

# MOSIAH 4–6



## Overview

In these three chapters, readers continue and complete King Benjamin's incomparable speech. While Mosiah chapters 1–3 are filled with reports of preparations for Benjamin's solemn assembly, his declarations about his own kingship, his son's coronation, and prophecies about the promised coming of and atoning powers of Jesus Christ, the Heavenly King, Mosiah chapters 4–6 deal with the response of the people to Benjamin's words, as they express their willingness to enter into a covenant with God, as Benjamin instructs them concerning their obligations under that covenant (chapter 4), as they then actually enter into that covenant (chapter 5), and as their names are recorded as being bound under this covenant with God, as well as with their new mortal king, God's servant on earth (chapter 6). Not only is King Benjamin's speech masterfully organized and literarily cohesive, but it is ceremoniously cohesive and ritually rich. All six chapters in Benjamin's speech must be read together as one great whole, in spite of the verse breaks and chapter divisions necessarily helpful for convenient referencing.

## Mosiah 4

### **Mosiah 4:1 — The People Fell to the Earth**

At this point, a little over halfway through his speech, when King Benjamin looked around, he found that his people had all fallen "to the earth." There was a big crowd, and we may wonder why they all had responded with the same physical response and all at the same time. The text says that the fear of the Lord had come upon them. The word for "to fear" and the word for "to revere" are related. In this context, the people's

fear most likely refers to a deep, powerful reverence for God, as when someone is a God-fearing person. Of course, the fear may also have been connected with the power that they knew the Lord had to administer eternal justice. They could also have been afraid because of their inadequacies and the seriousness of the covenant into which they knew they would soon be entering.

In Jerusalem, on the Day of Atonement, when the people heard the sacred name of the Lord pronounced by the High Priest, they fell down as if they were in the Lord's sacred presence. Similarly, in Lehi's dream, the people fall down when they reach the Tree of Life and partake of the fruit: "... and they came and caught hold of the end of the rod of iron; and they did press their way forward, continually holding fast to the rod of iron, until they came forth and *fell down and partook of the fruit of the tree*" (1 Nephi 8:30). There were four groups of people that had worked their way to the Tree of Life. Three of the groups either do not make it or soon fall away. Those who stay faithful are the ones who fall down when they get there, and make themselves as humble as the earth. Talk about being *humble!* When we as modern people bow down, we typically just bow our heads, but the ancient people bowed their bodies. When they came into a divine situation or into the presence of a great ruler, like a king or emperor, they would prostrate themselves in front of that person.

#### Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[Why Did the People Fall Down at the Feet of Jesus?](#) (3 Nephi 11:17)," *KnoWhy* 202 (October 5, 2016).

#### **Mosiah 4:2 — The People Cried Out with One Voice**

"And they all cried aloud with one voice." How did this happen? This was most likely a coronation-affirmation or covenant-making ritual, and the people may well have known what they were supposed to say in this situation. That does not mean that they were not sincere in what they were doing. This was not just some kind of prepared, mechanical ritual. For example, when we go to a temple dedication, we do the Hosanna Shout, and we all know what we are supposed to say, but since you know that you only say or do that under certain circumstances it has a lot of meaning for us.

It was a similar thing among King Benjamin's people. When they were saying, "Oh have mercy and apply the atoning blood of Christ," they were saying, in effect, "We want that blood to be sprinkled on us and to purify us," just as the High Priest traditionally would make the all-important atoning sacrifice on the Day of Atonement and then sprinkle purifying blood on the altar of the temple. They had just been told that the only way to overcome the natural man is through the atoning blood of Christ, so they especially wanted that blood applied to them. A similar covenant-making episode and vocal

response from the people is found when Joshua and his people made a covenant with the Lord (Joshua 24:16, 21–26).

As was mentioned in connection with Mosiah 2:5 in the previous week’s discussion, the fact that each family was sitting in their tent with the door open to the temple, links Benjamin’s speech with the Feast of Tabernacles. That was the traditional time for the coronation of kings in ancient Israel. In addition, the Day of Atonement, which was the highest and holiest day of the year on the ancient Israelite calendar, came on the tenth day of the seventh month, with the week of tabernacles following right afterwards, ending with a day of great joy and rejoicing for the teaching (torah) of the Lord.

### Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[How the Law of Moses Teaches about the Atonement](#) (Alma 34:14),” *KnoWhy* 424 (April 12, 2018).

Hugh W. Nibley, “[Assembly and Atonement](#),” *King Benjamin’s Speech: “That Ye May Learn Wisdom”*, ed. John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 119–145.

Terrence L. Szink and John W. Welch, “[King Benjamin’s Speech in the Context of Ancient Israelite Festivals](#),” in *King Benjamin’s Speech: “That Ye May Learn Wisdom”*, ed. John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 147–223.

### Mosiah 4: 3 — The People Desired and Received a Remission of Their Sins

In Latter-day Saint temples, initiates are washed, anointed, and purified. Although, at that point, we do not stand in the presence of God, we are preparing to enter into a covenant with God, and because we are entering into a relationship with God, we must be pure in order to even be in that close proximity with the divine. So, this word *pure* in the statement, “That our hearts may be *purified*,” in the middle of verse 2, similarly indicated the people’s willingness at that point. Their desire to do this showed that they were ready to do what would be coming next. They were prepared to enter into, or to renew, the covenant. They desired the benefits of the Atonement, becoming pure again and reunited with God in mind, body, and spirit. They knew that the Atonement had been prepared from the foundation of the world and also that salvation could only come through its sanctifying power. They were then filled with joy, having receive a remission of their sins and peace of conscience. That feeling of having a clear conscience before God, knowing that you have done what you could and then continuing with faith in Jesus Christ, is the sweet blessing of the Holy Ghost accepting of our sacrifice and commitment to obey.

### **Mosiah 4:4, 1 — Remember Your Nothingness Compared with the Great Goodness of God**

As Benjamin began again to speak to the people, he calls them to attention (4:4) as he had before (2:9), and then delivers to them the fifth section of his speech (4:5-12). This section begins and ends with a clear statement of the need for us to remember our “nothingness” (4:5 and 11). We don’t hear this kind of negative talk about ourselves very often from our Church leaders. It can make us feel uncomfortable. However, it is certainly true. But the point is not that we are truly nothing in an absolute or potential sense, but when we are compared in our present state and condition with the great goodness of our God, we must bow and confess, “O Lord, my God, how great thou art!” In his talk *“You Matter to Him”* (from the 2011 general conference), President Dieter F. Uchtdorf similarly taught,

But even though man is nothing, it fills me with wonder and awe to think that “the worth of souls is great in the sight of God.”

And while we may look at the vast expanse of the universe and say, “What is man in comparison to the glory of creation?” God Himself said we are the reason He created the universe! His work and glory—the purpose for this magnificent universe—is to save and exalt mankind. In other words, the vast expanse of eternity, the glories and mysteries of infinite space and time are all built for the benefit of ordinary mortals like you and me. Our Heavenly Father created the universe that we might reach our potential as His sons and daughters.

This is a paradox of man: compared to God, man is nothing; yet we are everything to God. While against the backdrop of infinite creation we may appear to be nothing, we have a spark of eternal fire burning within our breast. We have the incomprehensible promise of exaltation—worlds without end—within our grasp. And it is God’s great desire to help us reach it.

This beautiful explanation captures the same inspired encouragement and urgency that pervades King Benjamin’s desires for his people.

#### **Further Reading**

Dieter F. Uchtdorf, *“You Matter to Him,”* *Ensign*, November 2011, online at [churchofjesuschrist.org](http://churchofjesuschrist.org).

### **Mosiah 4:9–10 — Instructions to Believe in God**

In verses 9 and 10, Benjamin gives his people a powerful set of ten instructions! And how needed these mandates still are today. (1) First of all, we must believe that God exists. (2) Next, we need to trust “that he created all things, both in heaven and in earth.”

Yet it is not enough to simply know that he created all of this. (3) We have to believe “that he has all wisdom” and that he has a plan for us individually and collectively. (4) Furthermore, we must believe that he has “all power, both in heaven and in earth” to carry out his plan, and if he does, then (5) we have to believe that we cannot comprehend all that God comprehends. We cannot figure it all out alone.

This is sort of like King Benjamin’s own Articles of Faith: “Believe, believe, believe, believe, believe.” They and we must believe certain inevitably true things about ourselves and about God.

Does this mean there might be questions to which we do not know the answers? As much as we may hate to admit that we don’t know everything, the answer is, “Yes there are many things we do not yet know!” How do you think Benjamin learned that there were things he didn’t know, and even that his people didn’t know? At least in part, he surely learned this from his experience with the angel. He had just an experience that went way beyond normal, and whatever he knew before, he certainly now knew that man cannot comprehend all things.

Knowing that there are a lot of things we don’t know, we may wonder what to do next. And what did Benjamin say next? There was another set of five things for them (and us) to do. Once we know that we do not know everything that God can comprehend, we must (1) believe that we have to repent of our sins, and (2) we must forsake them. It is not enough to repent; we must also forsake, leave them behind, leave them to wither. This will bring us to the next step, (3) humbling ourselves, and then (4) asking sincerely for forgiveness and things we need and truly desire in order to repent. This is so that God can give them to us. Among other things, he will give us the knowledge we seek. God can and will forgive us but only if that is what we desire. Benjamin’s people wanted the atoning blood of Christ to be applied to them so they could be purified and forgiven. We also have to desire this and seek for it. And then, in the end, Benjamin requires that, if we believe all these things, (5) see that ye do them. These five imperatives match Benjamin’s previous five requirements of what we must believe. Benjamin understood that belief without doing is dead.

### **Mosiah 4:12, 26 — Retaining a Remission of Sins**

After Benjamin’s five “believe” statements and five “repent” statements (4:9–10), he added two “knowledge” statements (4:11), he followed it with two mentions of the word “remember,” particularly that we must “retain in remembrance” what God has done for us (4:11). It is not enough to know something; you can forget it next week. We must not only know it and remember it, but always *retain* it in remembrance. Notice how Benjamin has moved from one thought to another. He did not use a simple repetition; he

# Repentance and Obtaining Forgiveness

Recognize that an attitude or action is out of harmony with God's will

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Remorse, feel genuinely sorry with a broken heart and contrite spirit

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Resolve and truly desire to make a permanent change

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Report, confess sins to the Lord or bishop and talk with people whom you trust

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Rely on the merits and mercy of God and put yourself in his hands

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Respond to priesthood guidance

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Request forgiveness from the Lord

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Receive God's gift of forgiveness

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Restitution, repair all possible damage to relationships with God or man

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Renew your life through a realization of redemption

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Reform your conduct by adopting new patterns of behavior

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Reciprocate by forgiving others

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Retain a remission by giving generously to those in need

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Reinstatement in the household of faith by making new commitments

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Repeat the resolve, especially during the sacrament

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Rejoice, expressing thanks to God and testimony to others

used elevation of the thought as it went along. He was guiding people step by step. He moves here from having believed, then done, then known, and then remembered, then humbled ourselves, then called on the name of the Lord daily, and at that point you shall rejoice and be filled with love. This will allow us to “retain a remission of our sins,” grow in the knowledge of the glory of God, and then to know what is just and true. We achieve this goal one step at a time, and Benjamin marvelously sets out the step-by-step sequence. All of this is so that we can obtain a remission of our sins.

And remember that *remembering* in this sense is not just a matter of remembering intellectually. We truly remember when we remember *to do* certain things. And thus, toward the end of the next section of his speech, Benjamin will return again precisely to the idea of retaining a remission of sins (see 4:26). When I was a bishop, a girl who had transgressed—not terribly, but it was very troublesome to her—came to me, and she tried to repent. She kept coming back, and I would give her some ideas and she would feel better. Then she would come back two weeks later feeling bad again. She wondered why those bad feelings kept coming back. Benjamin’s words came to my mind, and I realized that her problem was that she had not *retained* a remission of her sins. I had never heard anyone talk about this step in the repentance process; but I had recently had Benjamin on my mind. So we read out loud Mosiah 4:26, together with its injunction to “retain” a remission of sins by giving to the poor, feeding the hungry, visiting the sick, and administering to their relief both spiritually and temporally. This additional step is actually a step in the repentance process. When we think of the R’s of repentance, certainly *retain* is one we should add.

That was a “Benjamin moment” for me, in which these words took on powerful life and meaning, impelling us to go and do something. We set out some things that she was going to go do, and two weeks later she came back to my office and said, “Bishop, it has worked! I feel totally different.” I told her to keep at it in order to always retain that remission. Benjamin has given us really profound guidance.

### **Mosiah 4:13–30—The Elements of a Covenant-Making Ceremony**

At this point, we enter into Section 6 of Benjamin’s speech.

What happens next in a covenant-making context? In the book *King Benjamin’s Speech: “That Ye May Learn Wisdom”* there is a chart (Figures 2, 3) that shows that treaties or covenant-making ceremonies as they are called in the ancient world, had several common elements.

# Treaty-Covenant Pattern

## in the Old Testament and Benjamin's Speech

Elements	Exodus 19:3b–8	Exodus 20–24	Deuteronomy	Joshua 24	Mosiah 1–6
<b>Preamble</b>	19:3b	20:1	1:1–5	24:1–2a	1:1–2:9a
<b>Antecedent History</b>	19:4	20:2	1:6–3:29	24:2b–13, 16b–18a	2:9b–21, 23–30
<b>Terms of the Covenant</b>	19:5–6	20:3–23:19	4–26	24:14, 18b, 23	2:22, 24b, 31–41; 4:6–30
<b>Formal Witness</b>	19:8	24:3	31:19	24:16a, 19a, 21–23	5:2–8
<b>Blessings and Curses</b>	19:5	23:20–33	27:9–28:68	24:19b–20	3:24–27; 5:9–15
<b>Recital of the Covenant/ Deposit of the Text</b>	19:7	24:4–8	27:1–8; 31:9, 24–26	24:25–27	2:8, 9a; 6:1–3, 6

Figure 2 John W. Welch and Greg Welch, "Treaty-Covenant Pattern in the Old Testament and Benjamin's Speech," in *Charting the Book of Mormon*, chart 100.

First, in the recording of ancient covenant or treaty making ceremonies, there was typically some kind of historical preamble. Then there was a discussion about the antecedent history involving how the people got to where they were, and what the relationship had been between the parties who were going to enter into the covenant. Benjamin gave that antecedent relationship in chapter 2 where he spoke of how mankind was created out of the dust of the earth. God created everything, and that is part of their relationship.



# Benjamin’s and Mosiah’s Covenant Ceremonies Compared with Old Testament Rituals

Elements	Exodus 24	Joshua 24	1 Samuel 10	Mosiah 1–6	Mosiah 25
<b>Leader</b>	Moses	Joshua	Samuel	Benjamin	Mosiah
<b>Assembly</b>	read in the audience of the people (v. 7)	gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem (v. 1)	called people together unto the Lord at Mizpeh (v. 17)	the people gathered themselves throughout all the land (2:1)	caused that all the people should be gathered together (v. 1)
<b>Legal Document</b>	book of the covenant (v. 7)	set them a statute and an ordinance (v. 25)	manner of the kingdom (v. 25)	my, my father’s, my son’s, and God’s commandments (2:31)	
<b>Public Reading</b>	read in the hearing of the people	said unto the people (v. 22)	told the people the manner of the kingdom (v. 25)	opened his mouth and began to speak (4:4; cf. 2:9)	read and caused to be read (v. 5)
<b>Writing</b>	wrote all the words of the Lord (v. 4)	wrote the words in the book of the law of God (v. 26)	wrote it in a book (v. 25)	words which he spake should be written (2:8)	
<b>Cultic Act</b>	built an altar (v. 4)	took a stone and set it under an oak by the sanctuary of the Lord (v. 26)	laid it up before the Lord (v. 25)	sacrifices and ordinances according to law of Moses (2:3); names recorded (6:1)	baptism (v. 17)

Figure 3 John W. Welch and Greg Welch, “Benjamin’s and Mosiah’s Covenant Ceremonies Compared with Old Testament Rituals,” in *Charting the Book of Mormon*, chart 101.

Then the terms of the covenant were stated in a contract mode. There were witnesses who wrote the names of the people entering into the covenant (we will address this later in the sixth chapter of Mosiah).

Next there were blessings and curses—blessings if the parties kept the covenant, and curses if they did not. And finally came time to write and deposit the covenant, making it a permanent, written record that people could keep and remember.

This pattern of covenant making is followed quite strictly in Benjamin’s speech. In section 6 of the speech (which is Mosiah 4:3–30), we find the stipulations with some of the promises of rewards for obedience and some of the curses if they did not keep the covenant.

### Further Reading

Stephen D. Ricks, “Kingship, Coronation, and Covenant in Mosiah 1–6,” in *King Benjamin’s Speech: “That Ye May Learn Wisdom”*, ed. John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 233–276.

### Mosiah 4:13, 28—Render to Others What They Are Due

The first requirement is to have no thought or desire or “mind to injure one another” (4:13). Wrong doing begins with wrongful thinking.

Next we must “live peaceably” (4:13). We must seek peace. Peace does not just happen. It must be created, desired, worked for, and maintained.

And third, Benjamin taught that if people have done good things to us, we must reciprocate and “render to every man according to that which is his due” (4:13). This may involve paying compensation, or extending human dignity, or giving verbal praise and recognition for what they have done. “Rendering” is a very powerful concept. It means to “rend,” to “tear open” and give generously and willingly. One of my granddaughters has been babysitting for a young mother in our stake who has been very grateful for what my granddaughter has done, and she has abundantly and sincerely praised her for her being able and willing to take care of these little children. My granddaughter goes over there voluntarily. She loves going over and helping because she is getting this positive praise. It has had a powerful effect on her whole personality, even giving her confidence in what she is doing in school and a lot of other things. She gets paid a little bit for the babysitting, but she does not go for the money. She goes for the praise and kind recognition for the service she has given.

Toward the end of this section of his speech, Benjamin returns to this theme. In Mosiah 4:28, it is interesting that he specified that an individual had to return the *thing* that he or

she had borrowed. In ancient Mesopotamian laws dealing with loans, if someone borrowed a cow or an ox to do their plowing, or borrowed a donkey, a borrower could not just give another donkey. They had to return the very animal that they borrowed, and that helped to preempt arguments about equivalent value and things like that. Thus, if they borrowed something, they needed to give back the actual thing. Benjamin's people, likewise, were probably not very far advanced financially. No ancient society had what we would call banks or mortgage companies. They had weights and measures for handling sales at the market place, but most didn't have currency. Thus, it is interesting that Benjamin wanted people to be precise in their paying back of anything that they owed someone else.

But the point here is not just that we give it back. Benjamin wants to be sure that there are no arguments, no disputations, but that by giving back "according as he doth agree," that person avoids committing sin himself and also prevents an argument that might lead your "neighbor to commit sin also" (4:28).

#### **Mosiah 4:14–15 — Teach the Children the Laws of the Covenant**

Once they had learned how to deal with property and deal with neighborly relations, the next thing they had to do was to look after the family. Benjamin taught his people, and consequently us, that they were to teach their children the laws of God. They could not be worthy to enter into this covenant if they would not agree to teach the children the laws of the covenant. Building righteous homes is a crucial part of entering into that covenant.

This requirement—that parents who enter into the covenant have to be willing to agree to teach their children these principles—is also found in Deuteronomy 4:9, where Moses is promulgating the covenant with all of Israel. He said, "Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life: but teach them thy sons, and thy sons' sons," and at the end of Deuteronomy 4:10, he said, "That they may learn to fear me all the days that they shall live upon the earth, and that they may teach their children."

Also, two chapters later, in Deuteronomy 6:6–7, it says, "And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up." Alma used the same phraseology. He knew this because it was in the Law of Moses which they were living strictly. Deuteronomy 6:8–9 continues, "And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt

write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates,” so that as people came in and out of the house, they would remember those “words”.

Do you think that Benjamin knew Deuteronomy? I think so. It was a covenantal restatement of the law of Moses. Benjamin was clearly aware of Deuteronomy 17 and the paragraph of the king, which he paraphrased in Mosiah 2. Now he turns to family duties as an integral part of his royal covenant.

Did Benjamin recognize that parents teaching their children is an implicit part of the covenant? We could think that this statement was just a random moralizing comment by Benjamin. But here Benjamin is doing more than giving nice advice. He has already mentioned that Christ’s Atonement embraces the eternal welfare of little children (Mosiah 3:16–17, and now he adds: “Not only shall we all be happy at home,” but children need to be raised in righteousness. They are part of the covenant too. Much depends on their condition and future faithfulness, and so there is a lot going on here.

#### Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Did Alma Counsel His Sons During the Passover?](#) (Alma 38:5),” *KnoWhy* 146 (July 19, 2016).

Book of Mormon Central, “[What Does the Book of Mormon Teach about Families?](#) (Mosiah 25:12),” *KnoWhy* 382 (November 16, 2017).

#### Mosiah 4:16–26 — Give Freely So That You Can Be Freely Forgiven

As a central requirement of his covenant text, Benjamin next turned to the need to give to the poor: “Ye yourselves will succor those that stand in need of your succor; . . . ye will not suffer that the beggar putteth up his petition to you in vain, and turn him out to perish” (4:16).

Again, Benjamin has the covenant text of Deuteronomy in mind. Deuteronomy 15:7–11 says, “If there be among you a poor man of one of thy brethren within any of thy gates in thy land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not harden thine heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother: But thou shalt open thine hand wide unto him, and shalt surely *lend* him sufficient for his need, in that which he *wanteth*” (15:7–8).

Likewise, Benjamin says that we are to supply those in need “according to their *wants*” (4:26). What does the word *wants* mean in this context? Nowadays, *to want* often means *to desire*, but in Old English it meant *to lack* something. That was what the King James translators were communicating with the word *wanteth* in Deuteronomy 15:8. Notice also that Deuteronomy speaks here of loaning, or lending, and that Benjamin does this also (Mosiah 4:28).

Deuteronomy 15:9 then cautions, “Beware that there be not a thought in thy wicked heart, saying ‘Lo, the seventh year, the year of release, is at hand.’” What the book of Deuteronomy is worried about is that people would remember that once every seven years all debts would be forgiven, so in the sixth year, they may be reluctant to loan anything, because if it were not yet payed back, the debt would be cancelled and the borrower would then be excused. The law said that they could not use that as an excuse. Benjamin also addresses the problem of people judging the poor and rationalizing or making excuses so that they do not feel obligated to give to the poor (Mosiah 4:17, 22), but rather “turn him out to perish” (4:16). But anyone who makes such excuses “perisheth forever, and hath no interest in the kingdom of God” (4:18).

Moreover, Deuteronomy 15 goes on to say, “Thou shalt surely give him, and thine heart shall not be grieved when thou givest unto him: because that for this thing the Lord thy God shall bless thee in all thy works, and in all that thou putteth thine hand unto. For the poor shall never cease out of the land: therefore, I command thee, saying, Thou shalt *open thine hand wide* unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land” (15:10–11). As one member of the class commented: “Unfortunately, sometimes, our giving comes with measurement. *Good* is to give. *Better* is to give without measuring.” All this is a part of the covenant, and just as teaching our vulnerable children is a part of the covenant, Benjamin spoke equally about ministering to the poor who are always at great risk.

Underlying all of Benjamin’s covenant stipulation of generosity is the logic of talionic justice (Deuteronomy 19:19). It is right and fair to get back what we have given out, eye for eye, “for that which ye do send out shall return unto you again, and be restored,” good for good, mercy for mercy, and evil for evil (Alma 41:13–15).

This all makes logical sense as well as theological certitude: For “if God ... doth grant unto you whatsoever ye ask that is right, in faith, believing that ye shall receive, O then, how ye ought to impart of the substance that ye have one to another” (Mosiah 4:21). Since Benjamin’s people had just asked God to be forgiven, blessed, and purified (4:2), it would be unbecoming of them as beggars unto God not to remember equally the poor and to give to those who put up their petition to them for relief (4:20).

### **Mosiah 4:26 — What Does it Mean to Walk Guiltless before God?**

We know that we can be forgiven and change our lives, but if we do not act according to and consistent with the covenant that we entered into, it is as if we had not been forgiven in the first place. Seeing King Benjamin’s Speech as a “manual for discipleship,” Elder Maxwell has taught, “Much emphasis was given by King Benjamin to retaining a remission of our sins (Mosiah 4:26). We do not ponder that concept very much in the church. We ought to think of it a lot more. Retention clearly depends on the regularity of

our repentance. In the church we worry, and should, over the retention of new members, but the retention of our remissions is cause for even deeper concern.”

### Further Reading

Neal A. Maxwell, “A Manual for Discipleship,” in *King Benjamin’s Speech: “That Ye May Learn Wisdom,”* ed. John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 16.

### Mosiah 4:27 — Do Not Run Faster Than We Have Strength

King Benjamin ended by saying that they should not try to do more than they were able. They (and we) should do all this in wisdom and order, “for it is not requisite that a man should run faster than he has strength” (4:27). Benjamin appears to have been conveying the idea that we do not necessarily need to give in order to provide for luxuries, but we do need to be concerned about essential needs. That is exactly what the welfare program of the Church does. In Benjamin’s day, they did not have a formal church welfare program, so the king needed to set up a system to provide and care for the needy, as Deuteronomy 15 required. The people were required to fill the needs on an individual basis.

### Mosiah 4:30 — King Benjamin Expected His People to Commit His Words to Memory

Ancient people used their brains differently than we do. We rely on books, programs, and aids (e.g. scripture apps with search functions) whereas many ancient people had most of the scriptures committed to memory. When Benjamin said, “Remember, remember, O man,” he meant, “Remember my words; memorize them.” I know that it was not so long ago that Joseph Smith and the boys, when they rode from Kirtland to Missouri, would memorize and recite scriptures and many of them could recite the whole New Testament as a result. It was not long ago that entrance to some Islamic universities required applicants to know the whole Quran from memory. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, entrance to colleges like Harvard and Yale required students to be able to sight-read and translate Greek and Latin classic. For years, Jewish boys were expected to know the Talmud by heart for their Bar Mitzvah. That is what the human brain is capable of.

In the year 2000, I was teaching an honors BYU Book of Mormon class, and for the last six weeks of the semester we were studying King Benjamin. The requirement was for them to memorize the entire speech. I had them perform it in groups where they could do it like a Greek chorus, but I also assigned them to do certain parts by themselves. It is possible to recite this whole talk in 35 minutes. Eleven years later, I still got reports from the students that it was the best thing they did at BYU.

### Further Reading

Steven L. Olsen, “Memory and Identity in the Book of Mormon,” *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 22, no. 2 (2013): 40–51.

Louis Midgley, “The Ways of Remembrance,” in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon: Insights You May Have Missed Before*, ed. John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1991), 168–176.

Louis Midgley, “‘O Man, Remember, and Perish Not’ (Mosiah 4:30),” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon: A Decade of New Research*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992), 127–129.

## Mosiah 5

### Mosiah 5:2 — No More Desire to Do Evil

The people then say to Benjamin that their hearts had been changed. In what way were their hearts being changed? What were the consequences that came from this great experience? The answer: They had no more desire to do evil. That is a great effect! Having “no more disposition to do evil” may be the greatest evidence of the “mighty change of heart.” We can test ourselves in that way. We can ask ourselves how we are doing in not even considering or wanting to commit sins.

### Mosiah 5: 3–4 — A Tribute to a Great Leader

These two verses are a beautiful tribute to King Benjamin. How he would have loved to hear these words, not because they were praise of his kingship, but even more so because he had succeeded in the one thing he wanted to really accomplish.

He was at the end of his rule, and they were thanking him. At the beginning of his speech, he mentioned rendering thanks and praise with their whole hearts (2:20), and so when the people said it was because of their faith in what the king had taught them that they had this great knowledge, it was more than just a nice recognition. Their words arose from a generosity that comes with the experience of conversion and when we think more of what other people have done for us than what we have done for them.

Do we admire and have faith in our Church leaders? Is it not important to recognize that it is because of the things that our prophet “has spoken unto us” that “has brought us to this great knowledge?” Let us personalize this. We can read what they did, but do we do the same things whenever we have this mighty change and feel wonderful blessings in our lives?

What about this “exceeding joy whereby we do rejoice?” This is another consequence. Rejoicing with such exceedingly great joy feels more than just *good*. It is not a matter of “Umm, that was pretty nice.” There was much joyous celebration going on among Benjamin’s people.

And as a result, Benjamin took the old things that were limited and only applied to the king, all those royal prerogatives, and opened them up and extended them to all his people. Although some of them are just symbolic things, what Benjamin gave his people were essentially royal privileges. For example, it was normally only the king that was brought up from his humiliation to be ritually raised up and crowned as the new king. Benjamin said that we are *all* of the dust and we are *all* humiliated, but then we are *all* elevated. To us that sounds indeed like a very generous thing, but more than that, from their frame of reference, now they were all actually putting themselves in the position that the king was normally in. Usually in an ancient Israelite coronation, the king was ritually adopted by God as his son and on that day He had ritually begotten the new monarch and pronounced, “Thou art my son” (Psalms 2:7). Benjamin’s people would now all become God’s sons and daughters (5:7). And in addition, they were all going to come away from this ceremony with a new name (3:8; 5:8), while normally there was only one person who came away from a coronation with the new name, and that was the new king. In so many ways, Benjamin was helping all his people to see themselves in a different way. They were not yet ready for democracy, with all people having the duties of the governors, but a generation later, they would be ready as a people to take that political step (Mosiah 29). That is something that could be, and has been to some extent, studied in much more depth.

### Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Did King Benjamin Say That His People Would be Sons and Daughters at God’s Right Hand?](#) (Mosiah 5:7),” *KnoWhy* 307 (May 1, 2017): “The application of these royal enthronement texts to the people themselves—making them all potentially kings and queens, sons and daughters at the right hand—makes Benjamin’s speech utterly revolutionary. In Israelite thought, Benjamin was already a royal son who was already at the right hand of God, as Mosiah soon would be. Benjamin instead taught the people about the truly royal Son and how this Son’s Atonement made it possible for all of them to become His sons and daughters and be enthroned with this Son at God’s right hand.”

John W. Welch, “[Democratizing Forces in King Benjamin’s Speech](#),” in *Pressing Forward with the Book of Mormon*, ed. John W. Welch and Melvin J. Thorne (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999), 110–126.



### **Mosiah 5:5 — Willing to Enter into the Covenant**

When the people were entering into the covenant, they were instructed that they must answer the king by saying essentially that they were willing to enter into this covenant, and we are doing this voluntarily because our desires are there. We are willing to enter into a covenant with our God to do his will and to be obedient to his commandments, and also to keep the commandments given to us by the new king.

Where do *we* manifest our willingness? Where does the word *willingness* come into our covenantal renewal? In the sacrament prayer. Those who partake witness unto God the Eternal Father that they “are *willing* to take upon them the name of thy Son, and always remember him and keep his commandments which he has given them” (3 Nephi 18:10; Moroni 4:3; D&C 20:77). What does being *willing* really mean? It means we are going to do this of our own *free will* and *choice*. Choice and willingness are a vital part of covenant-making.

### **Mosiah 5:7 — The Nephites All Became the Children of Christ**

There are two things that traditionally only happened to the king. One occurred at the coronation when traditionally the king would hear God saying, “Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee.” (Psalm 2:7). The king became a son of God representing God as his viceroy here on earth, the link between God and the people. However, in Mosiah 5:7, Benjamin declared that through the covenant, the people had all become sons and daughters of Christ. These people were in transition. They were living the Law of Moses, and they were expecting the fulfillment of the prophecies of Christ. In Benjamin’s speech we see what is missing in the Old Testament. We have the Old Testament and the New Testament, but we do not have anything showing how they went from one to the other. Benjamin’s speech is exactly halfway between the old law and the new law, and it begins with every single person being able to make the same covenant that was previously made only by the king. They are *all* sons and daughters of God. They get the name; they get the blessings and promises of the covenant.

#### **Further Reading**

Matthew L. Bowen, “Becoming Sons and Daughters at God’s Right Hand: King Benjamin’s Rhetorical Wordplay on His Own Name,” *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 21, no. 2 (2012): 2–13.

## Benjamin and the Law of the King

	Deut.	Mosiah
The Lord shall choose him	17:15	1:10; 2:30
He shall be one of thy brethren	17:15	2:11
He shall not return the people to Egypt	17:16	3:14
He shall not multiply to himself silver and gold	17:17	2:12
He shall have a copy of the Law	17:18	1:3
He shall read the Law all his days	17:19	1:7
He shall fear the Lord	17:19	2:37–40
He shall keep all the Law	17:19	1:5; 5:5
His heart shall not be lifted up above his brethren	17:20	2:26
He shall turn not aside to the right hand or left	17:20	5:8–10
His days shall be prolonged in the kingdom	17:20	2:31

Figure 4 John W. Welch and Greg Welch, "Benjamin and the Law of the King," in *Charting the Book of Mormon*, chart 125.

### **Mosiah 5:7 — They All Had the Law**

In Deuteronomy 17:18–19, which lays out the requirements for a righteous king, he was required to write himself a copy, and read the law “all the days of his life” (Figure 4). Now Benjamin gave everybody a copy of the speech so that they could read in it in their families all the rest of their lives. They now could develop a sense of, “I am responsible; I am accountable.” Ultimately, his talk was designed and shared so that everyone there would take upon them the name of Christ, enter into a covenant, not just to keep the commandments that his son would be giving, as in a normal coronation ceremony, but also the commandments that Christ will give. He changed their hearts and lives forever, and this text can change ours.

### **Mosiah 5:8–12 — If We Do Not Serve God, Our Names Will Be Blotted Out**

Benjamin then spoke about *obedience*: “There is no other name given whereby salvation cometh; therefore, I would that ye should take upon you the name of Christ, all you that have entered into the covenant with God that ye should be obedient unto the end of your lives” (Mosiah 5:8). This echoed what the people themselves had said that they wanted to do: “And it shall come to pass that whosoever doeth this shall be found at the right hand of God [and not on the left hand of God], for he shall know the name by which he is called; for he shall be called by the name of Christ (Mosiah 5:9, cf. vv. 10, 12). This is the positive, or reward, half of the covenant. Notice the perfect balance in this center piece of the final section of the speech: if ... and if not....

By the way, in the name *Benjamin*, the last part *ja (yah)-min*, means *right hand*. *Ben* is the *son of*. Thus, *Benjamin* is the *son of the right hand*. Benjamin was saying, “If you want to be with me, come on the right hand. If you want to be over there, go on the left hand.” The promise, then, is balanced with the *warning*! There will be a cutting off or a blotting out!

The word 'right' can have both a directional meaning (that is, on the right hand side), and also an empowerment sense (that is, the right hand of power, strength, and favor). See Matthew L. Bowen, *Name as Key-Word* (2018), 50. Perhaps his own name drew Benjamin to refer in his speech five times to the Lord as “omnipotent” (Mosiah 3:5, 17, 18, 21; 5:15) and five times to speak of his matchless, marvelous “power” (Mosiah 2:11; 3:5; 4:6, 9; 5:15).

Mosiah 5:10–12 is one of the most famous passages in the Book of Mormon, because of its clear and meaningful chiasmic structure. This passage, by the way, was the very first chiasms that I found in the Book of Mormon. I was awakened and led by the Spirit, early in the morning, in Regensburg, Germany, on Wednesday, August 16, 1967, to spot this structure, and a few minutes afterwards to find the same pattern in Mosiah 3:18–19.

As one can still imagine, over 50 years later, that discovery on that morning was unforgettably exciting. It changed me, my focus, my testimony, my life, and my already deep love for the scriptures and the gospel of Jesus Christ, in many creative and productive ways.

It also changed the way that people everywhere read the Book of Mormon. More than ever before, people now approach this sacred record with much greater respect for its deliberate organization, for the elegant composition of its passages, for the meaningful placement of its individual words, for the compelling logic of its coherent messages, for its convincing mode of timeless communication, for the enduring value of its spiritual and practical examples, and for the joy of its attractive manner of persuasion and invitation to come unto Christ and repeatedly find there God’s beautiful plan of eternal life and happiness.



Figure 5 Photos of Mosiah 5:10-12 in the German Book of Mormon.

## Chiasmus in Mosiah 5:10–12

And now it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall not take upon him  
the *name of Christ*

must be *called* by some other name;

therefore, he findeth himself on the *left hand of God*.

And I would that ye should *remember* also, that this is the  
name that I said I should give unto you

that never should be *blotted out*,

except it be through *transgression*;

therefore, take heed that ye do not *transgress*,

that the name be not *blotted out* of your hearts.

I say unto you, I would that ye should *remember* to retain the  
name written always in your hearts,

that ye are not found on the *left hand of God*,

but that ye hear and know the voice by which ye shall be *called*,  
and also,

the *name* by which he shall call you.

Figure 6 John W. Welch and Greg Welch, "Chiasmus in Mosiah 5:10-12," in *Charting the Book of Mormon*, chart 125.

### Further Reading

For a documentary on the discovery of chiasmus, see "[Greg Welch - How Chiasmus Was Discovered in the Book of Mormon \(Part 1\)](#)."

For a video interview of John W. Welch recounting his experience of discovering chiasmus in the Book of Mormon, see Book of Mormon Central, "[How Was Chiasmus Discovered in the Book of Mormon? \(Mosiah 5:11\)](#)," *KnoWhy* 353 (August 16, 2017).

For comments by Elder Jeffrey R. Holland on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the discovery of chiasmus in the Book of Mormon, see Jeffrey R. Holland, "[The Greatness of the Evidence](#)," Chiasmus Jubilee, August 16, 2017, online at [bookofmormoncentral.org](http://bookofmormoncentral.org). For a transcript of this talk, see "[Elder Holland Speaks at Book of Mormon Chiasmus Conference](#)," at [newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org](http://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org).

### **Mosiah 5:13–15 — We Must Serve God to Know Him**

"For how knoweth a man the master whom he has not served (Mosiah 5:13)?" Benjamin comes back to the concept of service at the end of his speech. He did not leave without explaining why we are expected to serve. If we want to know the master, we must serve the master. That is what we get out of service. When we know the master, we belong to the master because we have entered into a covenant with him, so we will not be driven out. In Mosiah 5:14, Benjamin equated the man who had not served and known the master to a familiar animal, one that they may have even seen driven from the temple on the Day of Atonement.

"Doth a man take an ass which belongs to his neighbor and keep him?" Benjamin said that the man would not allow such an ass to feed among his flocks. He would drive him away and cast him out. Here was an animal being driven out because he did not know the Lord. It was not recognized as an animal of the Lord. We will be driven out just like that animal, carrying out with us all of our own impurities, and have our names blotted out unless we take upon ourselves the name of Christ, remember it, and not transgress the covenant (5:11).

It is worth knowing that on some occasions a donkey was also used as a scape animal (like the scapegoat). Different animals were used. Benjamin here happens to speak of an ass or a donkey. We know from ancient near-eastern materials that some cultures, not the Israelites, occasionally used a dog. The Hittites sometimes used a dog and sometimes they even used a rabbit.

### **Mosiah 5:14–15 — Why Do We Serve?**

It is by serving that we come to know the master whom we have served. That is the purpose of serving. It is not to try to repay him, for we can never get out of his debt (Mosiah 2:21). It is actually not so much about serving our fellow beings, for "when ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only [merely, exclusively] in the service of your God" (2:17, see Figure 7). We serve the Master, and by so doing we get to know

Him. We hear and know His Voice. Service, first and foremost, is all about building a relationship with Him, so that we can know and do his will in serving others, and so that he can then exalt us and seal us to be bound together in righteousness.

## Three Steps in Benjamin's Logic on Service

### 1 All service is merely service to God

Therefore, serving fellow beings produces no reason to boast, unless serving God produces some reason to boast.

*"When ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God" (Mosiah 2:17)*

### 2 But no matter how much we serve God, we remain unprofitable servants

Therefore, we have no reason to boast.

*"If ye should serve him with all your whole souls yet would ye be unprofitable servants" (Mosiah 2:21)*

### 3 We do not serve God to get ahead with God or man, but to know the voice by which we are called.

Therefore, service to God is valuable, but not in ways people always think.

*"For how knoweth a man the master whom he has not served" (Mosiah 5:13)*

*Figure 5 John W. Welch and Greg Welch, "Three Steps in Benjamin's Logic on Service," in Charting the Book of Mormon, chart 86.*

### Mosiah 5:15 — What Does "Seal You His" Mean?

In the end, the sealing power will come into play. Benjamin said, "I would that ye should be steadfast and immovable, always abounding in good works, that Christ, the Lord God Omnipotent, may seal you his, that you may be brought to heaven, that ye may have everlasting salvation and eternal life, through the wisdom, and power, and justice, and mercy of him who created all things, in heaven and in earth, who is God above all (Mosiah 5:15)." This conclusion to Benjamin's speech is a truly beautiful,

prophetic blessing upon all his people, ending with the sealing, the placing of the Lord's seal of approval that binds us to him.

What did an ancient seal look like? It was like an official stamp. It could be a cylinder seal which parties to an official document or contract would roll on clay. It was, in a way, like a credit card. It was the ancient world's way of putting a stamp of approval on a transaction. So, when the Lord seals us his, it is as if he is putting his seal, his signature on us.

When a person in the ancient Roman world was purchased as a slave, they would brand their foreheads somewhat like branding cattle. If slaves belonged to a temple and were dedicated as temple servants, they could have the seal or the brand of the temple, so the people knew to whom they belonged. While this was not done in ancient Israel, as far as we know, Benjamin had talked earlier about people "serving" God, and that could have included temple servants or people devoted to the Lord in his sacred house.

Benjamin also told his people that, by making this covenant, they had now become sons and daughters of Christ. As sons and daughters, they were free persons, and they were entitled to inherit from the Father. They now belonged to him in that sense, and they were now spiritually reborn and begotten into the family. With this formality completed for each of us, life has just begun. A new life is now lies ahead.

#### **Further Reading**

Book of Mormon Central, "How Does Christ 'Seal You His'" (Mosiah 5:15)," *KnoWhy* 558 (April 21, 2020).

#### **Mosiah 6:1–2 — Names Were Taken of Those Who Entered the Covenant**

Finally, King Benjamin had his priests record the names of all who had entered into the covenant with God. The book of Numbers, in the Old Testament and on the Brass Plates, was given its name because Moses, Aaron, and the tribe leaders numbered all the Israelites, the covenant people. They were arranged by their tribes and counted. This was partially for military and partially for taxation purposes. They counted how many there were, and then they knew who to collect taxes and to require military service from. The records also helped in administering the lands of inheritance when people intermarried between the tribes and when some might die without any living heirs.

King Benjamin, again in this final episode of his kingship, is transforming Nephite society and perception. Everyone in his kingdom was numbered among the covenant makers equally, perhaps for the first time, even though there were among them both Nephites and Mulekites. That was likely a brand new concept. They now had merged as a unified people in the city of Zarahemla under one king.



That numbering bonded everyone. It brought them together with obligations as members of this covenant house. Assuming that they all were recorded in a single tally, they also all had the same rights and privileges because they were all equal in their access to the public affairs, public benefits, protections of the law, and religious access. They all had similar duties under the Law of Moses that King Benjamin scrupulously followed. Being numbered, the king knew the names of all of his subjects and could care for them and never forget them. That numbering filled many important roles.

When we bless a baby, we give the child a name and a blessing, and put his or her name on the records of the Church. The keeping of a record was the very first commandment that was given to the church when it was organized in Fayette, New York at the Peter Whitmer farm. Doctrine and Covenants section 20, the organization of the church, was approved. Then followed Section 21, of which the first verse says, “A record shall be kept.” From the very beginning, all the names of the people who had become members of the Church were written down. We can go back to the very earliest days and know when they were baptized, even in those early months.

This record-keeping function has been very valuable to the organization of wards and stakes, and enabling good shepherds to minister to church members, even those who have become less active or are going through the process of discipline, repentance, and reinstatement. Some who have left the Church ask to have their names removed from its records. In such cases, the individual intentionally blots out his or her own name. Only at that point do Church leaders cease taking watchful care over them, although their hearts, hope, and love continue to strive with them.

We do not know how often the numbering was done in King Benjamin’s day. Probably not very often. This seems to be an unusual coronation. This was a great moment in transforming the nature of the kingdom in Zarahemla and the Church in that area. Perhaps Benjamin was looking a long way back in history and thinking, “When Moses needed to start Israel and unify his people, he numbered everybody. I am going to number my people too!” As membership record keeping is a huge effort today, it was probably a very big effort for Benjamin too, but it was and is a truly important function. The Good Shepherd knows and presumably numbers his sheep (John 10:14).

### **Further Reading**

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Is It Important to Keep Records?](#) (1 Nephi 9:5),” *KnoWhy* 345 (July 28, 2017).