the academic and fiscal years being two examples.

Leaving aside the calendrical issue, we can proceed to isolate some of the themes and traditions probably associated with the New Year. Unlike New Year’s Day in most Western cultures, the beginning of a New Year’s cycle in the ancient Near East was the occasion of a sacred religious celebration, one of the most important religious days of the year. The following are among the main traditions that have come

to characterize the ancient Israelite New Year: the blowing of horns, sacrifice of burnt offerings, a day of judgment, the kingship of God, creation and renewal, remembrance and memorial, and the king's humility.

Horns. The blowing of horns was certainly a common part of Israelite culture and worship, and the most characteristic ritual of the later Rosh ha-Shanah was the sounding of the *shôfâr*, the straight horn of a wild ram (see Numbers 29:1).³² This is likely related to the "memorial of blowing of trumpets," specifically prescribed for the first day of the seventh month in Leviticus 23:24. Horns are never mentioned in connection with Benjamin's speech, but one would not necessarily expect this detail to have accompanied Benjamin's written script or to have been preserved.³³ Nevertheless, there is reason to believe that some kind of cue, such as the blowing of a horn or the announcement of an acclamation, would have been given to assemble the people (see Mosiah 2:9), to call them again to attention (see Mosiah 3:1), to call the people to fall simultaneously to the ground (see Mosiah 4:1), and to cry aloud all with one voice (see Mosiah 4:2; 5:2).

Furthermore, Jewish literature gives several commonly cited reasons for blowing the *shôfâr*.³⁴ Most of these circumstances pertain to parts of Benjamin's speech that would have offered several occasions for the sounding of horns, namely when: (1) hailing God as King³⁵ (see Mosiah 2:19), especially at a coronation (see Mosiah 2:30; see also 2 Kings 9:13); (2) heralding the season of repentance (see Mosiah 2:9; 4:1; and possibly 4:26); (3) remembering the giving of the law on Mt. Sinai to Moses (which is mentioned in Mosiah 3:14; see also Exodus 19:19); (4) declaring the words of the prophets (prophetic declarations are referred to in Mosiah 3:3 and 3:13); (5) causing the people to tremble (see Mosiah 2:30; 4:1); (6) announcing the judgment of God (see

Mosiah 3:18, 24–25) and sounding the horn of warning or alarm (see Exodus 20:18; Amos 3:6), or calling the troops to arms (see Judges 3:27); (7) heralding the coming messianic age (see Isaiah 27:13 and Mosiah 3:5; see also Revelation 8–9); and (8) marking the resurrection of the dead (see Mosiah 3:10). The sounding of the horn in much later Judaism eventually came to be known as a reminder of the following:

A call to contrition and penitence, as a reminder of the Shofar-sound of Sinai; and the Day of Memorial, the beginning of the Ten Days of Repentance which culminate in the Day of Atonement, as a time of self examination and humble petition of forgiveness. “The Scriptural injunction of the Shofar for the New Year’s Day has a profound meaning. It says: Awake, ye sleepers, and ponder over your deeds; remember your creator and go back to Him in penitence. Be not of those who miss realities in their pursuit of shadows and waste their years in seeking after vain things which cannot profit or deliver. Look well to your souls and consider your acts; forsake each of you his evil ways and thoughts, and return to God so that He may have mercy upon you” (Maimonides).³⁶

Though all these connections may not have been familiar in the days of Lehi, similar sentiments may well have existed already, to be expressed both by his descendants in the New World and by the posterity of his surviving relatives in Jerusalem. Since most of these traditional occasions and purposes for sounding the *shôfâr* are so clearly manifest at the ceremonial sectional dividing points in Benjamin’s speech, one can easily envision their being accompanied by the sounding of the *shôfâr*.

Further evidence that the horn (*shôfâr*) or the trumpet (*yôbêl*) may have been used among the Nephites as a liturgical instrument, blown at the New Year to herald a season of repentance or on other similar occasions, may be garnered

from Alma's wish that he might speak with the "trump of God, with a voice to shake the earth, and cry repentance unto every people" (Alma 29:1). Alma's psalm may well have been written for a New Year festival, because it appears in the text immediately after the ending of the fifteenth year (see Alma 28:9) and near the time of "the days of fasting, and mourning, and prayer" that seem to mark the beginning of the sixteenth year (Alma 30:2).³⁷

Sacrifice. The typical New Year, like most festivals,³⁸ evidently began with burnt offerings of animals of "the first year." "In the seventh month, in the first day of the month . . . ye shall offer an offering made by fire unto the Lord" (Leviticus 23:24–25). Consistent with this, Benjamin's people brought "the firstlings of their flocks, that they might offer sacrifice and burnt offerings according to the law of Moses" (Mosiah 2:3).³⁹

Judgment. A characteristic theme in both ancient Near Eastern and later Jewish sources is that the New Year is a day of judgment. In Babylonia and Assyria, the New Year festival took place in the month of Nisan in the spring.⁴⁰ An important aspect of the festival was the "Decreeing" or "Determining of Fates," by which the success or failure of the following year was determined.⁴¹ Because of the importance and danger of this ominous period of the year, a certain uneasiness was in the air. Frankfort describes it as follows: "The mood of the Babylonians at the beginning of the year was peculiar. They not only felt uncertainty as regards the future but feared that their own inadequacy and guilt might have incurred divine wrath."⁴² Baruch Halpern adds: "At the start of the feast, a certain insecurity, a cosmic paranoia, seems to have pervaded the air. Fearing for their destinies, perhaps afraid that nature stood in an inchoate or malevolently chaotic state, the people cleansed themselves, to prepare the way, and perhaps to search, for their savior."⁴³

The idea of the New Year as a time of judgment is also found in Judaism. According to the Mishnah, it is the day when all mankind is judged.⁴⁴ In the face of this judgment, God is “entreated to show mercy to his creatures,” and confidence in the mercy of God is expressed.⁴⁵ This is the only day on which modern Jews are permitted to “kneel and fall upon their faces.”⁴⁶ On this day, people in the Talmudic era wore white garments, and books of judgment were opened:

The completely righteous are immediately inscribed in the book of life. The completely wicked are immediately inscribed in the book of death. The average persons are kept in suspension from Rosh ha-Shanah to the Day of Atonement. If they deserve well, they are inscribed in the book of life, if they do not deserve well, they are inscribed in the book of death.⁴⁷

Furthermore, Gaster suggests that the symbolism of judgment by fire (compare Ezekiel 38:18–39:16) draws upon imagery pertinent to the fall festivals.⁴⁸ Corresponding to the mood of the Mesopotamian New Year, the celebration of the Jewish New Year “has no traces of joy, for these are profoundly serious days, with a feeling of the heavy moral responsibility which life puts on all.”⁴⁹

Similarly, Benjamin’s people faced a day of judgment. In his speech, Benjamin lays bare the fate of those who remain and die in their sins—enemies to God (see Mosiah 2:37–38); he spells out the nature of God’s judgment, “for behold he judgeth, and his judgment is just” (Mosiah 3:18); he makes it clear that all men are subject to this judgment (see Mosiah 3:17), except little children (see Mosiah 3:21); and he declares that these ceremonial words shall stand to judge the people (see Mosiah 3:24–25) “like an unquenchable fire” (Mosiah 2:38).

Just as the Mesopotamians and the Jews were awed by the seriousness of the day, so too were the people of

Zarahemla when they heard Benjamin speak about the judgment: "Behold they had fallen to the earth, for the fear of the Lord had come upon them. And they had viewed themselves in their own carnal state, even less than the dust of the earth" (Mosiah 4:1–2). Yet in the face of this judgment, mercy was sought. Benjamin's people cried out in unison, "O have mercy" (Mosiah 4:2). Mercy is mentioned by Benjamin several other times (see Mosiah 2:39; 3:26; 5:15). There is also mention of cleansing of garments (see Mosiah 2:28)⁵⁰ and of writing down the names of all the righteous who have entered into the covenant to keep God's commandments (see Mosiah 6:1).

The later Jewish liturgy for this "Day of Awe" provides further interesting points of comparison. Although this liturgy cannot be dated confidently before the time of the Crusades,⁵¹ some of its elements could, of course, have been drawn from the substantially older traditions discussed above. Schauss gives the following account; parallels to King Benjamin's speech are italicized and referenced in brackets, with citations to earlier biblical precedents:

The greatest and most exalted moment of the services comes when the Ark of the Torah is opened. . . . An unnatural *fear* grips the hearts of the worshipers [compare Mosiah 4:1; Exodus 3:6; Deuteronomy 28:58] [who] recite the words in a *loud voice* [Mosiah 4:2; Deuteronomy 27:14] with tears and sobs: "We will declare the *greatness* [Mosiah 4:11; Deuteronomy 5:24] and the holiness of this Day, for thereon, Thy kingdom is exalted, Thy throne established in mercy and Thou judgest in truth. It is true that *Thou art the judge* [Mosiah 3:18; Genesis 31:53], Thou reprovest; *Thou knowest all* [Mosiah 4:9; 1 Samuel 2:3; 1 Chronicles 28:9], Thou bearest *witness* [Mosiah 3:24; Isaiah 55:4], *recordest and sealest* [Mosiah 6:1; 5:15; Isaiah 8:16]. Thou also rememberest all things that seem to be

forgotten; and *all that enter the world must pass before Thee* [Mosiah 3:24], even as the *shepherd* [Mosiah 5:14; Psalms 23:1; 80:1] causes his sheep to pass under his rod. Thou *numberest* [Mosiah 6:1; Daniel 5:26] and countest, and visitest every living soul, appointest the limitations of all Thy creatures, and *recordest* [Mosiah 6:1; Deuteronomy 30:19] the sentence of their judgment." The moans die down and the congregation calms itself somewhat at the words: "But *repentance* [Mosiah 3:21; Proverbs 28:13; Jeremiah 35:15; Ezekiel 18:30], prayer, and *charity* [Mosiah 4:26; Leviticus 19:18] avert the evil decree."⁵²

Moreover, the accompanying Jewish prayer does not end here but concludes with a sharp reminder of the shortness and impotence of man's life, contrasted with the greatness of God, and expressed in ancient biblical idioms:

How weak is man [Mosiah 2:25; Psalm 8:4]! He comes from the *dust* [Mosiah 2:25–26; Genesis 2:7] and returns to the dust; must *toil* [Mosiah 2:14; Genesis 3:19] for his sustenance; passes away like withered grass, a vanishing shadow, a fleeting dream. But Thou, O God, art eternal; Thou art *King* [Mosiah 2:19; Psalms 47:7; 89:18; Jeremiah 10:10] everlasting!⁵³

Kingship of God. Part of the New Year festival in Mesopotamia involved reciting the epic poem *Enuma Elish*.⁵⁴ In this tale the god Marduk slays Tiamat (goddess of the salt-water ocean), uses the body to create the world, and thus attains suzerainty. He then takes his throne at the head of the gods.⁵⁵ This festival has served for some as one of the foundations for reconstructing the New Year festival in Israel. As noted above, Mowinckel's attempted reconstruction of the New Year had as its central ritual the enthronement of God.⁵⁶ Although the ritual in which God *becomes* king has been the subject of debate,⁵⁷ "Mowinckel's arguments have carried the greatest support in locating the celebration of

Yahweh's kingship at the great autumnal festival of the New Year in the Jerusalem temple."⁵⁸ Even if no direct connection existed between Mesopotamian and Israelite practices, many of the psalms were probably sung on occasions in Israel when God's kingship was openly celebrated and venerated. Generally God's kingship is celebrated in the Bible because he is able to subdue people and nations (see Psalm 47:3), has power over chaos as represented by the floods (see Psalm 93:3), and is to be the judge of all (see Psalms 96:13, 99:4). In several instances in the psalms cited, God's kingship is celebrated by the sounding of trumpets, characteristic of the New Year, and in many of these "God-is-king" psalms, the people are told to sing unto the Lord (see Psalm 47:5–7, for example). In the Talmud and in later Jewish literature, the ideas of the kingship and judgment of God are also linked to the New Year: "The theme of God as King is particularly stressed on *Rosh Ha-Shanah* because of the day's association with His judgment."⁵⁹

The idea that God, not Benjamin or Mosiah his son, is truly the king is expressly found in Benjamin's words, "If I, whom ye call your king, . . . do merit any thanks from you, O how you ought to thank your heavenly King" (Mosiah 2:19), and in his instruction that the people should obey "the commandments of my son, or the commandments of God which shall be delivered unto you by him" (Mosiah 2:31). The same reasons for celebrating God's kingship, as cited above, are also given by Benjamin, and the power of God is acknowledged in close association with Benjamin's declaration that God is king (see Mosiah 2:11, 20–21), and the role of God as judge is proclaimed (see Mosiah 3:18). As noted above, the kingship of God was celebrated by singing, thanksgiving, and rejoicing in Israel, and similarly in his speech Benjamin hoped that his spirit "may join the choirs above in *singing* the praises of a just God" (Mosiah

2:28), and he admonished his people to “thank your heavenly King” (Mosiah 2:19) and to “render all the thanks and praise which your whole soul has power to possess” (Mosiah 2:20).

Creation. The New Year was also a day on which the creation of the earth was typically celebrated. As noted above, during the New Year festival in Mesopotamia, the *Enuma Elish* was read. The principal theme of this epic is the creation of the world. Lambert noted with regard to the *Enuma Elish*: “There is the fundamental presupposition that myths which we should suppose were regarded as having happened once and for all in the remote past, in fact were conceived to be recurring at regular intervals in the world in which the Babylonian authors lived.”⁶⁰ The repetition of the creation generally took place at the New Year.⁶¹

The New Year has also been the time when some Jews have observed the renewal of the creation. “In the beginning” was the creation (Genesis 1:1), and thus it was natural for the Israelite mind to think of the creation at the beginning of each new year’s cycle. Psalm 148 would have made a fine hymn for such an occasion. According to Jewish traditions found in the Talmud, the world was created in the first month in the fall, Ethanim (Tishri), and the New Year was an appropriate time to recall the creative work of God in forming a new earth.⁶² Gaster has summarized: “The world is reborn from year to year—even, in an extended sense, from day to day and from minute to minute; and the primary message of the festival is that the process of creation is continuous, that the breath of God moves constantly upon the face of the waters.”⁶³

Perhaps this adds context to the angel’s reference in the Book of Mormon to Christ as “the Creator of all things from the beginning” (Mosiah 3:8), and to the people’s appellation of Christ as “the Son of God, who created heaven and earth,

and all things” (Mosiah 4:2). Benjamin’s statement that God has “created you, . . . and is preserving you from day to day, by lending you breath . . . from one moment to another” (Mosiah 2:20–21), as well as his other frequent references to God’s creative powers (see Mosiah 4:9, 12; 5:15), fit well into these Israelite contexts that highlighted God’s creative works. Likewise, the rebirth of the people—“this day he hath spiritually begotten you” (Mosiah 5:7)—is evidence that one of the main purposes of Benjamin’s ceremony was to see that the people’s relationship with God and each other was renewed and reborn.⁶⁴

Remembrance. Few themes are stressed more emphatically by Benjamin than that of remembrance.⁶⁵ The word appears with repeated emphasis throughout the text. For example: “My sons, I would that ye should remember” (Mosiah 1:3, 6, 7); “stir them up in remembrance” (Mosiah 1:17); “ye should awake to a remembrance” (Mosiah 2:40); “O remember, remember that these things are true” (Mosiah 2:41); “I would that ye should remember, and always retain in remembrance” (Mosiah 4:11); “O man, remember, and perish not” (Mosiah 4:30); “I would that ye should remember also, that this is the name. . . . I would that ye should remember to retain the name” (Mosiah 5:11–12). The Nephite priests were even appointed to stir the people up “in remembrance of the oath which they had made” (Mosiah 6:3; compare the *Kol-nidre* liturgy of the Day of Atonement).

In Leviticus 23:23–25, the holy sabbath convocation celebrated on the first day of the seventh month is called a *zikkārôn* (memorial, remembrance).⁶⁶ This ancient observance, represented as the New Year,⁶⁷ involved the blowing of trumpets, a holy assembly, and the avoidance of work.

King. The king himself is frequently associated with New Year festivals. This was apparently the preferred time for the coronation of the king and the renewal of the

people's covenant to obey him and God. According to John Eaton, at such great Israelite assemblies, the king served in several ways: he would "exhort men in God's way," and admonish them to worship God (compare Mosiah 2:18–19); he would "[testify] to the marvels of Yahweh's salvation and [assert] his superiority to other gods" (compare Mosiah 2:40–41; 3:5, 17; and many others); and he would be God's witness, appearing "as an evidential sign, an abiding token and reminder of God's work in the midst of the nations" (compare Mosiah 2:24, 27, 29; 4:5–9).⁶⁸ Scholars feel that "the king's function as witness was represented and indeed rooted in the ceremonies of his ordination and its renewal . . . addressed to a great assembly representing Israel and all peoples, indeed all creatures."⁶⁹ Psalm 40 mentions all these roles of the king, especially the king's duty to call the people to worship God (compare Mosiah 2:22), and also declares God's status as King and Creator (compare Mosiah 3:8) who will rise from the dead (compare Mosiah 3:10).⁷⁰ Benjamin fulfills all the responsibilities of a king that are outlined in tradition and scripture.

For purposes of comparison, among the Sumerians the responsibilities of the *akitu* (or *zagmuk*) festival belonged to the king.⁷¹ In the first millennium B.C., the king's participation in the *akitu* / New Year festival was "obligatory."⁷² It was through this participation that his kingship was renewed.⁷³ Scholars have identified six elements of this festival: (1) a reenactment of the myth of creation issuing in the renewal of the cosmos, (2) a triumphal procession of the god, (3) the death and resurrection of the god, (4) the humiliation and reinstatement of the king, (5) the sacred marriage, and (6) the determination of destiny.⁷⁴ Though scholars feel (3) is "highly controversial," and (5) and (6) are absent in Psalms, all elements except (5) are clearly present in Benjamin's speech.⁷⁵ Mosiah 2:20–23 and 4:7 refer to creation and the cosmos; the

angel describes Christ's triumphal procession in Mosiah 3:5–9 and his death and resurrection in Mosiah 3:9–11; Benjamin refers numerous times to his own status as a subject to God ("I am also of the dust" Mosiah 2:26) and chooses his son to be his successor (see Mosiah 1:10); and throughout his speech he discusses the consequences and the rewards of one's actions (see, for example, Mosiah 2:31, 40–41; 4:11–12).

Regarding the king's personal participation in the Mesopotamian temple program for the New Year's festival at Babylon, the king was led to the temple, where his royal regalia were taken away; he was made to bow down and to declare before the god that he had neither been neglectful in the worship of the god nor had harmed the city or the people. The text of this negative confession is as follows: "I did not sin, lord of the countries. I was not neglectful of the requirements of your godship. I did not destroy Babylon; I did not command its overthrow; I did not . [broken] . . the temple Esagil, I did not forget its rites; I did not rain blows on the cheek of a subordinate. . . . I did not humiliate them. I watched out for Babylon; I did not smash its walls."⁷⁶ He was then struck on the cheek and if tears flowed the god was appeased.⁷⁷ The king's restoration to the throne symbolized his continuing ability to stabilize the society and the elements. Some scholars have suggested that certain psalms imply that the king in Israel underwent a similar type of ritual humiliation as part of an Israelite New Year festival.⁷⁸ Johnson suggests that, as part of this humiliation, Psalm 101 was an "affirmation of the rule which he (the king) is wont to exercise" and compares it to the negative confession in Babylon.⁷⁹

In Israel the situation, although not identical, was apparently similar. A. R. Johnson has concluded that the New Year festival "was used in Jerusalem for the important purpose of binding the people in loyalty not only to the na-

tional deity but also to the reigning house.”⁸⁰ J. B. Segal concurs: “The autumn New Year festival in Israel was a formal occasion at which the authority of King or High Priest was proclaimed or renewed.”⁸¹ De Moor notes that the official beginning of the king’s reign was connected with the New Year⁸² and provides a brief reconstruction:

The celebration of New Year did not differ much from what we have found earlier. The people made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. The king sacrificed burnt- and peace-offerings of sheep and oxen. He recited ancient songs, recalled the name of his dead ancestor David, praised the Lord and prayed for the prosperity of his dynasty and his people. He also prayed for rain and asked JHWH to judge his servants, condemning the wicked and vindicating the innocent.⁸³

With these concepts of the king’s participation in the New Year festival in Mesopotamia and Israel as points of comparison, one may now better appreciate parts of King Benjamin’s speech and actions in Mosiah 1–6. Clearly the New Year festival time was an appropriate time for Benjamin to effect his son’s coronation.⁸⁴ It also seems plausible that Benjamin’s frequent and sincere statements of humility and the accounting of his stewardship as king are in some way related to the general genre of humiliation and negative confession of the king found in other ancient cultures.⁸⁵ Benjamin asserts that he is like the people and “subject to all manner of infirmities” (Mosiah 2:11) and is “also of the dust” (Mosiah 2:26), and in rendering the accounting of his stewardship he follows very closely the so-called Paragraph of the King (Deuteronomy 17:14–20), which set standards by which the king’s performance was judged in Israel.⁸⁶

Thus the spirit of the Israelite New Year—as far as that may be known and defined—is reflected with considerable clarity in King Benjamin’s speech. The persistence of these

traditions carries down even to the level of customary sayings and greetings. Even today, one greets friends on this occasion with “May you be inscribed (in the book of life) and sealed for a good year.”⁸⁷ Suitably, Benjamin gives his people a name that cannot be “blotted out [of the book of life]” except by transgression (Mosiah 5:11), and he hopes that God will seal them his. With possible parallels to Benjamin’s speech, the following traditional Jewish New Year’s prayer expresses sentiments that Benjamin himself would have whole-heartedly concurred with: “Now, therefore, O Lord our God, impose Thine awe upon all Thy works, and Thy dread upon all that Thou hast created, that all works may revere Thee and all creatures prostrate themselves before Thee, that they may all form a single band to do Thy will with a perfect heart.”⁸⁸

These factors indicate that the themes of King Benjamin’s speech and the themes of the traditional Israelite New Year were indeed very similar. This discussion also supplies further reasons to believe that many Jewish traditions remained quite stable over the centuries, and that the Nephites were indeed conscientious and “strict” (Alma 30:3) in observing and perpetuating the law of Moses as they knew it.

Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur)⁸⁹

The next festival aspect of the month of the Feast of Ingathering in preexilic Israel was the all-important Day of Atonement,⁹⁰ a day of holy convocations and ritual atonement at the temple. It would later become the most sacred day in the Jewish liturgical year.⁹¹ The hypothesis that Benjamin’s speech was held on or in connection with the Day of Atonement finds initial plausibility in Benjamin’s seven explicit references to the atonement. This number seven may be purely coincidental, but doing something seven times is

characteristic of rituals performed on the Day of Atonement and during other biblical purification ceremonies prescribed in the book of Leviticus.⁹² Benjamin speaks of (1) “the atonement of his blood” (Mosiah 3:15), (2) the “atoning blood” (Mosiah 3:18), (3) the blood which “atoneth” (Mosiah 3:11), (4) the blood of Christ which “atoneth for [their] sins” (Mosiah 3:16), (5) the “atonement of Christ the Lord” (Mosiah 3:19), (6) the “atonement” prepared from the foundation (Mosiah 4:6), and (7) the “atonement” prepared for all mankind (Mosiah 4:7). Examining the speech further reveals substantial cumulative evidence that the rituals and traditions manifest in the Day of Atonement are also to be seen in Benjamin’s words and deeds.⁹³ These elements involve special preparations, blood sacrifices, sin removal, the holy name of God, fasting, repentance, confession, giving to the poor, repaying debts, rejoicing, and blessing.

Preparations. Special preparations were in order for such a great day, particularly for those in charge, such as the high priest. Rabbinic writings report special efforts taken to keep the high priest awake during the night of Yom Kippur, and pious men followed this example.⁹⁴ Benjamin’s preparations also were substantial; coincidentally, he was awakened, apparently during part of the night, by the visitation of an angel from God: “Awake; and I awoke. . . . Awake and hear” (Mosiah 3:2–3). Several points in the Jewish ceremony draw on biblical precedents: for example, the priest would wash and change his garments (compare Exodus 19:14).⁹⁵ Perhaps this relates to Benjamin’s saying that he has assembled his people that he “might rid [his] garments of [their] blood” (Mosiah 2:28). Yom Kippur is the anniversary of Moses’ second descent from Mount Sinai after having received the Ten Commandments. This day was declared one of forgiveness and pardon for the Israelites, and this event is remembered each year even to this day.⁹⁶ In Mosiah 3:14–15,

Benjamin also remembered this event and the law that was received, and throughout his speech can be seen the themes of forgiveness and pardon.

Sacrifice and blood purifications. On this day in Israel, sacrifices were made. First, a special atonement was made by one designated priest. In ancient Israel he would purify various parts of the temple by daubing and then sprinkling blood (see Leviticus 16:16–20), for it was necessary to purify the temple once each year (see Hebrews 9:7). The theme of temple purification is also found during the week of New Year’s observances in Mesopotamia. As part of the *akītu* festival a priest would purify the temple and all its environs by sprinkling water on it from the Tigris and the Euphrates.⁹⁷

If such a temple purification had just taken place in Zarahemla—or was about to take place—this would have given concrete contextual impact to Benjamin’s saying that the Lord “dwelleth not in unholy temples” (Mosiah 2:37). Assuming that Benjamin had followed the rules in Leviticus 16 and had used blood to purify the temple in Zarahemla, his several references to the cleansing power of “the atoning blood of Christ” (Mosiah 3:18) could hardly have been set more vividly in the minds of his people.

Second, the priest would cleanse the people from certain kinds of iniquities and transgressions (see Leviticus 16:21, 33), particularly sins against God: “This shall be an everlasting statute unto you, to make an atonement for the children of Israel for all their sins once a year” (Leviticus 16:34). Of primary concern on this particular day were the sins of inadvertence. Even though a transgression occurred unconsciously, the ancient Israelites still viewed this as a transgression that defiled the temple and the people, and thus it was necessary to make an atonement (see Numbers 15:27–29). In addition, of grave import were the sins of rebelliousness, or *pāshā’īm*.⁹⁸ Those who “brazenly rebel” are

not eligible to have their transgression forgiven through sacrifice (see Numbers 15:30–31). Later, the Talmudic sages made the same distinction and expressed similar concern regarding the different types of sin that were to be expiated on the Day of Atonement.⁹⁹

In much the same way, Benjamin expressed concerns regarding sin and the need for atonement. He explained that the atoning power of the blood of Christ covers inadvertent sins and sinners: “those who have died not knowing the will of God concerning them, or who have ignorantly sinned” (Mosiah 3:11),¹⁰⁰ while he who sins “contrary to his own knowledge” (Mosiah 2:33) receives the harshest condemnation (see Mosiah 2:38–40). Likewise, Benjamin spoke adamantly about the great seriousness of rebellious sin: “Wo unto him who knoweth that he rebelleth against God!” (Mosiah 3:12). “The man that . . . cometh out in open rebellion against God, . . . the Lord has no place in him” (Mosiah 2:37). Moreover, Benjamin’s theology is accurately Israelite when he explains that “salvation cometh to none such” rebellious sinners (compare Numbers 15:30–31), except through the extraordinary redemptive powers of Christ (see Mosiah 3:12). Conventional animal sacrifice could not expiate such sin.

Scapegoat. Leviticus 16:7–10 prescribes the well-known and distinctive scapegoat ritual¹⁰¹ in which the high priest, on the Day of Atonement, took two goats; by casting lots one goat was declared to be “for the Lord” and the other “for Azazel.”¹⁰² A similar dichotomy appears in Mosiah 5:7–12, in which the people are called either by the name of Christ and found belonging at the right hand of God, or are called “by some other name” and found at the left hand of God. According to later rabbinic tradition, if the lot “For the Lord” came up in the left hand it was permissible to switch the lots with their respective goats so that although the determination of

which goat was the Lord's was made by lot, the Lord's goat would be on the right hand while Azazel's goat would be on the left.¹⁰³

As the goat was set before the high priest, he drew a lot in each hand from an urn. The high priest then actually placed the lots upon the heads of the goats.¹⁰⁴ A metaphorical connection of this "head" (Christ) that can make one free appears in Mosiah 5:8.

The goat for the Lord was sacrificed, but the high priest placed his hands on the scapegoat and confessed all the sins of Israel, thereby transferring them to Azazel's goat, which was then taken off into the desert.¹⁰⁵ The man who carried the goat out to the empty wilderness became impure and could not come back into the camp until he burned his clothes and washed himself.¹⁰⁶ Similarly, any individual who breaks the covenant was, in Benjamin's mind, to be "consigned to an awful view" of his guilt and "into a state of misery and endless torment" (Mosiah 3:25); he would find himself to be "worthless," in a state of "nothingness" (Mosiah 4:5), and ultimately Benjamin compared those who "know not the name by which [they] are called" to an ass that belongs to a neighbor and is not suffered to feed among the flocks but is driven away and cast out (see Mosiah 5:14–15).

Had Benjamin said that the sinner would be driven out like a goat instead of an ass, these connections with the Day of Atonement would have been more direct.¹⁰⁷ But in fact, the kind of animal used in such settings was not critical among Israel's neighbors in the ancient Near East. Similar Hittite expiatory rituals drove out bulls, rams, mice, and vermin of the ground.¹⁰⁸ Furthermore, asses were commonly used in covenant-making ceremonies during the second millennium B.C. in Mesopotamia.¹⁰⁹ Because Benjamin is using the ass as a symbol of excommunication or banish-

ment, not of purification or impurity removal, it makes sense that he referred to a different animal than a goat.

The name. So holy was the Day of Atonement that on this day the ineffable name of God, YHWH, could be pronounced. During the Yom Kippur service at the temple, the priest could pronounce this sacred name aloud. Later Jewish tradition seems to have the priest utter this name ten times during the Yom Kippur liturgy, and to a similar degree, Benjamin employs the expanded names *Lord God* and *Lord Omnipotent* seven and three times, respectively.¹¹⁰

Seven of these utterances are in the reported words of the angel to Benjamin (see Mosiah 3:5, 13, 14, 17, 18, 21, 23). It seems more than coincidental¹¹¹ that it is in the mouth of an angel that such names appear seven times and that the number seven reflects a “spiritual” perfection. The other three utterances come in the words of Benjamin (see Mosiah 2:30, 41, and 5:15). These three utterances come at important ceremonial breaking points in the speech, not merely at random or inconsequential places.¹¹²

The response of the people to the pronouncement of the sacred name was singular. According to the Mishnah, each time the people at the temple in Jerusalem heard the sacred name they would fall prostrate on the ground.¹¹³ This can be compared with the reactions to King Benjamin’s speech in Zarahemla. When he finished reciting the words of the angel, “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” (Mosiah 4:1). It is possible that Benjamin’s people would have fallen down in profound reverence and awe several times when Benjamin spoke the holy name of God, as the Israelites did on hearing the tetragram, according to the Mishnah.¹¹⁴

Indeed, Benjamin declared that one of the main purposes

of the assembly was to “give this people a name” (Mosiah 1:11). Associated with pronouncing the name of God was the giving of his name to the people. In great solemnity and literary emphasis,¹¹⁵ Benjamin revealed the name of the Messiah as the following expression: “Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Father of heaven and earth, the Creator of all things from the beginning.” He also revealed Mary as the name of Christ’s mother (see Mosiah 3:8). He concluded his speech, telling the people, “this [the sacred name of Christ] is the name that I said I should give unto you” (Mosiah 5:11; see 5:9–14).

Fasting. On this day, according to the ancient custom, all were required to “afflict” their souls (see Leviticus 16:29–31; 23:27–32). Traditionally this has been understood to mean fasting (see Psalm 35:13; Isaiah 58:3, 5); however, it has been argued that this term should not be limited to fasting but should include other forms of self denial.¹¹⁶ Fasting is not specifically mentioned in Mosiah 1–6. Nevertheless, evidence exists in the book of Alma that fasting was practiced in Zarahemla around the beginning of the New Year (see Alma 30:2; 44:24–45:1). Thus fasting may have been a regular part of the Day of Atonement among the Nephites. If Benjamin spoke on a day when the people were afflicting their souls, his deprecating descriptions of humans as being not even “as much as the dust of the earth” (Mosiah 2:25) and an “enemy to God” (Mosiah 3:19), whose “nothingness” makes them “unworthy creatures” (Mosiah 4:11), would have fit powerfully into that context.

If an ancient Israelite did not “afflict” his soul on this day, he was “cut off” from among the people (Leviticus 23:29). Benjamin speaks of blotting such a person out (see Mosiah 5:11) and of casting him out (see Mosiah 5:14), but since all his people complied with the requirement of making the covenant (see Mosiah 6:2), none had to be expelled.¹¹⁷

Repentance. Benjamin implored his people to repent before God and to settle with their neighbors: to “live peaceably, and to render to every man according to that which is his due” (Mosiah 4:13); and to “return [any]thing that he borroweth” (Mosiah 4:28). This, along with prayer, was a necessary condition of obtaining remission of sins: “calling on the name of the Lord daily” (Mosiah 4:11), and imparting of your substance, “for the sake of retaining a remission of your sins from day to day” (Mosiah 4:26). Benjamin’s exhortations in this regard, as well as his decrees about giving liberally to the poor, reconciling with your neighbor, and realizing that we are “all beggars” (Mosiah 4:19; see also 4:20–28) would be especially pertinent at the time of a Day of Atonement celebration, when people were seeking forgiveness for sin. The Mishnah explicitly teaches that the scapegoat’s atonement is effective only when it is accompanied by repentance¹¹⁸ and that transgressions against one’s fellowman must first be resolved before the atonement can have a beneficial effect.¹¹⁹

Confession. Also associated with the Day of Atonement and naturally connected with repentance was the process of confession. According to the Talmud, the priest would confess the iniquities of the people—the confessions generally consisting of acknowledging sins and trespasses—and a corresponding expression of remorse from the people would follow.¹²⁰ This is to be compared with the confession of the people of King Benjamin of their carnal and sinful state (see Mosiah 4:2, 5), specifically adopting the king’s own acknowledgment of his “worthless and fallen state” (Mosiah 4:5): “I am also of the dust, . . . [an] unprofitable servant” (Mosiah 2:26, 21). According to one source, forgiveness is granted to all on this day who thus confess and repent (see Jubilees 34:17–18; see also Mosiah 3:16; 6:2).

Giving to the poor or repaying debts. Over the years, Jewish

traditions of asking forgiveness of one another, giving gifts to the poor, and generally appeasing one's neighbor developed from these ancient teachings in connection with the Day of Atonement.¹²¹ On the eve of the Day of Atonement "it is customary to send gifts to the poor, and a duty to ask forgiveness from one another and to appease each other."¹²² "Ye should impart of your substance to the poor," says Benjamin, "administering to their relief, both spiritually and temporally" (Mosiah 4:26). Expressing the natural human feeling of gratitude and debt that comes with any occasion of profound forgiveness and reconciliation, Jews today recite at Yom Kippur the *Avinu Malkaynu* prayer, which speaks of the deep indebtedness of all humans to God.¹²³

Joy. The Day of Atonement was apparently in all eras a time of "true joy."¹²⁴ Similarly, Benjamin and his people experienced "exceedingly great joy" (Mosiah 4:11) and rejoiced (see Mosiah 4:12) abundantly. On the Day of Atonement, Israelites came to feel God's close association with his creatures,¹²⁵ just as Benjamin exulted in the "goodness of God, and his matchless power, and his wisdom, and his patience, and his long-suffering towards the children of men" (Mosiah 4:6). In this same spirit, the great Nephite celebrations at the beginning of the nineteenth year of the reign of the judges were marked with "exceedingly great joy" (Alma 45:1).

Blessings. On many occasions in Jewish life, but especially on this day, blessings were pronounced. In Benjamin's case, several blessings were mentioned: "he doth bless and prosper you" (Mosiah 2:22); "ye shall prosper in the land, and your enemies shall have no power over you" (Mosiah 2:31); and remember "the blessed and happy state of those that keep the commandments" (Mosiah 2:41). At the end of the Day of Atonement, Jewish people exchange blessings such as "May you be inscribed for life [in the book of life]

and merit many years."¹²⁶ Likewise, at the conclusion of his speech, Benjamin took "the names of all those who had entered into a covenant with God to keep his commandments" (Mosiah 6:1). In some cases the Israelites immediately began constructing their booths (*sukkot*) in preparation for the next phase of this season's celebrations.¹²⁷

The Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkot)

The next aspect of the great fall celebrations in ancient Israel was the Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkot).¹²⁸ The earliest sources refer to it as the Feast of Harvest or Feast of Ingathering (see Exodus 23:16; 34:22).¹²⁹ Later it was called the Feast of Tabernacles or Feast of Booths in reference to the booths or huts in which the Israelites dwelt during this celebration. It was also called the "feast unto the Lord" (Leviticus 23:39; Numbers 29:12); "feast to the Lord" (Exodus 12:14); or simply "the feast" (1 Kings 8:2; 2 Chronicles 7:8). Of the three yearly festivals, it is often considered the most significant.¹³⁰ This portion of the festival eventually came to be observed on the fifteenth of Tishri, the seventh month of the year, five days after the Day of Atonement. Probably an agricultural festival originally, it eventually came to celebrate historical events associated with the exodus.¹³¹ The Feast of Tabernacles is mentioned frequently in the Bible (see Leviticus 23:33–44; Numbers 29:12–38; Deuteronomy 16:13; 31:9–13; Zechariah 14:16, 18–19; Ezra 3:4; 2 Chronicles 8:13; John 7:2), and many details about the particular customs associated with this day can be found in these biblical accounts. The description of the Feast of Tabernacles as drawn from the Bible compares very favorably and significantly with further elements in Benjamin's speech. Other important information about this festival is given in the Mishnah, Talmud, and later Jewish writings.

While it is not always possible to know exactly which of these later details were already part of the observance of the Feast of Tabernacles in Lehi's day, many intriguing parallels to Benjamin's festival in Zarahemla are found throughout this material as well. The basic aspects of this celebration encompass the following: pilgrimage to the temple, sitting in booths or tents, sacrifices, reading the law, renewing the covenant, coronation of kings, God's heavenly kingship, and praise and thanksgiving.

Pilgrimage. The Feast of Tabernacles was a day of national assembly, a great pilgrimage festival.¹³² The Mosaic law specified that "all . . . males shall appear before the Lord God" (Exodus 23:17), and in Deuteronomy the entire family was expected to participate: "And thou shalt rejoice in thy feast, thou, and thy son, and thy daughter, and thy manservant, and thy maidservant, and the Levite, the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow, that are within thy gates" (Deuteronomy 16:14; compare 31:10–12).¹³³ The people were to congregate at one of Israel's sanctuaries or "in the place which [God] shall choose" (Deuteronomy 31:11).

Similarly, at the occasion of King Benjamin's address, whole families were present. Benjamin caused all the people in his land to "gather themselves together" (Mosiah 1:18) and to assemble together (see Mosiah 2:9, 27), both Nephites and Mulekites (Mosiah 1:10): "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" (Mosiah 2:5). They assembled specifically "round about" the main Nephite sanctuary in the days of Benjamin, the temple in Zarahemla (Mosiah 2:6).¹³⁴

Booths/tents. In Zarahemla, Benjamin's people "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 would speak unto them” (Mosiah 2:6). During the Feast of Tabernacles in the Old World, the ancient Israelites sat in booths or huts made from branches and vines (see Leviticus 23:41–44). According to Leviticus 23:43 the purpose of the booths was to remind the children of Israel that they had been “made . . . to dwell in booths (*sukkot*)” when they were brought out of Egypt.¹³⁵ The relationship between such booths and tents has received a fair amount of comment. In particular, the word “booths” (*sukkot*) does not appear in the account of the exodus. Instead we find that the people lived in tents. For example, in Exodus 33:8, “and it came to pass, when Moses went out unto the tabernacle (*hā-ʾōhel*), that all the people rose up, and stood every man at his tent (*ʾōhel*) door, and looked after Moses, until he was gone into the tabernacle.”¹³⁶

Tents were specifically mentioned in connection with the celebration of Solomon’s dedication of the temple: “And at that time Solomon held a feast, and all Israel with him, a great congregation. . . . On the eighth day he sent the people away: and they blessed the king, and went unto their tents (*lʾʾohōleyhem*) joyful and glad of heart” (1 Kings 8:65–66). This feast, in which tents were used, was held in the seventh month (see 1 Kings 8:2) and has generally been thought of as a Feast of Tabernacles.¹³⁷ A passage in Hosea also refers to tents: “And I that am the Lord thy God from the land of Egypt will yet make thee to dwell in tabernacles (*baʾōhālîm*), as in the days of the solemn feast” (Hosea 12:9). The Hebrew word *ʾōhālîm*, translated in the King James Version as “tabernacles,” is most often rendered “tents.”¹³⁸ To the Nephites, their festival use of tents may also have symbolized the time when Lehi and his family had “dwelt in a tent” (1 Nephi 10:16),¹³⁹ for Benjamin convenes his celebration in part to remember the distinctiveness of his people, whom

“the Lord God hath brought out of the land of Jerusalem” (Mosiah 1:11).

It is evident in Benjamin’s speech that the tents are ceremonially significant. Each family had a “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” (Mosiah 2:6). Everyone had a tent, not just those who had come from out of town and needed a place to stay. Furthermore, they all remained in their tents during the speech, surely for ceremonial reasons. If it had not been religiously and ritually important for them to stay in their tents, the crowd could have stood much closer to Benjamin and been able to hear him, obviating the need for written copies of his words to be prepared and circulated (see Mosiah 2:8). Apparently Benjamin considered it more important for the people to remain in their tents than to have them stand within close hearing distance of the speaker. The relationship between booths and tents is not yet entirely clear,¹⁴⁰ but the use of the word *tents* instead of *booths* in Mosiah 2 does not appear out of place.

Sacrifice. Numbers 29:12–34 lists the sacrifices connected with the Feast of Tabernacles. These sacrifices were greater in number than those connected with the two previous celebrations.¹⁴¹ The Book of Mormon has relatively few references to sacrifices and burnt offerings. Two are found in 1 Nephi during the journey in the wilderness from Jerusalem to the new land (see 1 Nephi 5:9; 7:22). Another is in 3 Nephi 9:19, in which the Lord commands that sacrifices and burnt offerings no longer be performed. It is significant, then, that sacrifices and burnt offerings are mentioned in the prologue to King Benjamin’s address: “And they also took of the firstlings of their flocks, that they might offer sacrifice and burnt offerings according to the law of Moses” (Mosiah 2:3).

Law and covenant. During the Feast of Tabernacles, the Israelites celebrated the giving of the law to Moses on Mount Sinai.¹⁴² Ancient Israelites profoundly venerated their laws. Every seven years at the Feast of Tabernacles, the law was read, and a statement of the people's commitment to the law took place.¹⁴³ In postexilic times, this ancient element became so prominent that the ninth day of the feast came to be known as *Simḥat Torah* ("Joy-of-the-Torah"), in commemoration of the revelation of the law at Sinai. Today, the annual reading cycle of the Torah for the Jews ends at *Simḥat Torah*. This expanded practice of reading assigned portions of the law each week during each year is traditionally dated to the time of Ezra the Scribe (fifth century B.C.), who renewed the celebration of Sukkot after the Babylonian captivity and the return of the Jews to Jerusalem; but originally the law was read all at one time (see Deuteronomy 31:11). It has been suggested that the reading of the law on Sukkot "not only gives us a relatively early basis for the development of the Joy-of-the-Law observance on the ninth day, but also hints at a connection between the Feast of Booths and a formal covenant ceremony at which the reading of the laws of the covenant was a standard feature."¹⁴⁴ Thus not only do King Benjamin's constant references to keeping the commandments of God (see Mosiah 2:13, 22, 31, 41; 4:6, 30) and to God's appointment of the law of Moses to a stiffnecked people during the exodus (see Mosiah 3:14) fit the Feast of the Tabernacles perfectly, but also in both Jerusalem and Zarahemla this day was a day of covenant renewal. In Israel, on this day the people renewed their covenant with God to be his people and to obey his laws.¹⁴⁵ Benjamin's people also enter into such a covenant, and they follow the form of covenant renewal in Israel in detail.¹⁴⁶ Through this covenant, the people became the sons and daughters of God (see Mosiah 5:1–7; compare Exodus 19:5;

Jeremiah 31:33; Nehemiah 7:73–8:18; 9:1–13:31). The fact that Benjamin's people simultaneously fell down and spoke certain words in unison (see Mosiah 4:1–3; 5:1–5) strongly suggests a ritual or ceremonial response. The words that the people spoke may well have been prescribed. This does not detract from the profound spiritual state of the people as they uttered them. Solemn covenant renewals can have a profound impact on both hearers and participants, especially when they are beautifully and eloquently presented.

Earthly king. The figure of the king seems to have played an important part in the ancient Feast of Tabernacles. As noted above, King Solomon chose this time to dedicate his temple. To do so, he had to wait eleven months—from the eighth month until the seventh month (1 Kings 6:38; 8:2), indicating the importance he placed on waiting until a specific time in the fall. Later Jewish texts attest to the association between the king and the Feast of Tabernacles. The king's responsibility was to read the law every seven years during the Feast of Tabernacles. The Mishnah gives a good description of the activities of the king: ¹⁴⁷ the king stands upon a specially constructed platform,¹⁴⁸ and he is given a copy of the law from which he reads various passages from Deuteronomy, including the Paragraph of the King¹⁴⁹ and other texts dealing with the law and covenant-making. John Tvedtnes has examined these passages in depth and draws numerous comparisons between its particulars and the text of King Benjamin's address.¹⁵⁰ In view of the role of the king in the Feast of Tabernacles it is not surprising that this was the time for the coronation of a new king both in Israel and among the Nephites.¹⁵¹

Heavenly king. Not only did the earthly king play an important part in the Feast of Tabernacles, but God as the Heavenly King is also implied in early sources.¹⁵² The prophet Zechariah, who looked strongly toward the heav-

only Lord of Hosts as the eternal king, prophesied that the Messiah would come on the Feast of Tabernacles and that the people would venerate him as king after his coming: "And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles" (Zechariah 14:16). Thus the royal aspects of the Feast of Tabernacles also served as reminders that Jehovah rules as king (see Psalms 93:1; 96:10; 97:1). Such references to God as king call to mind Benjamin's reference to God as the "heavenly King" (Mosiah 2:19) and also Benjamin's discussion of the coming of the Messiah (see Mosiah 3:1–10).

Thanksgiving and praise. Finally, prayers of thanksgiving and praising God were an important part of all ancient Israelite holy days. Over the years, a standard thanksgiving prayer known as the *She-hecheyanu* has been handed down among the Jews. This prayer is recited when eating the first-fruits, offering sacrifices, doing things for the first time (or for the first time in a long time), and at certain other prescribed times, including the beginning of every festival. The words of this prayer today are: *Barukh 'attah YHWH 'Eloheinu melekh ha-'olam she-hecheyanu ve-kiyemanu ve-higiyanu laz-zaman ha-zeh*, which is "Praised (or blessed) art Thou, Lord our God, King of the universe, who hast kept us alive, and hast preserved us, and enabled us to reach this [festival] season."¹⁵³ Although it is impossible for us today to know when the specific words of this short traditional prayer were composed, its sentiments are all found in the Psalms and thus some formulation of this kind may resemble the words used by Jews long ago to express their feelings of praise and thanksgiving to God, especially at the beginning of their important festivals. Indeed, the oral law required the recitation of this blessing in Israel: the Mishnah

mentions the prayer in a matter-of-fact manner, as if it were a long-standing tradition.¹⁵⁴

Interestingly, King Benjamin's speech contains many of the elements found in the *She-hecheyanu*.¹⁵⁵ Immediately after referring to God as "your heavenly King" (Mosiah 2:19), Benjamin soberly instructs his people to render "*thanks and praise . . . to that God who has created you, and has kept and preserved you*" (Mosiah 2:20–21). As the traditional prayer emphasized "*this festival season,*" Benjamin also spoke several times of his assembly "*this day,*" which may reflect a Hebrew idiom referring to the arrival of a festival moment.¹⁵⁶ When Benjamin told his people that even by thanking and praising God with all they possessed they would still be unprofitable servants, he implied that they customarily offered such prayers of thanks and praise to God, their Creator, for keeping and preserving them, and causing them to have joy and peace. This deprecating reminder of Benjamin to his people would have been especially impressive to them if they offered this kind of prayer often in their religious worship, and thought it beneficial. Understanding that they may even have uttered such a prayer only shortly before the commencement of Benjamin's speech gives his words a cultural context, provides his message with immediate bearing on his people, and helps explain the powerful impact these words of Benjamin had on his people.¹⁵⁷

In sum, many elements in King Benjamin's address and the events surrounding it correspond to the Feast of Tabernacles as practiced in ancient Israel and as those celebrations gradually developed in Jewish history.

Sabbatical Years¹⁵⁸

In addition to perhaps scheduling his speech during the fall festival, Benjamin seems to have timed this great assem-

bly to occur in connection with the conclusion of a sabbatical year, which came once every seven years. Four of the major themes of the sabbatical year can be found embedded in biblical legislation concerning land, debt, slaves (also servants or service), and the public reading of the law.¹⁵⁹

Land, debt, and servitude. Under the law of Moses, in every seventh year beginning at the Feast of Booths, the fields had to lie fallow and their yield was left to the poor (see Exodus 23:10–11). According to the law set out in Deuteronomy, “at the end of every seven years” the covenant people of Israel were required to “make a release,” namely that “every creditor that lendeth ought unto his neighbour shall release it; he shall not exact it of his neighbour, or of his brother” (Deuteronomy 15:1–2). This law may have involved either a full release or a one-year suspension, and it applied so long as any poor inhabited the covenant land; debts owed by foreigners were not subject to this release (see Deuteronomy 15:3–4), for God intended Israel to “lend unto many nations” but not to “borrow” (Deuteronomy 15:6). Moreover, in the year of release all Hebrew slaves were to be set at liberty, particularly those who were enslaved for the nonpayment of debts (see Exodus 21:2–6; Deuteronomy 15:7–18; Jeremiah 34:8–16).¹⁶⁰ The reason for this was that no one could “claim as his own private property a fellow Israelite, who belonged by right of purchase to God alone.”¹⁶¹

Many of these factors are relevant to Mosiah 1–6. If Benjamin’s speech came at the end of a sabbatical year, this would explain why King Mosiah, at the end of his coronation, “did cause his people that they should till the earth” (Mosiah 6:7). This royal act would seem to mark specifically the end of the sabbatical year and the ceremonial beginning of a new agricultural period, for it would be odd for a king to command his people to begin tilling the ground unless there had been some reason to cease, or some need to commence

this common activity anew. It would also give new significance to the fact that Benjamin affirms that he has not allowed his people to “make slaves of one another” (Mosiah 2:13) and insists that all people belong to God by virtue of his having created them (see Mosiah 2:24). Furthermore, in the context of a sabbatical year celebration it makes good sense for Benjamin to speak so extensively about service, giving to the poor, and the realization that all people are beggars (see Mosiah 4:15–23). In addition, Benjamin commanded his people to settle their debts with their neighbors and not remain borrowers (see Mosiah 4:28). The absence of permanent servitude in his kingdom would have been immediately proven by a royal proclamation releasing all debtors who were working off debts through involuntary servitude.

Similarly, continuing the moral and ethical regime of Benjamin, his son Mosiah would later be remembered as a king who “had granted unto his people that they should be delivered from all manner of bondage” (Mosiah 29:40). It seems likely that such a “grant” would also have involved either a specific decree or the periodic implementation of the sabbatical laws, and that his “deliverance from all manner of bondage” would have included a sabbatical-like release from economic debts as well as all kinds of compulsory servitude.

The reading of the law. As discussed already above, associated with the celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles on the sabbatical year was the reading of the law. The stipulations regarding the reading of the law are found in Deuteronomy 31:9–13. The numerous similarities between that passage and the account of Benjamin’s assembly present considerable evidence that Benjamin was consciously following the Deuteronomic regulations in observing just such a seventh-

year Feast of Tabernacles. Deuteronomy 31:10–13 (with emphasis added) reads:

And Moses *commanded* them, saying, At the end of every seven years, in the *solemnity* of the year of release [compare Mosiah 2:9], in the feast of tabernacles, When all Israel is come to appear before the Lord thy God in the *place* which he shall choose [compare Mosiah 1:18], thou shalt read this law before all Israel *in their hearing* [compare Mosiah 2:8]. *Gather* the people together, *men, and women, and children* [compare Mosiah 2:5], *and thy stranger* that is *within thy gates* [compare Mosiah 1:10], that they *may hear*, and that they *may learn* [compare Mosiah 2:9], and *fear the Lord* your God [compare Mosiah 4:1], and observe *to do all the words* of this law: and that their *children*, which have *not known* any thing, may hear, and learn to fear the Lord your God [compare Mosiah 3:21–22; 4:15].

The completeness and precision with which Benjamin appears to be fulfilling these technical Mosaic requirements lends weighty evidence to the conclusion that it was at just such a seventh-year Deuteronomic Feast of Tabernacles that Benjamin's speech was delivered.

The Jubilee

Moreover, every seventh sabbatical year was a jubilee year.¹⁶² It is possible that Benjamin not only selected a sabbatical year on which to crown his son king, but that this great occasion also fell on a jubilee year, as the following factors may indicate:

A time of return. The jubilee year was a time when property was returned to its hereditary owner: "Ye shall return every man unto his possession, and ye shall return every man unto his family" (Leviticus 25:10). De Vaux summarizes:

“Consequently transactions in land had to be made by calculating the number of years before the next jubilee: one did not buy the ground but so many harvests. . . . Religious grounds are given for these measures: the land cannot be sold absolutely, for it belongs to God.”¹⁶³ On a jubilee year, one could expect a king to comment on this extraordinary time of return, as Benjamin indeed does: “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” (Mosiah 4:28). Benjamin’s concern, under one possible reading of this text, is that the very thing that has been transferred should be returned. Substituted property of equivalent value, or money, was apparently not acceptable to Benjamin on this occasion. One wonders why not—perhaps because during a jubilee year the people had to “return every man unto *his possession*” (Leviticus 25:10, emphasis added). Furthermore, Benjamin expresses concern that the lender might commit sin¹⁶⁴ as well as the borrower. Are we to imagine that Benjamin fears that the lender might commit sin by somehow injuring the delinquent debtor in anger?¹⁶⁵ Or is this more a reflection of the public nature of the obligation to fulfill the requirements of the jubilee wherein the possession of specific property itself had to be relinquished, and both parties were required to participate or else “commit sin”?

Underlying the jubilee laws was the idea that the land and all the world belongs to God. Private ownership of land in Israel was effectively limited, at least in theory, by the jubilee redemption and fallow laws. A similar concept is also expressly recognized by King Benjamin, who declares concerning the dust of the earth: “behold, it belongeth to him who created you” (Mosiah 2:25). The recognition of God’s ownership of the earth would have been as power-

fully felt on a jubilee year as at any time on the ancient Israelite calendar.

Jubilee texts. The jubilee text of Leviticus 25 compares closely with two sections of Benjamin's speech.¹⁶⁶ Leviticus 25 reflects the words and phrases associated with the jubilee in ancient times. A considerable density of phrases and ideas from these chapters can be found in the latter portions of Mosiah 2 and 4, sufficient to indicate a textual dependency of Benjamin's words on these or similar jubilee texts. The main parallels between these passages and Benjamin's speech can be outlined as follows:

- Benjamin's "return the thing" (Mosiah 4:28) recalls "return every man unto his possession" (Leviticus 25:10).
- His injunction "Ye will *not* have a mind to injure one another" (Mosiah 4:13) echoes "Ye shall *not* oppress one another" (Leviticus 25:14, 17).
- At the jubilee, it was required: "He shall reckon with him" (Leviticus 25:50; compare 15–16). Similarly, Benjamin said: "Render to every man according to that which is his due" (Mosiah 4:13).
- "And if thy brother be waxen poor, and fallen in decay with thee; then *thou shalt relieve* him: yea though he be a stranger or a sojourner; that he may live with thee" (Leviticus 25:35) has the same import as "Ye . . . will *succor* those that stand in need, . . . ye will not . . . turn him out to perish" (Mosiah 4:16).
- "I am the Lord your God, which brought you forth" (Leviticus 25:38) implies the same conclusion as "Do we not all depend upon the same Being, even God, for all the substance which we have" (Mosiah 4:19).
- The promise in Leviticus reads: "Wherefore ye shall do my statutes and keep my judgments, and do them; and ye shall dwell in the land in safety. And the land shall yield her fruit" (Leviticus 25:18–19); and in Benjamin,

“If ye would keep his commandments ye should *prosper in the land*” (Mosiah 2:22).

These relatively specific parallels, coupled with similarities in the overall tone and concerns of the jubilee texts and Benjamin’s speech, indicate Benjamin’s intense feelings about helping the poor, establishing God’s covenant among his people, being conscientious in walking in the paths of righteousness, and realizing man’s utter dependence on God for life and sustenance. These may well be attributable to the heightened sense of these principles felt by the ancient Israelites during the jubilee season.

A further parallel, expressing the spirit behind all sabbatical and jubilee laws, is found in Deuteronomy 15:9: “Beware that there be not a thought in thy wicked heart, saying, The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand; and thine eye be evil against thy poor brother, and thou givest him nought; and he cry unto the Lord against thee, and it be sin unto thee.” This compares closely with Benjamin’s injunctions to his people to impart freely of their substance to the poor without grudging (see Mosiah 4:22–25).

A time of beginning anew. While the jubilee laws served primarily to protect the lives and real property of small individual families from the horrors of bondage and disinheritance, these provisions also expressed powerful ideological values that helped periodically to set the community back on an even keel. Ancient economies were largely unregulated. In such societies, the rich tend to get richer and the poor become steadily poorer; land ownership becomes more and more concentrated in the hands of a few, and debts accumulate and compound without any hope of relief coming from such modern inventions as bankruptcy laws or government subsidies.

Babylonian kings in the second millennium B.C. dealt with this broad economic problem by issuing special edicts

at the commencement of their reign or periodically as the need arose.¹⁶⁷ These so-called *mishârum* decrees forgave classes of people their outstanding debts and canceled taxes, and introduced various reforms,¹⁶⁸ thereby setting everyone in the kingdom, to an extent, back on an equal or equitable footing. This often involved the return of land or property that had been seized as collateral or was being held to produce revenue to pay off a debt.¹⁶⁹

During its formative years, however, Israel had no kings. In the ancient Israelite world, no decrees would ever be forthcoming through the coronation edict of a generous new ruler seeking to garner political popularity, putting aside all the old obligations legitimized under his predecessor's authority in favor of giving his new administration a clean slate. Perhaps the jubilee laws were understood, in part, to fill this ancient need for periodical recalibration of Israelite economy and society. Whereas the kings of the ancient Near East reestablished their economic order at the time of their coronation and provided occasional subsequent reenactments throughout their reigns, Jehovah, the king of heaven and earth, decreed as a part of his perpetual reign that order should be regularly adjusted every seven years and then substantially re-created at the commencement of every new fifty-year cycle, approximately once in every lifetime. Obviously, religious and moral as well as economic and political purposes are served by this program.¹⁷⁰

With this background, it is easy to imagine why King Benjamin would turn to the jubilee texts and sabbatical principles at the end of his reign and the commencement of the regency of his son Mosiah. Benjamin wanted his son to start afresh; he wanted old claims to be settled before new administrators and officers were put into office (see Mosiah 6:2), who would not necessarily know the terms of prior commitments or arrangements. Moreover, the ethical content of

the jubilee strongly promoted such ideas as showing mercy (see Mosiah 4:16), forgiving indebtedness (see Mosiah 2:23), making people free (see Mosiah 5:8), proclaiming good news to the poor (see Mosiah 3:3; Isaiah 42:1–7; 61:1), settling accounts and returning borrowed property (see Mosiah 4:28), and retaining one's inheritance and favored condition (compare "retain" in Mosiah 4:12 and 26). These precepts are further bound up tightly with such theological themes as obtaining relief from one's debt to God through his mercy and goodness, being redeemed through the atonement of Christ, being held accountable at God's final judgment, and repenting and retaining a remission of forgiveness—doctrines that appear prominently in Benjamin's speech.

A time of peace. Another clue indicating that Benjamin's speech was delivered at the end of a jubilee year is found in Nephite history half a century later. Every seventh seven-year time period ideally occasioned a jubilee celebration, a time of peace. Mosiah reigned a total of thirty-three years after King Benjamin's speech (see Mosiah 29:46). Interestingly, in the sixteenth year of the reign of judges (the forty-ninth year after Benjamin's speech), "there began to be continual peace throughout all the land" (Alma 30:2). This peace lasted all through the seventeenth year of the reign of the judges (the fiftieth year); "there was continual peace" (Alma 30:5). During this time the people were especially "strict in observing the ordinances of God, according to the law of Moses" (Alma 30:3). Since the Hebrew word *yōbēl* (jubilee) literally means "trumpet," and indeed the jubilee was so called because it was opened with the sound of the trumpet,¹⁷¹ we may further conclude that Alma's wish that he might speak with the voice of "the trump of God" (Alma 29:1) is present and especially appropriate in this second

identifiable jubilee season in Nephite history, as well as on the typical New Year occasion as discussed above.

Conclusion

The cumulative effect of all the foregoing information, in our opinion, points toward the idea that King Benjamin's speech was delivered in the fall, at the time of the year when all ancient Israelites, including peoples of the Book of Mormon, would have been celebrating their great autumn festival season, which included many ancient elements that later became enduring parts of the Jewish holidays of Rosh ha-Shanah, Yom Kippur, and Sukkot. Most of the known or surmised ancient elements of these festivals are represented in the text of the Book of Mormon. A very substantial percentage of the total number of words and topics found in Benjamin's speech are clearly found in the Israelite or Jewish literature associated with these sacred observances.

The setting for King Benjamin's speech was profoundly religious. On this occasion Benjamin disclosed sacred knowledge to his people about the true nature of divine kingship, the atonement of Christ, and the judgments of God. In addition, Benjamin performed the coronation of his son Mosiah and conducted his covenant renewal celebration—the most important ceremonial day of his life. It appears that he deliberately held this sacred assembly at the holy time of the year when such events were typically performed in ancient Israel, and possibly during a sabbatical or jubilee year. Just as the Israelite traditions shed considerable light on Benjamin's words, his speech represents a Nephite version of the ancient Israelite fall celebration, and as such it may add to our understanding of preexilic Israelite religion.

Thus it may be reasonably asserted that the ancient Israelite traditions connected with these festivals provided much of the fabric from which Benjamin fashioned his presentation of many of his revealed and revealing Christian expectations. This address ranks as one of the most spiritual and humanitarian sermons ever recorded in holy books the world over. Benjamin's speech contains numerous elements pertinent to the New Year holy day, the Day of Atonement observances, the Feast of Tabernacles, and the sabbatical or jubilee year. These elements account for the vast majority of themes or topics found in Benjamin's speech.

Benjamin's speech addresses many fundamental religious principles, and none of these topics can be considered out of place in a speech delivered by a king to a group of observant Nephites during their fall festival season. When viewed in light of the holy setting of this speech, its penetrating and revealing themes shine through especially bright and clear. King Benjamin's carefully chosen words and the angel's marvelously articulated messages could hardly have been more timely.

**Some of Benjamin's Main Themes Appropriate
to the Time of the Israelite New Year**

admonitions	the long-suffering of God
the attributes of God	the Lord omnipotent
being sealed to God	man's nature and nothingness
covenant making	preaching and prophecy
creation	rebirth and resurrection
divine judgment	remembrance
forsaking sin	reverence and fear of God
God's involvement in history	sacrifice
guilt before God	testimony against the people
kingship of God	warnings against sin
law	wisdom

**Some of Benjamin's Main Themes Appropriate
to the Season of the Day of Atonement**

atonement	the goodness of God
balancing order and diligence	humility
being made free from sin	ignorant sin
belief in the Messiah	indebtedness to God
belief in God	inscribing the names of the righteous
blood	knowing the divine name
blotting out the names of transgressors	left hand
the commandments of God	the means of salvation
confession and repentance	the name of God
conversion	pride
joy and blessings	purification
eternal rewards and punishments	rebellion against God
faith	repentance
the fall of Adam	right hand
the fallen state of humanity	service to God and fellowman
foundation of the world	submission
giving to the poor	the suffering and works of the Messiah
	unintentional sin

**Some of Benjamin's Main Themes Appropriate
to the Season of the Feast of Tabernacles**

becoming sons and daughters of God	kingship
booths/tents	knowing God by serving God
coronation	law and order
deliverance	one's accountability after being warned
the effect of knowing God	praise
family	remembrance
giving thanks and praise	rejoicing and thanksgiving
joy in the commandments	sacrifice
keeping the commandments	temple assembly

**Some of Benjamin's Main Themes Appropriate
to Sabbatical and Jubilee Years**

blessings	prosperity
debt	purification and renewal
forgiveness	rendering to each his due
freedom	returning things borrowed
land	riches and generosity
love	service and servants
peaceful living	slaves released

Notes

1. See Hugh W. Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, 3rd ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988 [1st ed. 1957]), 295–310.

2. See Hugh W. Nibley, "The Roman Games as a Survival of an Archaic Year-Cult" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1939).

3. Nibley supported his claim by pointing out thirty-six elements present in Benjamin's assembly, potentially identifiable as part of a typical ancient year-rite: Benjamin's speech involves a proclamation, assembly, census, sacrifice, *silentium* (call to attention), a dramatic form of instruction, hailing of the king, homage, gifts, signs of submission, divine kingship, the king's farewell, a heavenly choir, promises of victory and prosperity, records, divination of the future, judgment, *acclamatio* (crying out), *proskynesis* (falling to the ground), recalling the condition of mankind in the Golden Age before the fall, caring for the poor, making a covenant, receiving a new name, recording the names in a register symbolic of the heavenly Book of Life, and dismissal. Each such element is identified as an "unfailing part" or "important aspect of the year-rites." Nibley, *Approach to the Book of Mormon*, 304.

4. See *ibid.*, 299–300.

5. These include David E. Boruchowitz, Richard Erickson, Jerome Horowitz, Stephen D. Ricks, John L. Sorenson, Terrence L. Szink, Gordon C. Thomasson, John A. Tvedtnes, Benjamin Urrutia,

John W. Welch, and Stephen Wood. Many of the ideas expressed in this chapter can be found in the following publications: John A. Tvedtnes, "King Benjamin and the Feast of Tabernacles," in *By Study and Also by Faith: Essays in Honor of Hugh W. Nibley*, ed. John M. Lundquist and Stephen D. Ricks (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990), 2:197–237; "The Ideology of Kingship in Mosiah 1–6," "This Day," "Benjamin's Speech: A Classic Ancient Farewell Address," and "The Coronation of Kings," in *Re-exploring the Book of Mormon*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992), 114–26; Stephen D. Ricks, "King, Coronation, and Covenant in Mosiah 1–6," in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, ed. John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1991), 209–19; Gordon C. Thomasson, "Mosiah: The Complex Symbolism and Symbolic Complex of Kingship in the Book of Mormon," *JBMS* 2/1 (1993): 21–38.

6. John W. Welch, "The Temple in the Book of Mormon," in *Temples of the Ancient World*, ed. Donald W. Parry (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1994), 316–17.

7. *Ibid.*, 309–10. Welch marshals arguments explaining the strict observance of the law of Moses by the Nephites, including sabbaths (the main festival days were also treated as sabbaths even if they fell on a regular day of the week), and daily sacrifice, as well as civil and criminal law; Nephite practices and teachings blended elements from both the Old Testament and the revealed knowledge of the coming Messiah (*ibid.*, 301–19).

8. J. H. Hertz, "Sabbath, Festival and Fast in Judaism," in *The Babylonian Talmud*, ed. Isidore Epstein (London: Soncino, 1938), 1:xx.

9. See John P. Pratt, "Book of Mormon Chronology," in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 1:169–71.

10. J. B. Segal, "The Hebrew Festivals and the Calendar," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 6 (1961): 76, has written: "The calendar must not be alienated from the periodic festivals, nor the periodic festivals from the calendar, if both are to survive. If the two systems are separated one from another, one or both will wither and die."

11. See R. T. Beckwith, "The Earliest Enoch Literature and Its Calendar," *Revue de Qumran* 39 (1981): 365–403; "The Significance of the Calendar for Interpreting Essene Chronology and Eschatology," *Revue de Qumran* 38 (1980): 167–202; Julius Morgenstern, "The Three Calendars of Ancient Israel," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 1 (1924): 13–78.

12. See J. David Bleich, "Sefirat Ha-Omer and the Observance of Shavu'ot for Travellers Crossing the Dateline," *Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox Jewish Thought* 21 / 4 (1985): 62–66.

13. See "Abinadi and Pentecost" and "Sons of the Passover," in *Reexploring*, 135–38, 196–98. In the New Testament a similar thing happens: Matthew, assuming that the reader understands Judaism, offers no explanation of Jewish practices, but Luke stops to point out Jewish customs to his Greek audience. Compare, for example, Matthew 26:17 with Luke 2:40–41.

14. A strong association can be drawn between the "tabernacles" or "booths" of the Feast of Tabernacles and "tents"; see discussion of the Feast of Tabernacles, below.

15. See Moshe I. Sorscher, *Companion Guide to the Yom Kippur Prayer Service* and *Companion Guide to the Rosh Hashanah Prayer Service* (Brooklyn: Judaica, 1994).

16. A similar methodological assumption is made by Reuven Yaron, "Prolegomena to the Study of Biblical Law," in *Jewish Law in Legal History and the Modern World*, ed. Bernard S. Jackson (Leiden: Brill, 1980), 27–44, arguing that rabbinic sources can shed light on the state of the law in the early biblical period in which the rabbinic rules and the prevailing ancient Near Eastern law codes are consistent on a point of law, but the biblical rule on the subject is lacking.

17. For further discussion of this topic, see Welch, "Temple in the Book of Mormon," 314–16.

18. Current Old Testament scholarship has placed the final editing of the books from Genesis to Chronicles, as we know them today, in the middle of the sixth century B.C. in Babylon. The final records would have been written from early sources. See David

Noel Freedman, "The Formation of the Canon of the Old Testament: The Selection and Identification of the Torah as the Supreme Authority of the Post-Exilic Community," in *Religion and Law: Biblical-Judaic and Islamic Perspectives*, ed. Edwin B. Firmage, Bernard G. Weiss, and John W. Welch (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 315–31.

19. See Robert E. Paul, "Joseph Smith and the Manchester (New York) Library," *BYU Studies* 22/3 (1982): 333–56.

20. See Menahem Haran, *Temples and Temple-Service in Ancient Israel* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1985), 297–98; H. J. Kraus, *Worship in Israel*, trans. Geoffrey Buswell (Richmond: Knox, 1966), 208.

21. The fall Feast of Ingathering "had many rites that are now associated with Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Sukkot. It appears that it was only later, after the Babylonian Exile, that the autumn festival was divided into three separate holidays." Hayyim Schauss, *The Jewish Festivals* (New York: Schocken, 1962), 113. See also John Bright, *A History of Israel*, 3rd ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981), 171; Robert Martin-Achard, *Essai biblique sur les fêtes d'Israel* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1974), 73; Johannes C. de Moor makes the connection between the Canaanite New Year festival and the Israelite Feast of Tabernacles in *TDOT*, 2:191; for his discussion of possible reasons for the divisions of the feasts, see Johannes C. de Moor, *New Year with Canaanites and Israelites* (Kampen: Kok, 1971), 1:24–25. Even conservative scholar R. K. Harrison seems to accept "the three festivals of Tishri" as the preexilic counterpart to the Feast of Ingathering; see R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 52. For purposes of comparison, we may find a parallel to this idea of an ancient festival season in the common practice of celebrating Christmas, the New Year, and Hanukkah by sending Season's Greetings, a practice that combines several holidays in one.

22. Kraus, *Worship in Israel*, 208, writes "the division of the autumn festival into three parts must have taken place in the short

period of time between the reformation of king Josiah and the Babylonian exile." More specifically, he dated the division of the festival into three parts to "about 600 B.C." *Ibid.*, 66.

23. On the New Year festival in general, see de Moor, *New Year with Canaanites and Israelites*. Martin-Achard, *Les fêtes d'Israel*, 93–104; Helmer Ringgren, *Israelite Religion*, trans. David E. Green (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), 185–200. Book of Mormon research in this area has been cultivated and advanced by several scholars; for example, in "New Year's Celebrations," in *Reexploring*, 209–11. The materials in this section have been developed particularly by Terrence L. Szink.

24. De Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 502–3; Abraham Bloch, *The Biblical and Historical Background of the Jewish Holy Days* (New York: KTAV, 1978), 20. On the other hand, Haran, *Temples and Temple-Service*, 291 n. 7, argues that neither the New Year nor the Day of Atonement were mentioned in the nonpriestly sources because they were not designated as a *ḥag*, or festival, although they indeed did exist. It is also possible that the reason the New Year festival is not mentioned by name is that it was still part of the united autumn festival. This might also be why it was not identified by name in the Book of Mormon. Later it was differentiated, received a name, and developed further as a festival.

25. De Vaux, for example, in *Ancient Israel*, 2:502–3, wrote that "under this name [Rosh ha-Shanah], . . . the feast never existed in Old Testament times." He notes that "the feast held on the first of the seventh month was simply an unusually solemn new moon, the first day of a month which, at that time, was full of feasts." Kraus, *Worship in Israel*, 67, wrote "neither the older regulations concerning the autumn festival nor the cultic traditions in the Old Testament which presuppose the feast day on the first day of the seventh month make it possible to prove that there was a New Year festival in Israel"; compare Schauss, *Jewish Festivals*, 117.

26. De Moor reconstructs an Israelite New Year on the basis of Ugaritic material in *New Year with Canaanites and Israelites*. Many scholars combine passages from Psalms with parallels drawn from the Babylonian *akītu* (New Year) festival for reconstruction. In his

reconstruction, Sigmund Mowinckel saw the New Year festival as the “enthronement of Yahweh.” *Psalmstudien, II, Das Thronbesteigungsfest Jahwäs und der Ursprung der Eschatologie* (Oslo: Christiania, 1922). Von Rad and Weiser, on the other hand, saw it as a “covenant renewal festival.” Gerhard von Rad, “The Form-Critical Problem of the Hexateuch,” in *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays*, trans. E. W. Trueman Dicken (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), 33–40; Artur Weiser, *The Psalms*, trans. Herbert Hartwell (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962), 35–52. For a discussion of these two theories, see Ringgren, *Israelite Religion*, 192–200, and Ringgren, “Enthronement Festival or Covenant Renewal?” *Biblical Research* 7 (1962): 45–48. For a rejection of the historical anthropology that stands behind these comparative approaches, see Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 50–53.

27. Hertz, “Sabbath, Festival and Fast,” xvii.

28. See “New Year’s Celebrations,” in *Reexploring*, 209–11. For a study of the Nephite calendar system, see John L. Sorenson, “Seasonality of Warfare in the Book of Mormon and in Mesoamerica,” in *Warfare in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and William J. Hamblin (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990), 445–77. Note that Sorenson suspects that the Nephites followed more than one calendar system (p. 449), which would mean that the timing of the festival is not as clear as we would like it to be.

29. In the past, many scholars have suggested that in preexilic times the New Year was observed in autumn and that the spring New Year developed after the exile, perhaps as a result of contact with Babylon, where the New Year was celebrated in spring. Jacob Klein, in his article “Akitu,” in *ABD*, 1:138, notes that among the Sumerians a shift in the celebration of the *akitu* festival from the seventh to the first month also took place (this is not to imply a relationship between the two shifts). Another theory argues that the kingdoms of Israel and Judah simultaneously maintained opposing and overlapping year systems. See James C. Vanderkam, “Calendars: Ancient Israelite and Early Jewish,” in *ABD*, 1:814–20, for a discussion and bibliography of this problem.

30. See D. J. A. Clines, "The Evidence for an Autumnal New Year in Pre-exilic Israel Reconsidered," *JBL* 93 (1974): 22–40.

31. Vanderkam, "Calendars," 817, explains that the festive calendar deals with an "agricultural cycle which is not necessarily the same as a calendar year." He notes that the Gezer calendar (presumably based on an agricultural cycle) begins with the ingathering, which would have been the seventh month; in a similar way among the Sumerians, "the *akitu* festival marked the beginning of the agricultural year." Klein, "Akitu," 138. The Mishnah notes not one or two, but four "New Year days" (*Rosh ha-Shanah* 1:1), each one having a different purpose.

32. See M *Rosh ha-Shanah* 3:3.

33. Similarly, Josephus makes no mention of the *shōfār* in his description of the holiday in *Antiquities* 3.10. Alternatively, it is possible that the blowing of the horns was not specifically known to Benjamin, since the form of Leviticus 23:24 that we know may well belong to "the last edition of the Pentateuch," which could have postdated Lehi. See de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 503. This would not rule out the possibility, however, that some kind of similarly functioning sound or instrument was used in preexilic Israelite festivals before being finally incorporated into their written traditions, as de Vaux himself suggests. *Ibid.*, 254.

34. See Albert L. Lewis, "Shofar," in *Encyclopedia Judaica* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1972), 14:1442–47.

35. See "Kingship of God," below in this section.

36. Hertz, "Sabbath, Festival and Fast," xviii.

37. This suggestion was made by Gordon Thomasson.

38. See Bloch, *Jewish Holy Days*, 13.

39. This was an ancient practice with which Lehi would have been familiar. See Genesis 4:4 (Abel sacrificed the "firstlings of his flock"); Deuteronomy 12:6 ("And thither ye shall bring your burnt offerings, and your sacrifices, . . . and the firstlings of your herds and of your flocks"). The firstling males were eaten before the Lord "year by year"; see Deuteronomy 15:19–20.

40. "The fact that the Babylonian *akitu* was celebrated in the spring does not contradict the theory of an Israelite New Year's festival in autumn; as is well known, any new beginning in the

annual cycle can be observed as a New Year's festival." Ringgren, *Israelite Religion*, 200.

41. Klein, "Akitu," 138–39; W. G. Lambert, "Myth and Ritual as Conceived by the Babylonians," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 13/1 (1968): 107; de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 505.

42. Henri Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), 331.

43. Baruch Halpern, *The Constitution of the Monarchy in Israel* (Chicago: Scholars Press, 1981), 57.

44. See *M Rosh ha-Shanah*, 1:2. "On New Year's Day all that come into the world pass before him like legions of soldiers, for it is written, He that fashioneth the hearts of them all, that considereth all their works."

45. *Leviticus Rabbah* 29:4; see *TY Rosh ha-Shanah*, 1:3; Louis Jacobs, "Rosh ha-Shanah," in *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 14:307, 309.

46. T. H. Gaster, *Festivals of the Jewish Year* (New York: Morrow Quill, 1978), 121.

47. *TB Rosh ha-Shanah* 16b; Jacobs, "Rosh ha-Shanah," 307.

48. See Gaster, *Festivals of the Jewish Year*, 93.

49. Schauss, *Jewish Festivals*, 112.

50. This may be distantly connected with the ritual of throwing one's sins into the sea (Micah 7:19), acted out in the *Tashlich* custom. See Schauss, *Jewish Festivals*, 148. The wearing of a long white cloak was customary and was a symbol of purity; Gaster, *Festivals of the Jewish Year*, 121.

51. See Schauss, *Jewish Festivals*, 300 n. 135.

52. *Ibid.*, 147–48.

53. *Ibid.*, 148.

54. As Lambert has pointed out, this poem was also read at other times during the year, "Myth and Ritual," 108.

55. See *ANET*, 501–3.

56. See Mowinckel, "Erster Teil: Die Thronbesteigungspsalmen und das Thronbesteigungsfest Jahwäs," in *Psalmenstudien, II, Das Thronbesteigungsfest*, 3–145.

57. Both Kraus, *Worship in Israel*, 205–8, and de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 504–6, reject the idea.

58. Keith W. Whitelam, "King and Kingship," in *ABD*, 4:44.

59. TB *Berakhot* 12b; Jacobs, "Rosh ha-Shanah," 307. See also Gaster, *Festivals of the Jewish Year*, 120.

60. Lambert, "Myth and Ritual," 112. Creation themes were often found in temple contexts; compare Stephen D. Ricks, "Liturgy and Cosmogony: The Ritual Use of Creation Accounts in the Ancient Near East," in *Temples of the Ancient World*, 118–25.

61. See Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods*, 314.

62. See TB *Rosh ha-Shanah* 10b–11a.

63. Gaster, *Festivals of the Jewish Year*, 109. To this effect, Gaster cites generally Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954), 51–92.

64. This was likewise the time of temple dedication in a Canaanite context. Frank M. Cross, "The Priestly Tabernacle in the Light of Recent Research," in *The Temple in Antiquity*, ed. Truman G. Madsen (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1984), 93; compare Solomon's temple dedication at the Feast of Tabernacles (1 Kings 8:2–66).

65. See Louis Midgley, "The Ways of Remembrance," in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, 168–76.

66. *BDB*, 272.

67. See Gaster, *Festivals of the Jewish Year*, 81.

68. John H. Eaton, "The King as God's Witness," *Annual of the Swedish Theological Institute*, ed. Hans Kosmala (Leiden: Brill, 1970), 7:27, 29, 31. This third duty is further divided into proclaiming peace, teaching one to look "to God as his rock, crag and fortress, his father who accepted him from the womb and who taught him as he grew," that "from the very netherworld God will bring him up and indeed increase his princely greatness," and also declaring at great length that he as king will stand as a witness for God "such as he has hitherto rendered daily and will continue to render in the future, proclaiming God's mighty work and righteousness to succeeding generations, affirming his incomparability" (p. 31).

69. *Ibid.*, 32–33.

70. See *ibid.*, 34.

71. See Klein, "Akitu," 138; John H. Eaton, *Kingship and the Psalms*, 2nd ed. (Sheffield: JSOT, 1986), 88.

72. Klein, "Akitu," 138; see also Eaton, *Kingship and the Psalms*, 88.

73. See Halpern, *Constitution of the Monarchy in Israel*, 53.

74. See Helmer Ringgren, "Enthronement Festival or Covenant Renewal," *Biblical Research* 7 (1962): 45.

75. See *ibid.*

76. *ANET*, 334.

77. See Klein, "Akitu," 139. In the Babylonian New Year festival, on the second day of the month, the king asked the all-seeing god (line 19; compare Mosiah 4:9) to have mercy on his people (line 24; compare Mosiah 4:2, 6) and to make them free (line 32; compare Mosiah 5:8) as god's subordinates (or servants, line 32; compare Mosiah 2:17). On the third day he offered additional prayers. On the fourth day he blessed and purified the temple and offered prayers to the God of heaven and earth, before being humiliated by having his scepter, circle, and sword (lines 420–25; compare Mosiah 1:16) taken from him and being slapped on the cheek until the tears flowed. On the sixth day the king raised two images, one in his right hand and the other in his left hand, knocked off their heads, and threw them into a fire (line 215; compare Mosiah 2:38). *ANET*, 331–34. Obviously, one may find in this ritual some similarities and several dissimilarities with Benjamin's speech as well as with certain elements in the Bible. Not much can be made of such comparisons, and we do not claim that the Israelites or Nephites celebrated a year-rite in the pagan sense; but texts such as the rare New Year's liturgy from Babylon help modern readers at least to imagine the general kinds of ceremonies that existed in the ancient Near East.

78. See Johnson, *Sacral Kingship in Ancient Israel*, 22–25; Eaton, *Kingship and the Psalms*, 133–34; Ringgren, *Israelite Religion*, 236–37. On the other hand, Tryggve N. D. Mettinger, *King and Messiah: The Civil and Sacral Legitimation of the Israelite Kings* (Lund: Liber Läromedel, 1976), 307, declares that "there is a lack of positive evidence for such a practice in ancient Israel," although he admits that "cultic suffering on the part of the king in a yearly renewal of

kingship would perhaps not constitute a wholly inconceivable element in Israelite kingship.”

79. Johnson, *Sacral Kingship in Ancient Israel*, 106.

80. Aubrey R. Johnson, *Sacral Kingship in Ancient Israel* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1955), 47.

81. J. B. Segal, *The Hebrew Passover: From the Earliest Times to A.D. 70* (New York: Oxford Press, 1963), 267.

82. See De Moor, *The New Year with Canaanites and Israelites*, 1:20.

83. *Ibid.*, 18.

84. See discussion of the “Earthly King” under the Feast of Tabernacles, below. See also “Kingship and Temple in 2 Nephi 5–10,” in *Reexploring*, 66–68.

85. For people in a culture such as this, an actual killing of a king on New Year’s Day would have caused absolute fear and terror, as if their world had just fallen apart. Thus it was surely no accident that Teancum chose New Year’s Eve to steal into the tent of King Amalickiah and kill him (perhaps under the guise of some ritual). When his subjects found him dead “on the first morning of the first month” (Alma 52:1), it is no wonder that they “were affrighted” (Alma 52:2), abandoning all military plans and retreating in search of protection.

86. See Tvedtnes, “King Benjamin and the Feast of Tabernacles,” 224–26, and pp. 34, 60, 188, and 248 in this volume.

87. Schauss, *Jewish Festivals*, 146; see also Jacobs, “Rosh ha-Shanah,” 309.

88. Jacobs, “Rosh ha-Shanah,” 310. For “awe” of God and lowliness of man as God’s “creation,” see Mosiah 2:20–26; 4:5–11. For “prostrating” oneself before God, see Mosiah 4:1 and Gaster, *Festivals of the Jewish Year*, 121. For achieving harmonious unity among the people, see Mosiah 4:13; 5:2. For doing God’s will with a perfect heart, see Mosiah 5:2–5.

89. The biblical prescriptions for the rites of the Day of Atonement are noted in Leviticus 16; 23:26–32; Numbers 29:7–11. Their relevance to Benjamin’s speech was first developed by John W. Welch. On the Day of Atonement see generally David P. Wright,

"Day of Atonement," in *ABD*, 2:72–76; Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 1009–84; Kraus, *Worship in Israel*, 68–70; Jacob Milgrom, "Day of Atonement as Annual Day of Purgation in Temple Times," in *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 5:1384–87; Moshe D. Herr, "Day of Atonement," in *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 5:1376–84. Regarding the use of the term *kipper*, see Baruch A. Levine, *In the Presence of the Lord* (Leiden: Brill, 1974), 55–77.

90. The Day of Atonement was certainly preexilic. Kraus writes, "We can conclude that the special 'Day of Atonement' that is laid down for the first time in Lev. 23:26 was part of the autumn festival from the earliest period and points back even as far as the desert period." *Worship in Israel*, 69. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 1071, closely examines the question of dating the Day of Atonement and concludes that "the tenth of Tishri, as the annual event for the purgation of the Temple, was observed in preexilic times."

91. The Mishnah devotes an entire tractate (*Yoma*, lit. "The Day") to the ceremony and prescriptions of the Day of Atonement.

92. Welch, "The Temple in the Book of Mormon," 353. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 1039, notes that the septenary system was operative in the rites of the Day of Atonement. See Leviticus 4:6, 17; 8:11; 14:7, 16, 27, 51; 16:14, 19. In their response to his seven references to atonement, Benjamin's people speak once of the "atoning blood" (Mosiah 4:2).

93. That Benjamin seems to serve as the high priest, or at least describes actions taken by the high priest, is not unusual. Ringgren, *Israelite Religion*, 234, has written: "We are probably justified in assuming that the king officiated at certain atonement ceremonies in the context of the New Year festival." See also Mettinger, *King and Messiah*, 306; Eaton, *Kingship and the Psalms*, 172–77.

94. See M *Yoma* 1:7.

95. For example, see M *Yoma* 3:3 (31b); 3:4 (34b).

96. See Sorscher, *Companion Guide to the Yom Kippur Prayer Service*, xi.

97. See *ANET*, 333. Milgrom notes both the similarities and

differences between the two rites, *Leviticus 1–16*, 1067–70; note again this association between the Day of Atonement and the New Year celebration.

98. *Leviticus 16:21* mentions three terms describing types of misdeeds: (1) *ʾāwōnōt*, “iniquities,” which were deliberate wrongdoings but not quite as serious as (2) *pāshāʿīm* (translated by the KJV as “transgressions”), which were rebellious acts and the most serious type of sin, and (3) *ḥaṭṭāʾōtām*, “sins,” a general term that covered all types of misdeeds except the *pāshāʿīm*. See BDB, 306–10, 730–31, 833, and Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 1034, 1043.

99. M *Yoma* 3:5.

100. See “Unintentional Sin in Benjamin’s Discourse,” FARMS Update, *Insights* (April 1996): 2.

101. On the scapegoat rite and comparative Near Eastern rites, see David P. Wright, *The Disposal of Impurity: Elimination Rites in the Bible and in Hittite and Mesopotamian Literature* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1987), 15–74.

102. The term ^ʾAzazel most likely refers to a demon. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 1020–21; Hayim Tawil, “^ʾAzazel, the Prince of the Steepe [Steppe]: A Comparative Study,” *ZAW* 92 (1980): 43–59.

103. See M *Yoma* 4:1.

104. See Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 1019. The placing of the lots on the heads of the goats is to mark them for identification only.

105. Interestingly, in the course of King Benjamin’s speech he uses the term “evil spirit(s)” four times (Moses 2:32, 37; 3:6; 4:14), while it appears in the rest of the Book of Mormon only once (2 Nephi 32:8). Perhaps his references to the “evil spirit” are to be connected with “^ʾAzazel” of *Leviticus 16:8*. Three of the references to the evil spirit in Benjamin’s speech are associated with sins of rebellion, the type of sins the scapegoat carried to Azazel. In Benjamin’s fourth reference, the evil spirits are to be “cast out,” as was the scapegoat.

106. See generally, de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 508–9. Scapegoat analogy is not complete, of course. In Benjamin’s words, the one

who is driven out does not bear the sins of any other people, only his own.

107. Benjamin might have preferred the ass over the goat for several reasons: availability, for the symbolic value of its fabled stubbornness, from connections between the ass and the Nephites' progenitory Lehi (whose name means "jawbone [of an ass]," compare Judges 15:15–17) and Joseph (Speiser's translation of Genesis 49:22 sees Joseph as a wild ass colt, although his analysis may be weak), and because the ass was uniquely "redeemable" by the slaying of a lamb (see Exodus 13:13; 34:20). These points were first explored by John W. Welch and Gordon C. Thomasson, "Ritual Use of the Ass in the Ancient Near East and in the Book of Mormon," unpublished manuscript.

108. See Wright, *The Disposal of Impurity*, 50–72.

109. See Delbert R. Hillers, *Covenant: The History of a Biblical Idea* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1969), 40–41.

110. The occurrences are Mosiah 2:30, "Lord God doth support me"; 2:41, "Lord God hath spoken it"; 3:5, "Lord Omnipotent who reigneth"; 3:13, "Lord God hath sent his holy prophets"; 3:14, "Lord God saw that his people were a stiffnecked people"; 3:17, "Lord Omnipotent [only means of salvation]"; 3:18, "Lord Omnipotent [atoning blood of]"; 3:21, "Lord God Omnipotent [name of]"; 3:23, "Lord God hath commanded me"; 5:15, "Lord God Omnipotent may seal you his." Moreover, only in Benjamin's speech do "Lord God Omnipotent" or "Lord Omnipotent" ever appear in the Book of Mormon, indicating cultic usage here. On the Jewish practice, see Schauss, *Jewish Festivals*, 135, who counts ten such occurrences, representing completeness and perfection. In addition, just as the people responded by saying the word *atone* once in Mosiah 4:12, they pronounce the name *Lord Omnipotent* once in Mosiah 5:2.

111. The use of these words is remarkable, especially since the angel also uses the name *Christ* exactly seven times, and Benjamin uses the root *atone* seven times in this seven-part speech.

112. The holy name is given at the endpoints of three of the chiasmic sections of Benjamin's speech. Mosiah 2:30 is the breaking point between sections 1 and 2. Mosiah 2:41 is the breaking point between sections 2 and 3. The final utterance of the holy name is in Mosiah 5:15, the final verse of the speech.

113. "And when the priests and the people which stood in the Temple court heard the Expressed Name come forth from the mouth of the High Priest, they used to kneel and bow themselves and fall down on their faces and say, 'Blessed be the name of the glory of his kingdom for ever and ever!'" M *Yoma* 6:2.

114. It is quite plausible that the people would have fallen or bowed down in respect when they heard Benjamin pronounce the holy name of God as he announced his son Mosiah to be their new king (see Mosiah 2:29–30). It is possible that the people would have fallen down again when they heard Benjamin pronounce the holy name in Mosiah 2:41, as he imposed the judgment of God upon the people at the end of that section of his speech. Since Benjamin observes in Mosiah 4:1 that the people "had fallen to the earth," and since the sacred name is mentioned seven times in rapid succession in Mosiah 3:1–27, it seems probable that they remained in a fallen position throughout Benjamin's words about the fall of Adam (see Mosiah 3:11, 16, 19) and the atonement of Christ (see Mosiah 3:13, 17–21). Finally, the people could well have fallen or bowed down one last time as Benjamin spoke his doxology of God and as he sealed the people unto God at the conclusion of his speech (see Mosiah 5:15).

115. This revelation comes at the chiasmic center of the third section of Benjamin's speech. The Talmud indicates that some men had the name of God written on their bodies, TB *Yoma* 88a, as a slave might have been branded with the name or mark of his owner.

116. See Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 1054. Chapter 8 of *Yoma*, the section of the Mishnah dealing with the Day of Atonement, deals with the regulations regarding fasting on that day. Fasting, of course, should not be misunderstood as afflicting one's soul in the sense of suffering but in the sense of developing piety and empathy (see Isaiah 58:5, 10; Matthew 6:16–18).

117. Milgrom notes that the reason for the public fast is a threatened calamity either from man or God, *Leviticus 1–16*, 1066. He goes on to cite the words of the king of Nineveh in *Jonah 3:7–9*.

118. “The Day of Atonement effect[s] atonement if there is repentance.” *M Yoma 8:8*; Maimonides, *Yad (Mishneh Torah), Teshuvah 1:2–4*.

119. See *M Yoma 8:9*: “For transgressions that are between man and God the Day of Atonement effects atonement, but for transgressions that are between a man and his fellow the Day of Atonement effects atonement only if he has appeased his fellow.”

120. See *TB Yoma 87b*.

121. See Herr, “Day of Atonement,” 1378, 1381; Schauss, *Jewish Festivals*, 132.

122. Herr, “Day of Atonement,” 1381.

123. See Sorscher, *Companion Guide to the Yom Kippur Prayer Service*, 50.

124. Herr, “Day of Atonement,” 1382, especially citing Philo.

125. See *ibid.*, 1383.

126. *Ibid.*, 1382.

127. See *ibid.*, again evidencing the close connection between Rosh ha-Shanah, Yom Kippur, and Sukkot, which in preexilic Israel were probably not distinct holidays. Schauss, *Jewish Festivals*, 119, discussed above.

128. The insights in this section were first developed in depth by John A. Tvedtnes. See Tvedtnes, “King Benjamin and the Feast of Tabernacles,” 197–237; see also de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 495–502; Kraus, *Worship in Israel*, 61–66; Martin-Achard, *Les fêtes d’Israel*, 75–92; Gaster, *Festivals of the Jewish Year*, 80–104; Abraham Bloch, *Jewish Customs and Ceremonies*, 181–209; Bloch, *Jewish Holy Days*, 39–48; J. Coert Rylaarsdam, “Booths, Feast of,” in *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. George A. Butterick et al. (New York: Abingdon, 1962), 1:455–58.

129. See Ringgren, *Israelite Religion*, 189; de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 495; Haran, *Temples and Temple-Service*, 296.

130. See Schauss, *Jewish Festivals*, 171; de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 495; Haran, *Temples and Temple-Service*, 297–98.

131. Ringgren, *Israelite Religion*, 190, suggests that anciently it

may have been a type of vintage celebration that featured excessive drinking, on which he blames the behavior of Eli's sons in 1 Samuel 2; also de Moor, *New Year with Canaanites and Israelites*, 1:28–29. Perhaps King Benjamin's thrice-mentioned "drinking damnation to souls" (see Mosiah 2:33; 3:18, 25) is an allusion to this. See also Gaster, *Festivals of the Jewish Year*, 84; de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 501. Kraus, *Worship in Israel*, 128–34, 173–78, on the other hand, suggests that an original "tent festival" was held while the Israelites were still in the desert (an example of which he saw in Exodus 33:7–11), which was either displaced by the agricultural "booth festival" or changed to fit the customs of the indigenous population. Against Kraus, see de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 502.

132. See Schauss, *Jewish Festivals*, 170–74; Haran, *Temples and Temple-Service*, 293–94; von Rad, "Problem of the Hexateuch," 35.

133. Haran, *Temples and Temple-Service*, 294, notes that "even in the early period" the feasts included the participation of the whole family.

134. The fact that the people *surrounded* the temple (see also Mosiah 4:1) may be insignificant. On the other hand, it may have ceremonial meaning. The Mishnah has a description of circumambulation of the altar during Sukkot: "Each day (for the first six days) they went in procession a single time around the Altar, saying 'Save now, we beseech thee, O Lord! We beseech thee, O Lord, send now prosperity.' . . . But on that day (the seventh) they went in procession seven times around the Altar." *M Sukkah* 4:5.

135. According to Rylaarsdam, "Booths, Feast of," 456–57, the use of the booth most likely is related to the use of similar types of structures during harvest time. De Moor notes the use of booths in the Ugaritic New Year festival, which he connects to the Israelite Feast of Tabernacles, in *TDOT*, 2:191. See also de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 501.

136. Gaster, *Festivals of the Jewish Year*, 84, notes that "the cold fact is that people who wander through deserts live in tents, not booths, wood and green leaves being unavailable except at rare and intermittent oases."

137. See de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 496; Martin-Achard, *Les fêtes d'Israel*, 79. Hugh W. Nibley, "Tenting, Toll, and Taxing," in *The Ancient State* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1991), 41–46.

138. See *BDB*, 13–14.

139. The exodus from Egypt is a "type" of God's deliverance. The comparison between Lehi's deliverance from the Babylonian captivity and the Israelites' deliverance from Egypt is specifically mentioned in 1 Nephi 17:23–43 and Alma 36:28–29. On the exodus motif in the Book of Mormon generally, see George S. Tate, "The Typology of the Exodus Pattern in the Book of Mormon," in *Literature of Belief*, ed. Neal E. Lambert (Provo: Religious Studies Center Monograph Series, 1978); Terrence L. Szink, "Nephi and the Exodus," in *Rediscovering*, 38–51; S. Kent Brown, "The Exodus: Seeing It as a Test, a Testimony, and a Type," *Ensign* (February 1990): 54–57; S. Kent Brown, "The Exodus Pattern in the Book of Mormon," *BYU Studies* 30/3 (1990): 111–26; and "Nephi and the Exodus," *Ensign* (April 1987): 64–65.

140. Schauss, *Jewish Festivals*, 200, considers the idea of booths as a symbol of the wilderness, "a forced interpretation . . . evolved in later times; . . . besides, the Jews resided in tents during their wanderings in the desert, and there is quite a difference between a tent and a booth." Kraus, *Worship in Israel*, 64, quoting Alt, says that the interpretation of booths as representing the structures of the exodus was an "anachronism." As noted above, he believes there was originally a "tent festival" that was replaced by a booth festival.

141. See Haran, *Temples and Temple-Service*, 298.

142. Von Rad, "Problem of the Hexateuch," 35, wrote "The Feast of Booths was in earlier times pre-eminently the festival to which the community came on pilgrimage. It is therefore inconceivable that the festival of the renewal of the covenant between Yahweh and the people should not be identified with this very same festival."

143. See the discussion of the sabbatical/jubilee year, below.

Von Rad suggests that the reading of the law might have taken place not only every seven years, but annually, "Problem of the Hexateuch," 36.

144. Rylaarsdam, "Booths, Feast of," 456. See also Ringgren, *Israelite Religion*, 192–95, for a discussion of the covenant renewal as part of the autumn festival.

145. John Tvedtnes has interpreted the covenant-making ceremony at the base of Mount Sinai (Exodus 24) as a Feast of Tabernacles ceremony, "King Benjamin and the Feast of Tabernacles," 199. Although at the Feast of Tabernacles covenants were most likely made and renewed, note also the royal covenant of the third month in 2 Chronicles 15:10–15 (compare verse 13 with Mosiah 6:2).

146. See Ricks, "King, Coronation, and Covenant in Mosiah 1–6," 215–19, and his related materials in "Kingship, Coronation, and Covenant in Mosiah 1–6," in this volume.

147. See *M Sotah* 7:8.

148. T. Raymond Hobbs, *2 Kings* (Waco: Word Books, 1985), 142, suggests that the object stood on or was by "some kind of column, podium, or platform." Kraus, *Worship in Israel*, 224, notes that in the ceremonies of enthronement the king was lifted on to an *'ammud* where he received the homage of the congregation.

149. See Tvedtnes, "King Benjamin and the Feast of Tabernacles," 224–26.

150. See *ibid.*, 207–9.

151. Discussed further below.

152. For the link between the Heavenly King and the New Year, see the section on the New Year celebration, above.

153. See, for example, *Ha-Sidur ha-Shalem (Daily Prayer Book)*, translated and annotated with an introduction by Philip Birnbaum (New York: Hebrew Publishing, 1949), 678; this prayer is recited on the first day of waving the *lulav* during Sukkot.

154. See Sorscher, *Companion Guide to the Yom Kippur Prayer Service*, 5.

155. David Boruchowitz was primarily responsible for this discovery.

156. See "This Day," in *Reexploring*, 117–19.

157. The semantics of the Hebrew in the *She-hecheyanu* also fit the context of Benjamin's speech. The principal verb in the prayer is the *hiphil* form of the root *HYH, meaning "to preserve alive, let live, quicken, revive, restore to life." *BDB*, 311. From the same root come the verb *hāyāh* ("to live") and the noun *ḥayyîm* ("life: as consisting of earthly felicity combined often with spiritual blessedness"), *ibid.*, 31. Benjamin elegantly elaborates on this main theme of the *She-hecheyanu* when he says that God has caused the people to rejoice and live in blessed peace and has lent them breath that they may live. The repeated occurrence of words derived from this root would have structurally reinforced his message and conveyed a pleasing alliteration. Other references to life (see Mosiah 4:6, 22; 5:15), and to joy and rejoicing (see Mosiah 3:3, 4, 13; 4:11, 12, 20; 5:4) occur plentifully throughout his speech.

158. Research on Benjamin's speech in the context of a sabbatical or jubilee year was initiated by John W. Welch. For general background information, see Christopher J. H. Wright, "Jubilee, Year of," in *ABD*, 3:1025–32; Christopher J. H. Wright, "Sabbatical Year," in *ABD*, 5:857–61; de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 173–77; Kraus, *Worship in Israel*, 70–76.

159. See Wright, "Sabbatical Year," in *ABD*, 5: 857. See generally Niels-Erik A. Andreasen, *The Old Testament Sabbath: A Tradition-Historical Investigation* (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1972); Bernard R. Goldstein and Alan Cooper, "The Festivals of Israel and Judah and the Literary History of the Pentateuch," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 110/1 (1990): 19–31, and Timothy K. Hui, "The Purpose of Israel's Annual Feasts," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 147 (1990): 143–54.

160. A "release" similar to the Israelite practice of the sabbatical/jubilee year has been shown to occur in Mesopotamia, although it was not based on fixed intervals but declared arbitrarily by the monarch, usually (and interestingly) upon his ascension to the throne. See Julius Lewy, "The Biblical Institution of *De'rôr* in the Light of Akkadian Documents," *Eretz Israel* 5 (1958): 21–31.

161. Wright, "Jubilee, Year of," in *ABD*, 3:1026. See generally,

Niels P. Lemche, "The Manumission of Slaves—The Fallow Year—The Sabbatical Year—The Jubel Year," *Vetus Testamentum* 26/1 (January 1976): 38–59; and Robert North, *Sociology of the Biblical Jubilee* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1954).

162. The inclusive mode of sometimes counting the last year as the first of the next jubilee cycle accounts for the frequent confusion between 49- and 50-year jubilee counts. Walter Wifall, "God's Accession Year According to P," *Biblica* 62/4 (1981): 532–33 (cf. Leviticus 25:10, 11QMelch 3:2); Ben Zion Wacholder, *Essays on Jewish Chronology and Chronography* (New York: KTAV, 1976), 250. See also generally, Raymond Westbrook, "Jubilee Laws," *Israel Law Review* 6 (1971): 209–26.

163. De Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 175.

164. A delinquent debtor was considered a thief under Nephite law (see Alma 11:2) as well as under early Jewish law; see Bernard S. Jackson, *Theft in Early Jewish Law* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972), 91, but is not considered as such under Anglo-American law. See generally John W. Welch, "Theft and Robbery in the Book of Mormon and Ancient Near Eastern Law" (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1985).

165. A lender under ancient Near Eastern law could also commit an offense by not accepting proper repayment of the debt. Since disputes arose over the adequacy of precious metal equivalents or substitute property, the laws, especially in cases of noncommercial borrowing, protected the right of the lender to receive repayment of the debt in exact kind. Systems of weights and measures and exchange equivalents were instituted, in part, to remedy this commercial difficulty. Jewish law also expresses grave concerns about exchanges of property: since no two pieces of property (especially of different kinds) can be assumed to have exactly the same value, one party to the exchange can be assumed to be getting less and the other more than is deserved. Such problems are averted by returning "the thing" that was borrowed.

166. Although the final composition of these chapters in Leviticus has often been dated during the exile, jubilee practices are much older, as Raymond Westbrook demonstrates in his "Jubilee Laws," *Israel Law Review* 6 (1971): 224–26; see also Cyrus

Gordon, "Sabbatical Cycle or Seasonal Pattern?" *Orientalia* 22 (1953): 81.

167. See Raymond Westbrook, "Jubilee Laws," *Israel Law Review* 6/2 (1971): 216.

168. See *ibid.*, 217.

169. See *ibid.*, 216–17.

170. See Wright, "Jubilee, Year of," in *ABD*, 3:1028–29.

171. See de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 175.