

# MOSIAH 1–3

John W. Welch Notes



## Introduction: Who Wrote the Book of Mosiah and Why?

As readers open up the first page of the book of Mosiah, they enter a whole new part of the Nephite record. Having enjoyed the Small Plates of Nephi with their first-person accounts, prophecies and explanations of Nephi, Jacob, and Jacob's descendants, readers enter the world of the Large Plates of Nephi and other records that have been organized into the series of books named after Nephite leaders, from King Mosiah, to Alma the Younger (who was both the chief judge and high priest), Alma's son Helaman (high priest and leader of the stripling warriors), Alma's grandson Helaman, Alma's great-grandson Nephi, on down until the records were entrusted to Mormon. Mosiah, Alma, and Mormon all may have played roles in shaping the book of Mosiah. And thus, the questions, "Who wrote the book of Mosiah?" and "Who put this book together, and why?" are fascinating to ponder.

The overall structure of the book of Mosiah is interesting. It begins with the great and righteous King Benjamin. Then, in the very middle of the book, we encounter the lethal showdown between the prophet Abinadi and the wicked King Noah, together with the conversion of Alma the Elder, who at that time was still a young man. The book ultimately ends with the Nephites getting rid of kingship altogether. The book of Mosiah seems to be deliberately constructed in order to prove the point that kingship is a good system when the kings are like Benjamin but a bad system when they are like Noah.

That much appears obvious enough. But one still may ask, who wrote this book? It seems that Mormon probably did not abridge the text of this book very much, if at all. At least that's my view. When we read Benjamin's Speech, for example, the voice, the vocabulary, and the vision do not seem to reflect any of Mormon's personal influences.

Alma the Younger, however, strikes me as a main candidate who may have assembled the underlying pieces to create the book of Mosiah. He had access to all the records. He became the Chief Judge, and he would have needed to explain how he got there. After all, he was not even born in Zarahemla. So, how had he become the Chief Judge, the High Priest, and the Commander-in-Chief of the army in the land of Zarahemla?

Mosiah's four sons probably had little to do with the creation of this book. They had been away for fourteen years on a mission which, from a political perspective, looks like a voluntary exile. Although they were still the sons of Mosiah, they were no longer heirs-apparent. In Zarahemla, shortly after Alma became the leader, there arose the king-men who wanted to bring kingship back. Alma the Younger almost lost his life in the ensuing war, as he personally defended and solidified the new political system. So it is unlikely that Ammon or any of the other sons of Mosiah would have written this book after they returned from their fourteen-year mission, long after the death of their father.

Assuming that Alma the Younger was the compiler of this book, other questions yet remain. Why would he have included certain episodes? Why were certain stories told, and why were they told in the way that they were? Alma would have been personally interested in the story of his father's conversion, knowing that Abinadi was speaking the truth. Alma the Younger admired King Benjamin for many reasons. Just as Benjamin was visited by the Angel of the Lord, so was Alma. And Alma the Younger had a special interest in the four sons of King Mosiah. These were his friends growing up. Together, their lives were changed as they became disciples of Jesus Christ.

The book of Mosiah was assembled from several independent documents, and its stories are not presented in chronological order. In fact, the showdown between King Noah and Abinadi (embedded in a first flashback in Mosiah 9–22) probably happened 20 or 30 years earlier than the end of King Benjamin's life. Another flashback in Mosiah 23–24 is based on a record of Alma the Elder about the deliverance of his people from afflictions they suffered before finding their way into the capital city of Zarahemla. So readers of the book of Mosiah are not given a normal, sequential history. And, indeed, several thematic threads run through this multi-layered and multi-voiced text. Yet the book is held together coherently by the indelible interests and urgent tasks borne by Alma the Younger (Figure 1).

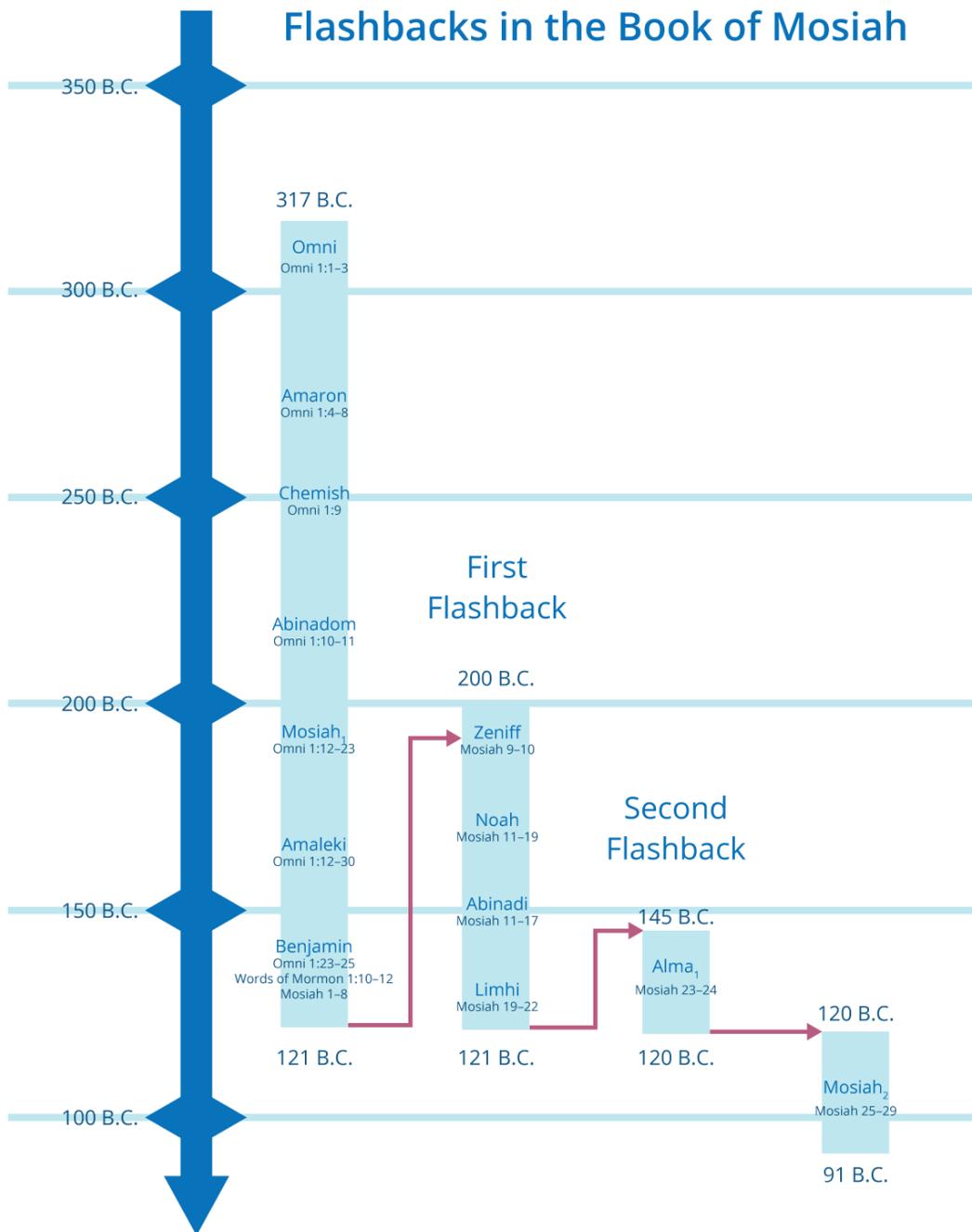


Figure 1 Welch, John W., and Greg Welch. "Flashbacks in the Book of Mosiah." In *Charting the Book of Mormon: Visual Aids for Personal Study and Teaching*. Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1999, chart 29.

**Further Reading**

John W. Welch, *The Legal Cases in the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: BYU Press, 2008), 140–145.

Gordon C. Thomasson, “Mosiah: The Complex Symbolism and Symbolic Complex of Kingship in the Book of Mormon,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 2, no. 1 (1993): 32–36

## Mosiah 1

In this chapter, King Benjamin was mostly speaking to his sons, particularly to Mosiah, who was about to be crowned to succeed his father. Mosiah was asked to call an assembly in which King Benjamin would address all his people, declare Mosiah as his successor, and renew the covenant of God with this people. Thirty-three years later, Alma the Younger would succeed King Mosiah as Alma became the first Chief Judge and High Priest of the diverse land of Zarahemla.

### **Mosiah 1:1 — Was There Contention among the Nephites?**

The book of Mosiah begins by stating that there was “no more contention” but “continual peace” (Mosiah 1:1). For the book to begin this way, the implication is that there had been serious problems with disunity in the Land of Zarahemla prior to this time (indeed, see Words of Mormon 1:12). Many Mulekites and a few Nephites lived in Zarahemla. Even counting all of the Nephites, Jacobites, Josephites, and Zoramites together, there were still more Mulekites than Nephites, as Mosiah 25:2 makes clear. This mixed population had needed to fight off Lamanite armies. False Christs had arisen, and Benjamin had to “shut their mouths” and punish false prophets and dissidents. These challenges long persisted in that region. While Benjamin’s power was challenged by some of his subjects, he labored tirelessly with his whole body and soul to reestablish peace throughout his land (Words of Mormon 1:12–18).

How was it that Benjamin’s father had become king in Zarahemla in the first place? In ancient America and in other parts of the world, it was common enough for an outside manager to be brought in to take care of local political and managerial jobs. When people from within the city were deciding who got certain privileges, it could engender hard feelings, so an outside person was sometimes brought in to rule the city for ten years or so. The decisions of such an administrator may have angered some, but they figured that he would be moving on. This was a common enough practice that Professor John Sorenson has speculated that when Mosiah<sub>1</sub> came from the Land of Nephi, he was welcomed as a leader because he had records, language, wisdom, and administrative

experience. However, after some time had passed, the older, indigenous population may well have tired of being ruled by an outsider. Mosiah<sub>1</sub> had certainly ensconced himself and his son, King Benjamin. But a generation after Benjamin's death, and after King Mosiah<sub>2</sub> had stepped down and died and the reign of the judges replaced the monarchy, a group of people called *king-men* stepped forth who wanted the kingship back. One such alternative heir-apparent might well have been a descendant of Zarahemla, whom the Amlicites gladly sponsored.

In any event, these pressures show that, while there were persistent hard feelings to deal with, King Benjamin and his son Mosiah were still able, for the most part, to unite these people. We should not pass lightly over this achievement. It was a major accomplishment, as these kings called upon every possible tool of law, ethics, oratory, prophecy, doctrine, and covenant-making to preserve and protect their people.

### Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[Why Should Readers Pay Close Attention to the Mulekites?](#) (Omni 1:19)," *KnoWhy* 434 (May 17, 2018).

Book of Mormon Central, "[What Did it Mean to be 'King Over All the Land'?](#) (Alma 20:8)," *KnoWhy* 128 (June 23, 2016).

John L. Sorenson, *Mormon's Codex: An Ancient American Book* (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2013), 362–380.

### Mosiah 1:10 — King Benjamin Asks Mosiah to Gather His People

In chapter 1, after Benjamin had grown old, he called his sons together and ordered that a proclamation should go out to gather all the people "on the morrow," at the temple. Accordingly, the people gathered for Benjamin to conduct a marvelous covenant-making ceremony, including the popular recognition of Benjamin's son as the new king. Many preparations would have gone into all of this, as people came from the outskirts, bringing their families, provisions, and shelters. It would have been normal for many preparations to have been made before the final call-to-order was sent out the day before this important formal coronation was to begin. Benjamin's speech is so finely crafted, organized, and word-smithed that it does not read like an extemporaneous talk. At the same time the tower was being erected, some copies of his speech could also have been prepared, anticipating the need and benefit of having a copy of this impressive text for each family.

## Mosiah 2

### The Nature of King Benjamin's Speech

The first embedded text that readers encounter in the book of Mosiah is the remarkable speech of King Benjamin, including its prelude and aftermath (Mosiah 1–6). When we are reading King Benjamin's speech, we are reading his actual speech, not a later abridgement by Mormon. This masterful oration is simultaneously a coronation speech, a classic farewell speech, a prophetic speech, a covenant ritual text, and a literary wonder. Mormon would no sooner have touched a classic text like this than any one of us would edit Lincoln's Gettysburg Address or Elder Bruce R. McConkie's final testimony. Benjamin's text became a type of constitution for the Nephite nation, being cited authoritatively on many occasions (for example, the five crimes established in Mosiah 2:13 are echoed precisely in Alma 30:10).

Helaman's Quotation of Benjamin	
<b>Mosiah 3:18</b>	<b>Helaman 5:9</b>
But men drink damnation to their own souls except they humble themselves and become as little children, and believe that salvation was, and is, and is to come, in and	O remember, remember, my sons, the words which king Benjamin spake unto his people; yea, and remember that there is no other way nor means whereby man can be saved, only
through the atoning blood of Christ	through the atoning blood of Jesus Christ
the Lord Omnipotent	who shall come; yea, remember that he cometh to redeem the world

Figure 2 Welch, John W., and Greg Welch. "Helaman's Quotation of Benjamin." In *Charting the Book of Mormon: Visual Aids for Personal Study and Teaching*, chart 104.

When we read the scriptures, we can assume that each word was put there for a reason. Modern paraphrases are helpful but are created at some peril. Every word in King Benjamin’s speech rewards careful attention. The entire speech is worth memorizing. It can be recited in about thirty minutes. It is one of those few amazing, inspiring, classic, historical speeches that deserve verbatim prominence in our minds.

### **What Is Significant about King Benjamin’s Speech?**

We call this lengthy passage of scripture King Benjamin’s *speech*. Others have called it an *address* or a *sermon*. It could also be called King Benjamin’s *ritual text* or maybe King Benjamin’s *revelation*, or *covenant text*.

It is unlike a modern General Conference talk in several ways. Most Conference talks are shorter, and most do not pause for ceremonial actions. This speech is segmented into seven units, and King Benjamin added “Amen” at certain points along the way. Did something happen between each “amen” and the next segment?

In the book called *Benjamin’s Speech: “That Ye May Learn Wisdom,”* which Stephen Ricks and I put together, several comments address the significance of the fact that these words were delivered at the temple in Zarahemla. As readers pay attention to temple-related words there, they discover that these temple elements run throughout the text. One serious reader, Paul Hyde, has identified 132 elements that identify it as a temple address. Elder Neal A. Maxwell has seen Benjamin’s text as a “manual for discipleship,” establishing “the mysteries” by way of covenant (Mosiah 2:9), establishing loyalty to the laws of obedience, submissiveness, meekness, consecration, and loving kindness.

All readers of this text should note that Joseph Smith, at the normal rate of translation, did not have more than about a day and a half to bring forth this text. It is not as if Joseph could say, “I know that I need to write one of the greatest religious speeches ever given in the history of the world, so I will take several weeks or months to work on this.” Speakers will labor long and hard over speeches of this magnificence, and certainly King Benjamin must have done so as well. Joseph did not have that luxury. When asked how he could do this, Joseph always answered, “by the gift and power of God.”

### **Further Reading**

Book of Mormon Central, “Why Is the Timing of the Book of Mormon’s Translation So ‘Marvelous’? (2 Nephi 27:26),” *KnowWhy* 506 (March 15, 2019).

John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks, eds. “Appendix: Complete Text of King Benjamin’s Speech with Notes and Comments,” in *King Benjamin’s Speech: “That Ye May Learn Wisdom”* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 509–510.

Neal A. Maxwell, "King Benjamin's Sermon: 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), 1–21.

### **King Benjamin's Speech: A Great Oration**

It is powerful to compare King Benjamin's speech to the greatest orations of world history. While I was in high school and college I read the speeches (in Latin and Greek) of many of the classic ancient orators. I also became aware of handbooks that were used in American schools to teach the art of oratory. Giving a great speech was an art. Who were the most impressive orators in the history of the world? Pericles reputedly gave the famous funeral speech during the Peloponnesian War. Demosthenes, Lysias, Cicero, and Seneca the Elder were renowned Greek and Roman orators, public speakers, and lawyers of antiquity. Many of their speeches and orations have been preserved, analyzed, and used as models for great talks. In my chapter entitled "Benjamin's Speech: A Masterful Oration," I identify twelve key qualities that rhetoricians readily agree are commonly found in the greatest of orations in world history. While great speeches often have six or seven of these, all twelve are present in King Benjamin's speech. For example:

Great orations are said to transcend the moment and capture the entire spirit of an age. They are able to distill where a nation has come from, to look ahead into the coming generations, and to capture and embody the spirit of where they stood as a people at that time. King Benjamin certainly does this in many ways.

A great oration is dramatic. It is out of the ordinary and not routine. Benjamin's people came and pitched their tents. They were all waiting and wondering what was going to happen next. This drama adds to the experience of the people. More than that, great orators are able to capitalize on that moment. They do not disappoint. When the people leave, they have truly experienced a marvelous, memorable occasion. There is a solemnity about it, and this too characterizes Benjamin's speech.

A great oration is absolutely sincere, with no pretense. Consider Abraham Lincoln. The simple Gettysburg Address captures and distills the agony of the thousands of Americans who died fighting each other at that small Pennsylvania crossroads. "May they not have died in vain." The memory of that speech helped to re-launch the United States as a nation. There was no pretense there. President Lincoln was not saying those words so he would get reelected. This was absolute sincerity.

The sincerity of Benjamin is even more impressive to me because of what he does not say. Nowhere does he say, "I am so glad that I was able to lead you. Remember when

we fought and I had the Sword of Laban and we defeated all those enemies!” He does not talk about all the great work that he has done for the people over the decades. He simply says, “I have been suffered to spend my days in your service” (Mosiah 2:11–12). There is no self-boasting here. Benjamin is humbly saying, “Farewell.”

A great oration delivers eternal truths uttered with disarming humility. King Benjamin knows how to speak of himself as not being even as much as the dust of the earth. His concern about the little children is another mark of humility.

A great oration has a voice of pure authority. Ralph Waldo Emerson once said, “I do not know any kind of history ... to which people listen with more interest than to any anecdote of eloquence. ... It is a triumph of pure power.” As you read King Benjamin’s speech, the power of his words, drawn from personal experience and revelation, rivet down the points that he wanted made. They reflect the angelic source from whence they came. His whole presence as king bespeaks dignified authority at every level.

A great oration is purposeful and effectively organized. Speaking of Cicero, the paragon of Roman orators, Sherwin Cody’s handbook on the world’s great orations has said: “He dazzles us with the brilliancy of his rhetoric. His words roll out in perfect oratorical rhythm, his periods are nicely balanced, his figures of speech and his choice of words beautifully artistic, singing through the mind like music and enchanting the ear.” Those words describe Benjamin’s speech just as well as Cicero.

A great oration gives unmistakable instructions to ensure success. For example, King Benjamin’s speech gives clear instructions on how to put off the natural man. He says to be humble, submissive, meek, patient, full of love, and so forth. He does not just say, “Well, put off the natural man!” He says, “Here’s how you do it.” It is beneficial to watch for how many times King Benjamin will use this oratory method.

Great oratory also produces a compelling presentation of ultimate human choice that propels people to critical action. King Benjamin does that too, concluding with his comment, “if you believe all these things see that ye do them” (Mosiah 4:10).

### Further Reading

John W. Welch, “Benjamin’s Speech: A Masterful Oration,” in *King Benjamin’s Speech: “That Ye May Learn Wisdom,”* ed. John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 55–88.

John W. Welch and Daryl R. Hague, “Benjamin’s Sermon as a Traditional Ancient Farewell Address,” in *King Benjamin’s Speech: “That Ye May Learn Wisdom,”* ed. John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 89–117.

**Mosiah 2:2 — The People Had Multiplied in the Land**

Professor John Sorenson believes that the population of a capital city, like Zarahemla, around 124 BC would have been about 25,000 people. While that number is not very remarkable today, what would it have been like to have a city of that size in the ancient world?

At the end of King Benjamin's speech, what did the people do? They entered into a covenant and then recorded the names of those who did so (Mosiah 6:1). They apparently did not write down all the names of everyone in the land, just the ones entering into the covenant. A full census could have been taken another time. But since a new king was being enthroned, he needed to know whom he could count on and over whom he had direct responsibility and loyalty. Keeping records of such covenants was an important but difficult sacred practice.

**Mosiah 2:3–4 — The People Gathered and Offered Sacrifices**

Every seventh year, all Israelites—men, women and children (it is important to note that there are children here too)—were required to come to the temple in Jerusalem on the Feast of Tabernacles, where sacrifices would be made, the law would be read, and they would then renew the Mosaic covenant. There are examples of these covenant renewal assemblies in Joshua 24 and in other places in the Old Testament, such as the book of Nehemiah.

These background details help give readers some clues as to what was most likely happening here. Because Benjamin had been on the throne so long, this is likely the first time that many of these people had witnessed the coronation of a king. However, it would not have been the first time that the people would have renewed their covenants (Figure 3).

**Mosiah 2:4 — Was This a Year of Jubilee?**

In Israel, the Jubilee was to happen regularly once every fifty years. In the rest of the ancient world, when a new king was crowned, he would issue an edict forgiving all old debts, enshrining new laws, and so forth. If you were a creditor in that world, you lived not knowing how long the king's life would last. The Israelite system provided stability, especially when thirty or forty years still remained before the next Jubilee. While some have wondered if the Jubilee Year was only an ideal part of the law, something that only anticipated a future Messianic Law, I believe that at least some parts of the Jubilee Law were needed to be observed as a corrective for restraint of long-term indentures or debt servitude, for inflation, and other sorts of inequities.

## King Benjamin's Coronation of Mosiah

Israelite Pattern	Book of Mormon Parallel or Adaptation
The Sanctuary Was the Site of the Coronation	All the people gathered at the temple at Zarahemla, the site chosen for Benjamin's address to the people and for the consecration of his son Mosiah as king (Mosiah 1:18)  Mosiah was then presented to the people in the public gathering at the temple (Mosiah 2:30)
The King Stood on a Royal Dais, Platform	Benjamin constructed a tower from which he spoke to the people gathered (situated in tents) at the temple (Mosiah 2:7)
Installing in Office with Insignia	Benjamin gave Mosiah the official records of the people (the plates of brass and the plates of Nephi), the sword of Laban, and the miraculous Liahona (Mosiah 1:15–16)  King Mosiah was known to possess "two stones" (Mosiah 28:13)
Anointing	Benjamin consecrated his son Mosiah to be a ruler and a king over his people (Mosiah 6:3)
Presentation of the New King	Mosiah is presented to the people as their king (Mosiah 2:30)  The people responded by accepting the king's declarations (Mosiah 4:2; 5:2–4)
Receiving a Throne Name	A royal name was given to the rulers over the Nephites (Jacob 1:10–11)  Benjamin revealed to all his people a new name at this coronation (Mosiah 3:8)
Divine Adoption of the King	By covenant, all the people became God's sons and daughters on his right hand (Mosiah 5:6–12)

Figure 3 Welch, John W., and Greg Welch. "King Benjamin's Coronation of Mosiah." In *Charting the Book of Mormon: Visual Aids for Personal Study and Teaching*, chart 85.

Based on several phrases which King Benjamin uses, many of which can also be seen in the main jubilee text in Leviticus 24 and 25, a case can be made that Benjamin timed his speech to be given during a Jubilee year for the Nephites. This explains why Benjamin talks so much about not allowing slavery, about indebtedness and forgiveness, and why King Benjamin would go on to live and serve as a co-regent for three additional years

after the coronation of his son. The observance of a jubilee would be an ideal time for such a solemn and thankful occasion.

### Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "Why Did Alma Wish to Speak 'with the Trump of God'? (Alma 29:1)," *KnoWhy* 136 (July 5, 2016).

### Mosiah 2:5–6 — Why Are the Tents Important at King Benjamin's Speech?

A prominent Israelite festival was the Feast of Tabernacles, sometimes referred to as the feast of tents or the Feast of Booths. At that festival, everyone would come with their families. This was different than the men going to get the sacrifice for the Passover. At Tabernacles, the entire family would come, and their men, women, and children would sit in a booth—a *sukkah*—that had been created to remind them that their ancestors had dwelt in tents as they wandered in the wilderness for forty years. These tents have significance. At the Feast of Tabernacles, once every seven years, the law was read, and the people renewed their covenant to keep the Law of Moses.

### Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "Why Did the Nephites Stay in Their Tents During King Benjamin's Speech? (Mosiah 2:6)," *KnoWhy* 80 (April 18, 2016).

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), 148–223.

Hugh W. Nibley, "Assembly and Atonement," in *King Benjamin's Speech: "That Ye May Learn Wisdom,"* ed. John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 148–223.

### Mosiah 2:9 — King Benjamin Caused His Words to be Written

Anticipating that many people would be present to hear his speech, he wrote his words and they were given to the people. Thanks to this unusual situation, we can be confident that Benjamin's exact words have been preserved. Many copies existed. Benjamin's words will be quoted by Nephite leaders and prophets for the next 125 years. Mormon and Moroni probably still studied it in school, as they were taught the demanding tasks of being archivists, scribes, abridgers, and prophets in their own right.

But what could Benjamin's speech have been written on? The most common material that people in ancient America wrote on was bark, especially fig bark. It was pliable, and they would pound it flat and make really quite a durable writing substance like a heavy stock paper. We have only a few of these codices. One happens to be a big fold-out

manuscript I saw on display in Dresden, Germany. There are only a few of these that have survived out of probably millions of Mayan texts that were in existence when the Spaniards came. They thought these were all pagan texts, and maybe they also made good fire kindling when it got cold, but they all went up in smoke. We can only imagine what we would know about those cultures had many more codices survived. The use of this writing material was standard operating procedure from the Incas in the south and up through Mesoamerica. These manuscripts were not easy to produce, but many were given out to preserve the memory of this singular occasion.

### **Mosiah 2:9 — King Benjamin Exhorts the People to Not Trifle with His Words**

As we worship, especially in the temple, we should remember King Benjamin's exhortation at the opening of his speech. He tells the people to no trifle with his words. Sacred words are serious and are not to be taken lightly. He continues by telling them he wants them to *hearken* unto his words, which means more than just to listen. He added these three things: "and open your ears that ye may hear, and your hearts that ye may understand, and your minds that the mysteries of God may be unfolded to your view." He wants people to engage with their full mental and spiritual faculties, to pay attention and to obey in every way possible.

### **Mosiah 2:12–13 — King Benjamin Kept the "Law of the King," Outlawed Slavery, and Required Obedience to Public Law**

When Benjamin affirms that he has not sought to accumulate gold or silver, he is certifying that he has kept the requirements of Deuteronomy 17:14–20, which limit the power of the king in ancient Israel (Figure 4). Kings under the law of Moses needed to read the law, fear the Lord, do all the words of God's law, and not lift his heart up above his brethren. Benjamin went out of his way to say that he was no better than anyone else and that he too was "of the dust" (Mosiah 2:26).

Slavery was an acceptable part of the Mosaic Law. But every seventh year, the Hebrew slaves had to be let go. King Benjamin went even further, prohibiting slavery among any of his people. The reason for this was because his people all belonged to God, their Heavenly King (2:18–21). If they are servants (or slaves) to God, it would be unseemly for them to be held as slaves by anyone else.

Benjamin also certified that he had not allowed people to murder, plunder, steal, commit adultery, or any manner of wickedness (2:13). This is a shortened form of the second half of the Ten Commandments, rules that pertain to the establishment of public law and order.

## 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 Welch, John W., and Greg Welch. "King Benjamin and the Law of the King." In *Charting the Book of Mormon: Visual Aids for Personal Study and Teaching*, chart 125.

### Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "How is the Use of Deuteronomy in the Book of Mormon Evidence for its Authenticity? (1 Nephi 4:34)," *KnoWhy* 428 (April 27, 2018).

Taylor Halverson, "Deuteronomy 17:14–20 as Criteria for Book of Mormon Kingship," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 24 (2017): 1–10.

### Mosiah 2:18–19 — Benjamin Teaches His People to Serve and Thank Their Heavenly King

One of the wonderful things about King Benjamin is that he does not require anyone to do anything that he has not been willing to do himself. Earlier in the chapter, he told the people that he had served them, with all his "might, mind and strength" (2:11). The scriptural exhortation to love God with all of your might, mind, and strength is in several biblical passages that King Benjamin, who knew the scriptures well, would have known (see, for example, Deuteronomy 6:5; 30:6; Proverbs 2:2). He brilliantly transforms that requirement to say, in essence, "I know that I am commanded to love God with all my heart, might and mind, but, you know, I have loved you and served *you* with all my heart, might and mind." He is telling them, "I am your king and God has put me in as king, but I love *you* as much as I have loved God." And thus, he will turn around and tell them that the same opportunity and reality applies to them as well: "And when you are in the service of your fellow beings you are only in the service of your God" (2:17).

And thus, "if I, whom ye call your king ... do merit any thanks from you, O how you ought to thank your heavenly King!" (2:19), because I have only been in the service of God, and he has "kept and preserved" us from day to day, lending us breath, that we might live (2:21). And thus all thankful praise should be directed toward Him. This is not only logically coherent, but also ethically right and spiritually fulfilling.

### Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "How Are Acts of Service Related to Wisdom? (Mosiah 2:17)," *KnoWhy* 308 (May 3, 2017).

### Mosiah 2:17, 24 — When We Serve Others, We Are Merely Serving God

To understand Benjamin's full point here, the key word is *only*. This word does not just mean *only* or *solely*. It also means *merely*. So, what is King Benjamin trying to tell his people? He wants them to remember that when you serve God, he immediately blesses you, and thus, you do not get out of His debt that way. While it is a good thing to serve God (especially so you can know the voice of the Master whom you have served, 5:14), in reality, when you are in the service of other people, you are still only—*merely*—in the service of God (2:17). And thus, neither King Benjamin nor anyone else has reason to

boast, even if one serves God exclusively, with *all* of one's whole soul (2:21). This is because, as Benjamin says, God always immediately blesses you (2:24).

### **Mosiah 2:15, 27 — Benjamin Wants to Stand before God with a Clear Conscience**

Above all, Benjamin wants to return to God with a clear conscience and with his garments pure, not stained by the blood of his people (2:27–28). At the beginning of his speech, Benjamin had similarly said that he wasn't speaking to the people "this day" that "I might thereby accuse you," but so that "I can answer a clear conscience before God" (2:15).

### **Mosiah 2:11, 28 — Benjamin States and Restates the Purposes of Their Gathering**

Finally, in conclusion of this first section of his speech, just as he had begun by telling his people that he had been consecrated by his father to be king and had been kept and preserved by God's matchless power (2:11), Benjamin ends by returning to these same points. He notes that "the Lord God doth support me, ... that I should declare unto you this day, that my son Mosiah is a king and a ruler over you" (2:30).

As will become clear as we carefully read this beautifully composed speech, Benjamin's words separate into seven sections, as do many of the Psalms, and as does the Gospel of Matthew. Some scholars have referred to this as a "menorah pattern," echoing the seven-branched configuration of the menorah in the Temple. And in this connection, we recall that Benjamin's speech and Mosiah's coronation was held surrounding the temple.

### **Further Reading**

Corbin Volluz, "A Study in Seven: Hebrew Numerology in the Book of Mormon," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 53, no. 2 (2014): 57–83.

For the most detailed discussion of the many chiasmic levels and structures in Benjamin's Speech, see John W. Welch, "Parallelism and Chiasmus in Benjamin's Speech," in *King Benjamin's Speech: "That Ye May Learn Wisdom,"* ed. John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 315–410. On this first section in particular, see pages 329–336. Each subsequent section is also displayed and discussed in detail in this book chapter.

### **Mosiah 2:28–30 — King Benjamin Declares Mosiah to be His Successor**

In Mosiah 2:29–30, King Benjamin stated, "I say unto you that I have caused that ye should assemble yourselves together, that I might declare unto you that I can no longer be your teacher, nor your king; For even at this time ... I should declare unto you this day, that my son Mosiah is a king and a ruler over you."

That is an official proclamation announcing the new king. At this point, there may have been some kind of investiture, where Mosiah would come up and perhaps be given the brass plates, or the Sword of Laban. After some interruption, King Benjamin resumes in verse 31 with the words, “And now, my brethren.”

In most successions from one king to another, what happens? The king dies and his sons fight over who is going to be the next king. It is very unusual for a king to appoint a son while the king is still alive. Now, there will be a co-regency for the next three years, with Benjamin and his son working together. At that point, King Benjamin will die, but in the meantime, he has provided for a smooth transition from himself to Mosiah, and Mosiah will successfully reign for thirty-three years without war or disruption, as far as we know.

#### 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 2:31–41 — How Is the Next Section of Benjamin’s Speech Organized?**

In this second part of his speech, Benjamin promises his people temporal blessings that will come from obedience (2:31), condemns willful rebellion against God (2:32–33), stresses the accountability of the people (2:34–36), once again condemns willful rebellion against God (2:37–39), and finally promises his people eternal blessings that come from obedience (2:40–41). This section acts as a coda following the installation of Mosiah as the new king. Its central section holds the people accountable, insisting upon their obedience and loyalty to the new king, who stands as an intermediary between the people and their Heavenly King.

#### Further Reading

John W. Welch, “Parallelism and Chiasmus in Benjamin’s Speech,” in *King Benjamin’s Speech: “That Ye May Learn Wisdom,”* ed. John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 315–410.

#### **Mosiah 2:32–33 — What Does the Term “Listeth to Obey” Mean?**

Why does King Benjamin believe that the Atonement is necessary? There are many answers to that question, but among them is the simple fact that we are sinful. He clearly talks about mankind’s sinful nature and that if we *list* to obey—or lean towards—the evil spirit, we are likely to fall into the state of rebellion against God that he advises us so much against. We are in a state of nothingness from which the Lord alone can elevate us. We are dust, we are created as and from the dust. If we are going to be exalted and rise above this mortal state, then the Atonement will be necessary to make that possible.

We are dependent on it. The unifying power of the At-one-ment holds this world together, and King Benjamin talks about the many ways we depend upon God.

### **Mosiah 2:40–41 — King Benjamin Calls upon All of His People to Choose Happiness**

In Mosiah 2:40, King Benjamin says: “O, all ye old men, and also ye young men, and you little children.” In Israelite culture, for some legal purposes, the world was grouped into old men, young men and children. With a life expectancy of roughly about forty, these three categories roughly break down into 10, 20, and 30 years of age. King Benjamin wants the elderly, the young adults, and the youth to consider the blessed and happy state of all those who keep the commandments of God.

#### **Further Reading**

Book of Mormon Central, “[How Can the Book of Mormon Strengthen Marriages and Families?](#) (Jacob 3:7),” *KnoWhy* 302 (April 19, 2017).

## Mosiah 3

### **Mosiah 3:2–5 — King Benjamin Was Visited by an Angel and Quotes His Words**

Section 3 of Benjamin’s Speech runs from Mosiah 3:2–10. These verses seem to be the very words that an angel of the Lord had spoken to Benjamin one night about the coming of Christ. The text does not say how many days or nights beforehand this visitation had occurred. The angel had awakened Benjamin, presumably at night, “And he said unto me: Awake; and I awoke, and behold he stood before me” (3:2).

The first words that the angel spoke to Benjamin were “For the Lord hath heard thy prayers, and hath judged of thy righteousness, and hath sent me to declare unto thee that thou mayest rejoice; and that thou mayest declare unto thy people, that they may also be filled with joy” (3:4). Above all, Benjamin wants all people to know that the Atonement is filled with joy. In the world, there is misery and sorrow, but the one thing that makes this life bearable and something we can enjoy to the fullest is the knowledge of the Atonement.

These teachings come from the angel. Whether they are all of the angel’s precise words is not known, but Benjamin has learned and reports the true essence of these things from the angel. Humans don’t receive messages like this one very often, so when such information is conveyed, we ought to take special note, with heed and diligence, listening carefully to what is said. Notice that the messenger from the Lord said, “Awake!” and Benjamin awoke. And the angel said again, “Awake and hear!” (3:3).

Wakefulness is an important thing. With it, King Benjamin was able to hear and understand all of the teachings about the Atonement that were then delivered to him.

It is possible that Benjamin timed his gathering to coincide with the season of Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. In Jerusalem, people wanted their High Priest to be fully conscious of everything, as he prepared to perform the most important sacrifices of the year on the Day of Atonement. To keep him focused and not to have any debilitating thoughts, the High Priest was kept awake the night before. Interestingly, Benjamin had been praying and was awakened, so he could understand all of these teachings about the Atonement that he then delivered to his people.

### **Mosiah 3:5 — The Christ Will Be Recognized by His Miracles**

Chapter 3 is the doctrinal heart of Benjamin’s Speech. It’s all about the Atonement. The first thing to recognize is the atoning Savior Himself. The angel assures Benjamin that people will know this Redeemer when he comes. He will look like a man and will dwell in a tabernacle of clay, but he will come with powers beyond anything normally seen: “working mighty miracles, raising the dead, causing the lame to walk, the blind to receive their sight, the deaf to hear, and curing all manner of diseases” (3:5).

Among the Dead Sea Scrolls—and this is discussed in this connection in the book, *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, composed and edited by me and Donald Parry—there is a text, 4Q 251, that was unknown until just a few years ago. This Jewish text, written in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century BC, says: “When the Messiah comes, he will heal the sick, make the blind see, raise [or resurrect] the dead, and to the poor announce glad tidings.” And another fragment (4Q 541) from that same cave reads as follows: “They will utter many words against him and an abundance of lies.” So this was an expectation among some Jews, and here you have the Nephites also knowing this around 124 BC. So that we might recognize the power of the coming Lord, a number of things are given to let people identify this person. When Jesus came working all of these miracles, it’s not just that he was doing amazing things, but he does them so that people will know and identify who has come. Of course, the people of the Book of Mormon will also have some of these things happen in their presence, when Jesus appears after the resurrection and says, “Have ye any that are lame, or blind, or halt, or maimed, or leprous, or that are withered, or that are deaf, or that are afflicted in any manner? Bring them hither and I will heal them” (3 Nephi 17:7). He has raised himself from the dead, and others will be raised from the dead. So all of these signs which Benjamin told the people will be a confirmation to them in their land, as well as to all people, that they might be convinced that Jesus was the Christ, the Eternal God, and how to embrace His Atonement.

### Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[Why Did Christ Perform Miracles?](#) (Mosiah 3:5)," *KnoWhy* 508 (March 28, 2019).

### Mosiah 3:7–11 — President John Taylor on the Atonement of the Savior

John Taylor wrote the book *Mediation and the Atonement* when he was President of the Church. It was one of his main contributions as president. He wanted the Saints to understand the Atonement, and his book is a classic. For inclusion in *The Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, Elder Jeffrey R. Holland wrote the [article on Atonement](#), but Elder Holland humbly told us as the editors, "I can't do any better than just to quote John Taylor."

Here is one of President Taylor's comments:

The Savior thus becomes master of the situation—the debt is paid, the redemption made, the covenant fulfilled, justice satisfied, the will of God done, and all power is now given into the hands of the Son of God—the power of resurrection, the power of redemption, the power of salvation .... He becomes the author of eternal life and exaltation. He is the Redeemer, the Resurrector, the Savior of man and the world. (p. 171)

And here is another comment, from a different chapter:

... in some *mysterious, incomprehensible* way, Jesus assumed the responsibility which naturally would have devolved upon Adam; but which could only be accomplished through the mediation of Himself, and by taking upon Himself their sorrows, assuming their responsibilities, and bearing their transgressions or sins. In a manner to us *incomprehensible* and *inexplicable*, he bore the weight of the sins of the whole world; not only of Adam, but of his posterity; and in doing that, opened the kingdom of heaven, not only to all believers and all who obeyed the law of God, but to more than one-half of the human family who die before they come to years of maturity, as well as to the heathen, who, having died without law, will, through His mediation, be resurrected without law, and be judged without law, and thus participate, according to their capacity, works and worth, in the blessings of His atonement. (p. 148–149; emphasis added)

As President Taylor undoubtedly knew, King Benjamin said many of the same things: "Believe that man doth not comprehend all the things which the Lord can comprehend" (4:9). We can know many things. We can understand the symbolism, we can understand the fulfillment of prophecy, we can understand that it's real and we can feel its reality, but the eternal economy in all of this, we cannot fathom.

### **Mosiah 3:7 — Focusing on the Atonement of Jesus Christ**

In this third section of his speech, Benjamin explains that the Lord shall suffer temptations and pain of body, hunger, thirst and fatigue, even more than a man can suffer. There are limits to our physical suffering—the body will check out at a certain extreme point. But perhaps there are not such limits to spiritual suffering, for Jesus would suffer more than a mortal could suffer. The angel says that Jesus would suffer so intensely that blood cometh from every pore (3:7). Symbolically, his blood is sprinkled from his body on all the world as he is performing that Atonement, much like the high priest did on the Day of Atonement as he sprinkled the sacrificial blood on the altar and on the people.

Jesus voluntarily offered to do this in the pre-mortal realm, and he carried through with it. The most amazing part of all of this—on top of all the pain and suffering—is that at any time, even after he said “Not my will but thine be done,” he could have checked out or called down the powers of heaven to intervene on his behalf.

#### **Further Reading**

Book of Mormon Central, “[Did Jesus Bleed from Every Pore? \(Mosiah 3:7\)](#),” *KnoWhy* 520 (June 13, 2019).

### **Mosiah 3:8 — King Benjamin Reveals to His People a Glorious Name of Jesus**

One of the great purposes of this whole assembly is for King Benjamin to give his people a new name “by which they may be distinguished above all the people which the Lord God hath brought out of the land of Jerusalem” (Mosiah 1:11). The name is “Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Father of heaven and earth, the Creator of all things from the beginning” (3:8). This elaborate name of Jesus contains ten nouns. It describes not only Jesus personally, but His role as creator of all things from the beginning. In the ancient world, when a king was crowned, he would receive a set of coronation names or titles that accompanied his given name. For instance, Roman Emperors bore honorific and religious titles of glory, victory, and so on. Here, in this coronation setting, King Benjamin is recognizing the Savior as their heavenly king. Before the seventh section in Benjamin’s speech, all of his people will enter into a covenant whereby they took upon themselves the revealed name of Christ (5:8), that never should be blotted out (5:11). Thereby they become spiritually reborn as his sons and daughters (5:7).

This expanded covenant name would be remembered and used again in the Book of Mormon. In Helaman 14, Samuel the Lamanite stood on the walls of this same city of Zarahemla and prophesied again of the coming of Christ. In Helaman 14:11–12, he says, “for this intent have I come up upon the walls of this city, that ye might hear and know of the judgments of God which do await you because of your iniquities, and also that ye

might know the conditions of repentance; and also that ye might know of the coming of [1] Jesus [2] Christ, the [3] Son of [4] God, the [5] Father of [6] heaven and of [7] earth, the [8] Creator of [9] all things from the [10] beginning; and that ye might know of the signs of his coming, to the intent that ye might believe on his name.” Samuel’s precise recitation and invocation of this holy name, reminding the people of Zarahemla to repent, may especially have pushed his recalcitrant audience over the edge. No wonder they tried to kill him when they could have just ignored him.

Samuel’s Quotation of Benjamin	
<b>Mosiah 3:8</b>	<b>Helaman 14:12</b>
And he shall be called	And also that ye might know of the coming of
Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Father of heaven and earth, the Creator of all things from the beginning;	Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Father of heaven and of earth, the Creator of all things from the beginning;
and his mother shall be called Mary.	and that ye might know of the signs of his coming, to the intent that ye might believe on his name.

Figure 5 Welch, John W., and Greg Welch. “Samuel’s Quotation of Benjamin.” In *Charting the Book of Mormon: Visual Aids for Personal Study and Teaching*, chart 105.

### Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Did Benjamin Give Multiple Names for Jesus at the Coronation of his Son Mosiah?](#) (Mosiah 3:8),” *KnoWhy* 536 (October 17, 2019).

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).

### **Mosiah 3:9 — Jesus Will Be Crucified Because People Will Say He Has a Devil**

Even after all that Jesus would do, some people would try to explain his miracle-working in a secular way. They will “consider him a man,” not a god. But then how can they account for his supernatural, miraculous deeds? They will “say that he hath a devil.” Under the Law of Moses, miracles were viewed with caution. Judges needed to ask, “By what power or authority was this miracle performed?” (see Mark 3:22; Matthew 21:23).

Roman law also strictly prohibited magic and spell-casting. If these things were by the power of the Devil or evil forces, ancient judges were ordered, “Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live” (Exodus 22:18). Anyone, male or female, could not use magic, miracle-working, or sign-giving to lead people to worship or follow some other god or way (Deuteronomy 13:1–4). Such conduct in Israel was seen as violating the first and greatest commandment, loving and having only the Lord as God, and the death penalty was to be enforced very seriously (Deuteronomy 13:5, 8–11). In Roman law, it was associated with treason, the most serious of all crimes. Benjamin’s prophecy explains best why Jesus was rejected and killed. More than any other single text, this passage has informed all my years of study of the trials and death of Jesus.

### **Mosiah 3:11 — The Atonement Will Automatically Cover Three Types of Sins**

Section 4 of Benjamin’s speech (3:11–27) discusses the doctrinal theology and the religious behaviors that are consistent with repentance and the transformation that comes with the Atonement.

In Section 2 of his speech, Benjamin made it clear that people must repent of their own sins and not remain and die an enemy to God (see, for example, 2:38). This will allow the Atonement to make it possible for people to “dwell with God in a state of never-ending happiness” (2:41). As he turns to the legal, religious, and practical operations of the atoning blood of Christ, Benjamin now conveys additional important information that certain transgressions or human conditions will be automatically covered by the “infinite and eternal” Atonement, as Amulek will later call it (Alma 34:15). King Benjamin first tells his people that the Atonement is guaranteed to cover three things:

1. **“His blood atoneth for the sins of those who have fallen by the transgression of Adam”**  
Christ’s atoning blood covers the direct effects of the Fall. As Lehi declared, “the Messiah cometh in the fullness of time, that he may redeem the children of men from the fall” (2 Nephi 2:26–27). Similarly, the Apostle Paul was aware of this doctrine and taught, “For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive” (1 Corinthians. 15:22). The New Testament talks about Jesus as the *second Adam* because Christ counters the effects of the first Adam. King Benjamin understood this too. Thus, we believe that we will be punished for our own sins and not for Adam’s transgressions (Article of Faith 2).

2. “His blood atoneth ... [for those] who have died not knowing the will of God concerning them”

Many people who have lived, have not known the general will of God concerning them. They did not know the plan of God, the plan of redemption, or the plan of mercy, and how to obtain these blessings. They have done things that were wrong and they felt were wrong, but they died not knowing what they should do to reconcile with God concerning that matter. The Atonement will cover all of that as well.

3. “His blood atoneth ... [for those] who have ignorantly sinned”

This third type of sin is somewhat different from the second in Benjamin’s list. This category refers to *specific* things that people have consciously done but were unaware that what they were doing was actually against some point of the law, or involved some particular impurities that they may have come in contact with, not knowing that they had inadvertently contravened a law that they knew full well. The phrase “ignorantly sin” probably seems strange to modern Christian readers. Isn’t sin coming out in open rebellion against God, consciously going against His will. Yes, but while that is generally the case, in fact, it is also quite possible to do something deliberately while being mistaken or completely unaware that doing so actually contravenes a law of God or has unintended consequences that are damaging or have the effects of distancing us from God or other people whom we should love.

In Numbers 15:27–29, the Law of Moses actually makes provisions for covering such “*ignorant sins*.” For instance, someone could unconsciously or accidentally contract impurity or do something while not aware that it was in violation of the Law of Moses. If so, it was considered to be an “ignorant sin.” How would such a sin be taken care of? Perhaps the person was completely unaware that it had even happened. How would then one repent of it, or know to go to the temple and make a sacrifice for it? Actually, that was one of the things that was covered under the Law of Moses on the Day of Atonement. The High Priest’s sacrifice on the Day of Atonement would cover all of the sins and transgressions that had been committed ignorantly.

We don’t think about such accidental matters as sins any longer, but in Benjamin’s day they did. Maybe we should be grateful to Jesus Christ for having taken care of all such things, so that we need not be troubled or afraid on this account.

**Mosiah 3:14–15 — The Day of Atonement Was a Type of Christ’s Atonement**

King Benjamin then explains in Mosiah 3:14–15 that the Lord gave the people many things in the Law of Moses that were types and shadows of things to come. This was to aid them in recognizing the Messiah when He came. For example, the very Day of Atonement is a type and shadow of the Atonement of Jesus Christ in many ways. The

holy name of Jehovah (YHWH) was an important part of the Day of Atonement. It was so important that the Rabbis tell us that this sacred name could not be spoken out loud on any other day. But it needed to be spoken on the Day of Atonement, and it could only be spoken ten times, a perfect number of times. When one counts the number of times that King Benjamin’s speech contains the compound phrases “Lord God,” “Lord Omnipotent,” or “Lord God Omnipotent,” there happen to be ten of them. This bears witness to us that the Lord is perfect, and that through our following Him He “may seal [us] His” (5:15).

#### Further Reading

John W. Welch, “Counting to Ten,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 12, no. 2 (2003): 42–57, 113–114.

### **Mosiah 3:13–15 — How Does the History of the Nephites Differ from that of the Israelites?**

We are fortunate to have in the Book of Mormon—and this is something that we do not have in the Bible—a decade by decade walk with groups like Benjamin and his people who were making the transition from following the Law of Moses up to the time when they were prepared and ready to receive Christ. In this history, we see the Lord sending holy prophets and guiding them step by step (3:13). They were given basic rules along with sublime promises under the law of Moses (3:14), as well as types and shadows (3:15) for those who would understand and not look beyond the mark.

The testimony of Christ is not a light switch that just gets turned on and off. There is a process of transition, and steps are taken to prepare these people. The Lord was heavily invested in this project. He had promised many things to Lehi and Nephi. They had done everything that he had asked them to do. Yet, at several junctures in Nephite history, it becomes perilously close to not working. The Nephites could vanish as quickly as had the Jaredites, and so, at this point, King Benjamin is giving these people a deeper understanding of the Atonement and a deeper understanding of their relationship with God so that they can be prepared and ready.

#### Further Reading

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), 174–183.

### **Mosiah 3:18–19 — The Natural Man Is an Enemy to God**

King Benjamin’s speech has an overall chiasmic structure. It is organized into seven sections (Figure 6).

# Overview of Benjamin's Speech

## Supporting Elements in Mosiah 1–6

### **Preparations (1:1–2:8)**

Successor named and new name to be given; people gathered but not yet numbered; tower constructed

### **First Interruption (2:29–30)**

Coronation proclamation

### **Second Interruption (2:41–3:1)**

Remember, remember, the Lord has spoken; Benjamin calls again for attention

### **Third Interruption (3:27–4:4)**

Thus has the Lord commanded, amen; the people fall to the ground and confess; atoning blood is applied; joy and remission; Benjamin begins to speak again

### **Fourth Interruption (4:30–5:6)**

Remember, and perish not; covenant response of the people; Benjamin accepts their covenant

### **Final Acts (6:1–3)**

Names recorded of all who accepted the name; Mosiah consecrated; priests appointed; people dismissed

## Words of Speech in Mosiah 2–5

### **A. All are indebted to God (2:9–28)**

God is the heavenly king; God has physically created and sustains all people; people should serve and thank God; the hope of exaltation after death

### **B. Consequences of obedience or disobedience (2:31–41)**

Obedience brings victory and prosperity (compare Leviticus 26); prohibition of contention; rebellion and disobedience bring pain and anguish; all are eternally indebted to Heavenly Father

### **C. The angel's testimony of Christ's deeds (3:2–10)**

The Lord Omnipotent will come down in power and goodness; the sacred name of God; the suffering and death of Jesus Christ

### **D. Sanctification by the atonement of Christ (3:11–27)**

The only possibility of reconciliation; putting off the natural man and becoming a saint; people will be judged according to their works

### **C'. Benjamin's testimony of God's goodness (4:4–12)**

God is good, patient, long-suffering; believe in God; God is all-powerful, loving, and glorious; call upon the name of the Lord daily

### **B'. Righteous behavior of the redeemed (4:13–30)**

Living in peace and social order (compare Leviticus 25); prohibition of contention; because God imparts, all must give to those in need; avoid guilt and sin

### **A'. The sons and daughters of God (5:6–15)**

God has spiritually begotten you this day; the only head to make you free from debt; excommunication upon breach of obligations; covenant people know God by serving him; the hope of exaltation after death

Figure 6 Welch, John W., and Greg Welch. "Overview of King Benjamin's Speech." In *Charting the Book of Mormon: Visual Aids for Personal Study and Teaching*, chart 87.

Section 4 is the middle, and the middle of that middle is this chiasmic centerpiece in Mosiah 3:19 (Figure 7):

a For the natural man

b is an enemy to God, and

c has been from the fall of Adam, and

c' will be, forever and ever, unless he

b' yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, and

a' putteth off the natural man."

This was the second chiasm I found in the Book of Mormon, on the morning of August 16, as a missionary in Regensburg, Germany. The first was in Mosiah 5:10–12. Having found that one at the end of Benjamin's Speech, I immediately went back looking to see if Benjamin had used chiasmus elsewhere. Indeed he had.

## Chiasmus in Mosiah 3:18–19

except they *humble* themselves

and become as little *children*, and believe that

salvation was, and is, and is to come, in and through the *atonement*

*blood of Christ, the Lord Omnipotent*.

For the *natural man*

is an enemy to *God*,

and *has been* from the fall of Adam,

and *will be*, forever and ever,

unless he yields to the enticings of the *Holy Spirit*,

and putteth off the *natural man*

and becometh a saint through the *atonement of Christ the Lord*,

and becometh as a *child*,

submissive, meek, *humble*, patient, full of love, willing to submit to

all things

Figure 7 Welch, John W., and Greg Welch. "Chiasmus in Mosiah 3:18–19." In *Charting the Book of Mormon: Visual Aids for Personal Study and Teaching*, chart 130.

This passage, exhorting us to “put off the natural man and become a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord, and become as a child, submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon him,” is one of the most frequently quoted passages in the Book of Mormon in General Conference (see the [LDS Scripture Citation Index](#)). We as a people have sensed that that is the lynchpin of King Benjamin’s speech.

The structure and organization of this speech bears out that centrality. This speech has been carefully orchestrated. These words are virtually the dead center, the pivot point, of Benjamin’s entire speech. The focus of everything is right here, so we get not only Benjamin’s direct statement of its truth and importance, but we also get indirectly this structural verification. Indeed, one can count 2467 words before this perfectly central verse, and 2476 words after it. This is the logical and literary epicenter of King Benjamin’s entire speech and also of the glad tidings of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

#### **Further Reading**

Book of Mormon Central, “[How Was Chiasmus Discovered in the Book of Mormon?](#) (Mosiah 5:11),” *KnoWhy* 353 (August 16, 2017).

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Did King Benjamin Use Poetic Parallels So Extensively?](#) (Mosiah 5:11),” *KnoWhy* 83 (April 21, 2016).