
MOSIAH 1-8

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INTRODUCTION

At the time of his son's coronation, King Benjamin delivered a speech to his people that is rich on many levels and proved to be a turning point in Nephite history and culture. Mormon recognized the power of this address and included it in its entirety in his abridgement of the large plates of Nephi in what is today Mosiah 1-5.

MOSIAH 1:1-2:8 – PREPARATIONS

MOSIAH 1:1-8 BENJAMIN TEACHES HIS SONS

1:1 ***And now there was no more contention.*** Mosiah 1 marks the transition from the small plates of Nephi (1 Nephi to Omni) to Mormon's abridgement of the large plates of Nephi. That abridgement continues to 4 Nephi. But it didn't start with Mosiah 1. The original abridgement started with the story of Lehi and included the nearly 400 years of Nephite history that is covered in parallel in the small plates. Joseph Smith initially translated that section with Martin Harris as scribe, putting it on 116 pages of foolscap paper, which Martin subsequently lost. When Joseph resumed the translation later, the Lord instructed him to instead translate a different record (the small plates) that would cover the same period but with even "greater views upon my gospel" (D&C 10:45). In Mosiah, they simply picked up where they left off. We don't know with certainty if the translation began again with Mosiah, Words of Mormon, or 1 Nephi (and may never know because key portions of the original manuscript were destroyed by water as they lay in the cornerstone of the Nauvoo House until 1882), but the available evidence indicates that Joseph picked up with Mosiah through Moroni, then 1 Nephi through Words of Mormon (small plates and Mormon's transition), then lastly the Title Page.

When they started again with what is Mosiah 1 in our book today, Oliver Cowdery wrote "Chapter III," but there is no earlier material for Mosiah extant today. Where are chapters 1 and 2? What appears to have happened is that Mosiah chapters 1 and 2 were part of the 116 pages that were lost. That is why Mosiah starts seemingly in the middle of a thought and had no chapter heading. D&C 10:41 hints that Joseph had retained some portion of the original manuscript even after the loss of the 116 pages, and some have speculated that he had those two chapters of Mosiah, but it was decided not to include them in the printer's manuscript because they were redundant with Omni and The Words of Mormon.

1:2 **three sons...Mosiah, and Heloram, and Helaman.** Nothing is known of Benjamin's other two sons, but Mosiah was the next king and the person for whom the book of Mosiah is named. Though we don't know details of Helaman's life, he was likely very influential with his nephews, the sons of Mosiah, and their friend, Alma, son of Alma, who named his son Helaman.

1:2-4 **in all the language of his fathers...the language of the Egyptians.** These two entries both tell us something about what the royal family, at least, learned. The "language of his fathers" was certainly Hebrew, and at least some of the plates of brass content (such as Isaiah and other prophets) was surely in Hebrew. Lehi, Nephi, and Jacob would have written in Hebrew also, as shown by the comment in this verse: "that they might know concerning the prophecies which had been spoken by the mouths of their fathers." But why would Benjamin and his sons need to know "the language of the Egyptians" just to read the plates? This indicates that at least part of it was in Egyptian. That part was perhaps the five books of Moses, who grew up in Egypt, was raised in Pharaoh's court, and certainly spoke and wrote Egyptian better than any other language. Hebrew would have been a second language for Moses, probably learned late in life. When God spoke to him in the burning bush and on Mt. Sinai, it would probably have been in his first language: Egyptian. And when he wrote the words of God, it makes sense that he would also write in Egyptian. Thus the plates of brass may have preserved Moses' original writings, and not a translation into Hebrew, which is all we have available to us today (if Moses did write in Egyptian, as proposed).

1:3-4 **were it not for these plates...we must have suffered in ignorance.** Benjamin and his sons knew firsthand what would have happened to them without the plates, for they only had to look at the people of Zarahemla, with whom Benjamin's father had joined, to see the result (see Omni 1:17).

1:7 **remember to search them diligently.** Benjamin commanded his sons to search the plates of brass and the plates of Nephi (verse 6) that they might know the mysteries and commandments of God, and keep them.

MOSIAH 1:9-18 MOSIAH BECOMES THE KING AND ISSUES THE PROCLAMATION

1:10 **the people of Zarahemla, and the people of Mosiah.** It had not been many years since these two cultures had joined together under the leadership of Benjamin's father, Mosiah. They spoke two different languages (Omni 1:17-18) and had hundreds of years of separate history to create dramatic cultural and religious differences. They probably continued to live separately, transact business separately, and marry separately for many years. It appears to be at least one of Benjamin's goals to unite the people during this event, to break down the barriers that kept them looking to their old identities and give them a new, shared one. He surely made progress, but the final joining seems to have come later, in Mosiah 25:13.

1:11 **I shall give this people a name.** Besides the spiritual and covenantal significance, the name, which was revealed in Mosiah 3:8 and 5:8, was the key to uniting them socially, for they would no longer be the people of Zarahemla or Mosiah, but the people of Christ.

1:15 **he gave him charge concerning all the affairs of the kingdom.** The coronation ceremony would take place later and publicly, but the transition of the kingdom to Mosiah happened here.

1:16 ***gave him charge concerning the records***. Mosiah became the keeper of the “plates of brass” and “the plates of Nephi,” which would have included both the large and small plates. He also was charged with care of the royal relics: “the sword of Laban, and the ball or director.”

1:17 We receive a good summary of Lehi and his family’s journey through Arabia in this verse. When unfaithful (at least some of them), “they did not prosper nor progress in their journey, but were driven back.” One recorded instance of this was on the ship, sailing to the promised land (1 Nephi 18), but perhaps they were “driven back” at other times, contributing to their 8 year journey. Benjamin says that “they were smitten with famine,” which was part of their travels in the wilderness (see 1 Nephi 16:35 and 2 Nephi 1:24). They also suffered “sore afflictions,” well attested in Nephi’s text (e.g., 1 Nephi 16:20, 35; 17:1; 2 Nephi 2:1). All of this was done “to stir them up in remembrance of their duty.”

1:18 ***they might gather themselves together, to go up to the temple***. As we shall see from the speech itself, this was not a spontaneous decision. Benjamin planned for a long time what he would say and the events of this gathering, though he may not have revealed the details to Mosiah until the day before. The people were likely gathering anyway, but the proclamation was to go out to let them know that this was the day they would hear the farewell from their beloved Benjamin and welcome the new king, Mosiah, as their leader.

MOSIAH 2:1-8 PREPARATION FOR THE GATHERING

The preparation for the gathering was important to the success of Benjamin’s goals, and the people responded favorably.

2:2 ***there were a great number***. There were more people of Zarahemla than people of Mosiah (see also Mosiah 25:2), the combined group was very large, so much that they couldn’t number them.

2:3 ***offer sacrifices and burnt offerings***. More below on this, but the key point here is that they came in a spirit of obedience, humility, and sacrifice.

2:4 ***a just man to be their king***. Benjamin seems to have been a personally uniting force in the kingdom. Not only did he fearlessly lead his people in battle in his younger years (Omni 1:24; Words of Mormon 1:13), but he led them very much as a servant-king (Mosiah 2:13-14). Remembering all of this was part of the point of the gathering, too.

2:5-6 ***pitched their tents***. The people gathered around the temple, living in their tents for a few days, ready to listen and learn from their beloved king.

every man according to his family. The fundamental organization of the Nephite society at this time was the extended family, and many likely identified themselves by their ‘tribe’ or larger family group, as did the children of Israel after the Exodus.

2:7 ***he caused a tower to be erected***. Though it could have been a last-minute decision, that seems out of character with the rest of the clear preparations. This tower was certainly built long before the gathering in anticipation of the large crowd.

2:8 **they could not all hear his words.** The image we have of this happening on the spot may not correct either—it seems at least possible that Benjamin anticipated this challenge and had scribes make copies of his speech ahead of time and distribute them among the people as he talked.

MOSIAH 2:9–5:15 – KING BENJAMIN’S SPEECH

Benjamin’s discourse starts in Mosiah 2:9, and is divided into seven segments (below). The chiasmic structure of the whole and many smaller parts is impressive and was not accidental, but shows a lengthy preparation, perhaps many months. The center-point of his speech in terms of doctrine, the atonement of Christ, is also near dead-center in terms of content: it is preceded by 2,467 words and followed by 2,476 (John W. Welch, “Benjamin’s Speech: A Masterful Oration,” in Ricks and Welch, *King Benjamin’s Speech*).

Benjamin alludes to many Old Testament scriptures but never quotes any directly. His was a familiarity with the plates of brass that brought it into his daily conversation, but the authority to say what he said was the Holy Spirit—and the words of an angel of God.

Benjamin used unique phrases: 84 appear for the first time in his speech, and 28 of those are unique to him in all of scripture (John W. Welch, “Benjamin’s Speech: A Masterful Oration,” in Ricks and Welch, *King Benjamin’s Speech*).

Finally, Benjamin’s speech correlates well with what we know about ancient Israelite feasts.

FEASTS

The Book of Mormon has its origins 600 years before the time of Christ, so we have to look to the Old Testament to see if any practices in the Book of Mormon align with ancient Israelite feasts and holy days. We don’t know everything about the rituals in that period of time in Judah, but we know enough to demonstrate some fascinating parallels, especially in King Benjamin’s final sermon.

[This section relies heavily on a chapter called “King Benjamin’s Speech in the Context of Ancient Israelite Festivals” by Terrence L. Szink, and John W. Welch, in the book, *King Benjamin’s Speech: “That Ye May Learn Wisdom”* (ed. Stephen D. Ricks and John W. Welch); and “King, Coronation, and Covenant in Mosiah 1-6” by Stephen D. Ricks, in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon* (ed. John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne).]

Exodus 23 and other scriptures, including as Exodus 34; Leviticus 23; Numbers 28-29; and Deuteronomy 16, outline the three major feasts that faithful Jews were to observe each year. The first is the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which is kicked off by the Passover (*Pesach*). The second was the Feast of the Harvest (*Shavuot*), which is often called by its New Testament name, the Feast of Pentecost (meaning fifty days after the Passover). The third was the Feast of Ingathering or Tabernacles (*Sukkot*), which is tied to *Rosh ha-Shanah* (New Year/Day of Judgment) and *Yom Kippur* (Day of Atonement). This feast was considered the greatest feast of all, and is the one we shall examine.

NEW YEAR / DAY OF JUDGMENT (*ROSH HA-SHANAH*)

Let's first look at the characteristics of the celebration of the new year, as we know them, from pre-exilic times (before the Babylonian captivity, meaning Lehi's day).

First, according to Leviticus 23:24-25, **animal sacrifice** was involved:

...in the seventh month, in the first *day* of the month [the start of the Feast of Ingathering]...ye shall offer an offering made by fire unto the Lord.

Likewise, the people of Benjamin offered sacrifices when they gathered at the temple:

And they also took of the firstlings of their flocks, that they might offer sacrifice and burnt offerings according to the law of Moses (Mosiah 2:3).

Secondly, the new year appears to be a time of **judgment**, when the deeds of the old year are judged and covenants made for the new. (Such is the case with us today and our New Year's resolutions.) In the Book of Mormon account, Benjamin reminds them of their fallen state and what their fate will be if they remain an enemy to God. For example, Mosiah 2:37-39:

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

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

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

In ancient days, when the people heard of their potential judgment, they would fall down and cry out in **humility**, pleading for **mercy**. So it was with King Benjamin's people:

AND now, it came to pass that when king Benjamin had made an end of speaking the words which had been delivered unto him by the angel of the Lord, that he cast his eyes round about on the multitude, and behold they had fallen to the earth, for the fear of the Lord had come upon them.

And they had viewed themselves in their own carnal state, even less than the dust of the earth. And they all cried aloud with one voice, saying: O have mercy, and apply the atoning blood of Christ that we may receive forgiveness of our sins, and our hearts may be purified; for we believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who created heaven and earth, and all things; who shall come down among the children of men (Mosiah 4:1-2).

A fourth element of this feast is **coronation**, both of mortal kings and recognition of God's ultimate kingship. This is especially manifest in a number of Psalms, including the 47th:

O clap your hands, all ye people; shout unto God with the voice of triumph.
For the LORD most high is terrible; he is a great King over all the earth.

He shall subdue the people under us, and the nations under our feet.
He shall choose our inheritance for us, the excellency of Jacob whom he loved. Selah.
God is gone up with a shout, the LORD with the sound of a trumpet.
Sing praises to God, sing praises: sing praises unto our King, sing praises.
For God is the King of all the earth: sing ye praises with understanding.
God reigneth over the heathen: God sitteth upon the throne of his holiness.

Benjamin likewise reminds the people of God's kingship:

And behold also, if I, whom ye call your king, who has spent his days in your service, and yet has been in the service of God, do merit any thanks from you, O how you ought to thank your heavenly King (Mosiah 2:19)!

And of course, one of the main purposes of gathering the people at that time was to install Mosiah as the new king in Benjamin's place. Scholars believe that in the Old Testament, this time of year was the preferred time to do a coronation, during which time the king would also exhort the people to follow God and live righteously. This is exactly what happens in these chapters in Mosiah as well.

Fifth, the new year was a time to consider God's role in the **creation** of the earth and mankind. Scriptures such as the early chapters of Genesis and Psalm 148 would be read. Accordingly, Benjamin's speech contains many references to the creation. Christ as "the Creator of all things from the beginning" (Mosiah 3:8), and to the people's appellation of Christ as "the Son of God, who created heaven and earth, and all things" (Mosiah 4:2); Benjamin's statement that God has "created you, . . . and is preserving you from day to day, by lending you breath...from one moment to another" (Mosiah 2:20-21), as well as his other frequent references to God's creative powers (see Mosiah 4:9, 12; 5:15), all fit well into remembrance of God's creative works.

Which leads nicely to the sixth point, **remembrance**. Leviticus 23:24 says, "...In the seventh month, in the first day of the month, shall ye have a sabbath, a memorial..." The last word is *zikeron*, which means "remembrance." In Benjamin's address, the word *remember* or *remembrance* is used 15 times, including, "O remember, remember that these things are true" (Mosiah 2:41), and, "And now, O man, remember, and perish not" (Mosiah 4:30).

DAY OF ATONEMENT (*YOM KIPPUR*)

Now let's examine traditions about the Day of Atonement, which fell on the tenth day of the seventh month, ten days after the new year and just before the Feast of the Ingathering or Tabernacles.

The word "**atonement**" or a variation (atoning, atoneth) appears **seven times** in King Benjamin's speech (Mosiah 3:11, 15, 16, 18, 19; 4:6, 7). Seven is an important number in Hebrew, denoting perfection or completeness. To say something seven times is ritually significant. The purpose of the Day of Atonement is to cleanse the people and the temple from sin. On this day, a priest (later the high priest only) would enter the temple and daub blood from a sacrifice around to ritually cleanse the temple from the people's sins, and the sacrifices themselves would cleanse the people. Though there is no record in the Book of Mormon account of these specific practices (except the references to sacrifice in general), Benjamin's discourse is clearly focused on repentance, cleansing, and purifying, including those who sin inadvertently, an important focus of the Day of Atonement.

The other major feature of *Yom Kippur* is casting lots over **two goats**. One is sacrificed to the Lord and upon the other, the priest lays his hands and symbolically confers the sins of the people, then has it taken out into the desert. Tradition has it that the one of the right hand is dedicated to the Lord (if the lots come up differently, the animals switch places). Likewise, Benjamin speaks of the righteous being on the **right hand** of God and the wicked on His **left**.

It was on the Day of Atonement that the priest was allowed to utter the **name of God**. In fact, the tradition was to utter it **10 times** in the course of the day. In his speech, Benjamin says “Lord God” (which in Hebrew would be Jehovah God) **seven** times and “Lord Omnipotent” (Jehovah all-powerful) **three** times, a total of 10. It’s also interesting to note that seven of those occurrences are when he is quoting the angel. Again, seven plays a significant role (something Joseph Smith would be unlikely to know in 1829 and even harder to include in a rapidly translated text).

Giving to the poor and experiencing **great joy** are also part of the worship activities on the Day of Atonement. King Benjamin’s address speaks of both of these things—admonishing the people to give to the poor (Mosiah 4:26) and showing the great joy felt by the people (Mosiah 4:11-12).

Finally, the priest would pronounce **great blessings** on all the people as part of the Day of Atonement. And so does Benjamin three times in chapter 2 (verses 22, 31, 41) and chapter 6 (verse 1), which is very similar to the priest’s final blessing of asking for their names to be inscribed in the book of life.

THE FEAST OF THE TABERNACLES (*SUKKOT*)

Also called the Feast of the Harvest, the Feast of Ingathering, or just The Feast, *Sukkot* was celebrated five days after the Day of Atonement and was considered the greatest of the three required feasts. The Feast of the Tabernacles was a **pilgrimage**—Israelites were required to come from all over the land to the temple, pitch **tents** or make temporary **booths** (still practiced today by many Jews—which is where it gets the name *Sukkot*, which means “booths”), and assemble as families. But the practice of using booths is not documented until later in Israelite history; in the time of Moses and Solomon, at least, tents are clearly in use (see Exodus 33:8 and 1 Kings 8:65-66). This is exactly the picture we get from Benjamin’s address where the people gathered from the entire land, and in families pitched tents around the temple in order to hear the address (Mosiah 2:1-5).

Just as the Passover celebrates the deliverance from Egypt, Tabernacles celebrated the giving of the **Law to Moses**. The Law is recited and discussed, and the people are invited to renew their covenants with God. The king especially had a key role in this recitation of the law. Every seven years, he was to stand on a **platform** erected for this purpose and read the entire law to the people. So Benjamin also stood on a tower, discussed the commandments of God, and invited his people to renew their covenants with the Lord.

Many more parallels could be given by way of illustration, but this is sufficient to demonstrate that the first six chapters of Mosiah have many parallels to the Jewish Fall holy days and feast. These parallels are intricately woven into the speech and story in a way that would be masterful even for a scholar or Rabbi who knew the practices intimately. Joseph Smith had no such knowledge of Jewish customs and feasts.

OUTLINE OF KING BENJAMIN'S SPEECH (MOSIAH 2:9 – 5:15)

The speech is grouped into seven segments, forming an overall chiasmatic structure:

- A (1) All are indebted to God (2:9-28); first break (2:29-30)
- B (2) Consequences of obedience or disobedience (2:31-41); second break (3:1)
- C (3) The angel's testimony of Christ's deeds (3:2-10)
- D (4) Sanctification by the atonement of Christ (3:11-27); third break (4:1-4)
- C' (5) Benjamin's testimony of God's goodness (4:4-12)
- B' (6) Righteous behavior of the redeemed (4:13-30); fourth break (5:1-6a)
- A' (7) The sons and daughters of God (5:6b-15)

1. ALL ARE INDEBTED TO GOD (2:9–28)

- A Purpose of the assembly (2:9-10a)
- B What is man? (2:10b-11)
- C The laws in Benjamin's kingdom (2:12-14)
- D Man cannot boast of service to fellowmen (2:15-17)
- E Imperatives to serve one another and thank God (2:18-19)
- D' Man cannot boast of service to God (2:20-21)
- C' The laws in God's kingdom (2:22)
- B' What is man? (2:23-26)
- A' Purpose of the assembly (2:27-28)

First break (2:29–30): Coronation announcement

2:10 ***more than a mortal man***. Benjamin was careful to show that he was not above his subjects, that he was no 'divine king,' which was the opposite understanding of what many of his contemporary kings in the Old World were fostering.

2:11 ***suffered by the hand of the Lord***. Benjamin acknowledges that he was chosen by the people and anointed by his father, Mosiah, to be their king, but recognizes that it is truly the Lord that has allowed him to lead the people, and who "kept and preserved" them.

2:12 ***have not sought gold nor silver***. This is according to the writings of Moses, where the Lord said kings should not seek after these things (Deuteronomy 17:17).

2:14 ***labored with mine own hands***. This comment makes one wish for a King Benjamin for our day! Not only did he serve them, but he paid his own salary and kept their tax burden to a minimum.

2:16-18 ***only in the service of your God***. Benjamin's lesson is his own example. He served his whole life, but does not boast in acknowledging this because he was just serving God. He then invites his people to do the same—serve God by serving each other.

2:19 ***thank your heavenly King***. Uniquely used by Benjamin, the phrase "heavenly King" referring to God is not found anywhere else in scripture. How appropriate for the man who is arguably the greatest Nephite king to coin that phrase!

2:20-25 Elder Neal A. Maxwell shared that his mission president required new missionaries to memorize these verses at the beginning of their missions, which words greatly comforted a missionary who had just finished serving in a brutal World War II (Neal A. Maxwell, “King Benjamin’s Sermon: A Manual for Discipline,” in Ricks and Welch).

2:24 ***ye are still indebted to him, and are, and will be, forever.*** It is impossible for man to do enough to fill his debt to God. See comments by Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin, *Institute Manual*, 138.

2:25 ***the dust...belongeth to him who created you.*** We can’t even say that we own our bodies, for God created them out of the dust of the earth, which he created in the first place.

2:27-28 ***that I might be found blameless.*** Not simply checking something off his list, because Benjamin sincerely desires to lead them to Christ, but he knows that he must be obedient to the commandment he has received to teach all this to his people.

2:29-30 ***my son Mosiah is a king and a ruler over you.*** With that long preamble, Benjamin shares the important news of this day—they have a new earthly king.

2. CONSEQUENCES OF OBEDIENCE OR DISOBEDIENCE (2:31–41)

F Temporal blessings of obedience (2:31)

G Willful rebellion against God condemned (2:32-33)

H The accountability of the people (2:34-36a)

G' Willful rebellion against God condemned (2:36b-39)

F' Eternal blessings of obedience (2:40-41)

Second break (3:1): Remember, remember, the Lord has spoken; Benjamin calls again for attention

2:32 ***ye list to obey.*** This phrase is only found in the Book of Mormon, and only in Mosiah (2:32, 33, 37; 3:26) and Alma (3:27). “List” has many potential meanings as a verb. One author proposed that the sense here was like a ship, listing/leaning in one direction (Barbara Cramer, “Which Path Do We List?”, <http://mi.byu.edu/publications/insights/?vol=24&num=6&id=407>). But “list” has at least two other meanings that could be relevant here (see <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/list>). First is “to prepare (ground) for planting.” We certainly need to be prepared to obey the commandments. Additionally, an archaic meaning that fits well is “to like; wish; choose.” In effect, Benjamin is saying like Joshua of old “choose you this day whom ye will serve” (Joshua 24:15).

2:36 ***ye do withdraw yourselves from the Spirit.*** The doctrine here is not that the Spirit leaves us, but that as we sin, we pull away from the Spirit. We close off the path of communication when we allow wickedness into our lives.

3:37 ***cometh out in open rebellion against God.*** Doing things contrary to God’s commandments is a rebellion against what he has asked us to do. We thus become “an enemy of righteousness,” and as with verse 36, we are instructed that we thus eliminate a place for God in our lives. He does not withdraw from us, but continues to wait for us to cleanse our vessel so that he can dwell in a holy temple.

2:38-39 ***guilt, and pain, and anguish.*** These two verses are an apt description of hell, “a never-ending torment” brought on by our disobedience. We cannot bear the presence of God, but instead are filled with remorse that cannot be lessened “forever and ever.”

2:41 **consider on the blessed and happy state.** Many people remark that someone who is keeping the commandments just appears to be happier, which agrees with Benjamin’s point. ‘Look at the contrast,’ he seems to say. ‘The wicked are filled with guilt and pain, while the righteous are filled with happiness and joy.’

3:1 **I have somewhat more to speak.** It appears that Benjamin took a break after verse 41, perhaps as part of the ceremonies of the day or just to allow him to rest a bit before going on. Either way, the break would have given time to the people to ponder his words and prepare them for the next part of his message, which are the words of an angel.

3. THE ANGEL'S TESTIMONY OF CHRIST'S DEEDS (3:2-10)

J The Lord has judged thy righteousness (3:2-4)

K The Lord will descend (3:5a)

L The Lord’s works among men (3:5b)

M Christ’s power over evil spirits (3:6)

N Christ will be divine and bring salvation (3:7-9a)

M’ Christ will be accused of having an evil spirit (3:9b)

L’ Men’s treatment of Jesus (3:9c)

K’ The Lord will ascend (3:10a)

J’ The Lord will judge the world righteously (3:10b)

3:2 **an angel of God.** A messenger from God appeared to Benjamin during the night, woke him up and gave him a message. Benjamin thus became an angel in his own right; delivering God’s message to his people. This whole chapter is the angel’s message, recited by Benjamin apparently verbatim.

3:3 **glad tidings of great joy.** You might think this phrase came from Luke 2:10, but that verse actually says, “good tidings of great joy” (and is the only verse in scripture to use that phrase). “Glad tidings of great joy” is a Book of Mormon phrase, and is only used in the text when referring to the words of angels (here and also Alma 13:22 and Helaman 16:14). In our dispensation, the elders are charged with preaching such “glad tidings of great joy” by the Lord (see D&C 31:3; 79:1) and Joseph Smith celebrates the restoration with the same phrase (D&C 128:19). 1 Nephi 13:37 uniquely uses the shorter phrase “tidings of great joy.”

3:4 **that they may also be filled with joy.** The righteous love the preaching of the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ, because it is a message that fills them with joy, at least partly because it also fills them with the Holy Ghost (compare Acts 13:52). The words of the angel were shown to be fulfilled in the next chapter (4:3, 20).

3:5 **Lord Omnipotent.** Six times Benjamin refers to the Lord as “Omnipotent.” The word itself means ‘all powerful’ and is a clear characteristic of God. It is only found one other time in all of scripture—in Revelation 19:6, as part of the great triumph of God: “And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.”

shall come down from heaven among the children of men. In this verse and the next two, the angel summarizes the mortal ministry of the Savior: he takes on a body, works miracles, heals the sick, raises the dead, causes the lame to walk, heals the blind, makes the deaf hear, casts out devils,

and suffers temptations, pain, and afflictions of all kinds, including so much pain that blood comes from every pore. See Elder Neal A. Maxwell, *Institute Manual*, 138-139.

3:6 **cast out devils**. The angel offers an explanation of this phrase that is enlightening: to cast out devils is to cast out “evil spirits which dwell in the hearts of the children of men.” There is certainly demonic possession, but this indicates that many of the events of Jesus casting out evil spirits had more to do with changing the hearts of those so blessed than with an exorcism.

3:8 **he shall be called Jesus Christ**. Those this was recorded in the Nephite records by Jacob (2 Nephi 10:3) and Nephi (2 Nephi 25:19), Benjamin’s pronouncement demonstrates that the knowledge of the Savior’s name may have been lost to the people. Perhaps it was one of the things preserved on the small plates that were not on the large, so it was not broadly known. Or it may have been that the study of the records was only practiced by a few for many years, and so the general population was not aware of it. Certainly the people of Zarahemla, lacking scriptures and prophetic insight for all those years, would probably have been hearing this for the first time. This announcement is a ‘teaser’ of sorts leading up to the formal declaration in Mosiah 5:8 of the new name Benjamin was told to give to the people.

3:9 **scourge him, and shall crucify him**. The angel is clear about the suffering that Jesus would endure for our sins. Through study of the brass plates, Benjamin would certainly have been familiar with this (compare 1 Nephi 19:9-10).

3:10 **he shall rise the third day from the dead**. Thus is the great summary of the gospel message, the glad tidings of great joy, the good news—Jesus came to Earth as a mortal, died at the hands of evil men, and was raised on the third day by God (see 1 Corinthians 15:3-4, where incidentally Paul is quoting a scripture with a prophesy about Christ nowhere found in our current Old Testament).

4. SANCTIFICATION BY THE ATONEMENT OF CHRIST (3:11–27)

This is the focal point of the speech, the mid-point of the chiasm, the most important content. Everything else lead here and supports the doctrine in these verses.

P The atonement covers the sins of the innocent (3:11)

Q Repentance is necessary for the rebellious (3:12)

R We may rejoice now as though Christ had already come (3:13-15a)

Q' The atonement is necessary for the law of Moses (3:15b)

P' The atonement covers the sins of the innocent (3:16)

S Salvation is exclusively in Jesus Christ (3:17-18a)

T Putting off the natural man and becoming a saint (3:18a-19)

S' Salvation is universal in Jesus Christ (3:20-22)

U The angel’s words are witnessed by God (3:23-24a)

V Final warning of God's judgment (3:24b-27a)

U' The angel’s words are witnessed by God (3:27b)

Third break (4:1-4): 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

3:11 **his blood atoneth.** Three classes of people benefitted by the atonement are listed here. First is “those who have fallen by the transgression of Adam,” meaning all mortals, since we are all under the effects of the fall—salvation is universal. Second, those “who have died not knowing the will of God,” meaning who never heard the gospel message in this life. This powerful Book of Mormon doctrine is unique in the Christian world where all other churches teach that anyone not accepting Christ as Savior is damned. Third, those “who have ignorantly sinned.” Jews of Jesus’ day had great debates about the fate of those who commit sin unknowingly. Benjamin is clear that Christ’s atonement covers those sins, giving those who sin in ignorance an opportunity to repent once they learn eternal truth. All three of these facets speak to the infinite and eternal nature of the atonement (compare 2 Nephi 9:7; 25:16; and Alma 34:12).

3:12 **wo unto him who knoweth that he rebelleth.** Unless the rebellious repents, he will by necessity fall under condemnation, for the atonement cannot work for someone who knowingly sins and repents not.

3:13 **sent his holy prophets.** Prophets or spokesmen for God, are sent to share the message of salvation with the world. Those who believe experience “exceedingly great joy” in the atonement, whether they lived before, during, or after the Garden of Gethsemane and the cross.

3:15 **law of Moses availeth nothing except it were through the atonement.** Salvation cannot come through the law of Moses itself, or any other set of laws, unless it leads people to believe in Christ and make his atoning sacrifice real and effective in their daily lives.

3:16 **little children...are blessed.** Another unique Doctrine to the Latter-day Saints is the salvation of children before the age of accountability. This doctrine is taught plainly in the Book of Mormon, then enhanced in the Joseph Smith Translation and the Doctrine & Covenants.

3:17 **no other name given nor any other way.** The angel is teaching the singleness of the doctrine of salvation through Christ, but as Benjamin speaks this to the people, he is again preparing them for the promised name.

3:19 **natural man is an enemy to God.** A “natural man” is one who gives himself to sinful practices. Though born with divine character, we have to deny ourselves of the things of this world to overcome the natural man and become inheritors of God’s blessings (McConkie and Millet, 2:152-153). This is done by yielding “to the enticing of the Holy Spirit,” thereby becoming “a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord” (see Elder Quinton L. Cook, *Institute Manual*, 140). Such a saint is less like a person of the world and more like a child, “submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit” (see Pres. Henry B. Eyring, *Institute Manual*, 140-141).

3:20-22 One day every person will know of Christ and his mission, then they will stand without excuse. This alludes to the preaching of the gospel in the spirit world, else how could every person who ever lived know of Christ and be held accountable for acting on that knowledge? In Benjamin’s case, he was charged only with teaching his own people, which he did marvelously.

3:23-27 The reminder was given that the words spoken were done by charge from the Lord to the angel, and that those who reject them have a strong judgment awaiting them.

4:1-3 In the third break in the speech, after hearing the words of the angel delivered by Benjamin and reinforced by the Spirit, the people “had fallen to the earth, for the fear of the Lord had come upon them” (4:1). They recognized their own sinful nature and cried out for God to have mercy and

apply Christ's atoning blood to them (it's not clear how they cried "with one voice," but it probably wasn't them speaking in unison, but perhaps someone speaking for the group, expressing the feelings of their collective hearts and they all agreeing with this statement). The Spirit then came upon them powerfully, and they knew they were forgiven and experienced the great peace of the justified. But their prayer had two requests—forgiveness of sins and purified hearts. The second part came next. See Pres. Boyd K. Packer, *Institute Manual*, 142).

5. BENJAMIN'S TESTIMONY OF GOD'S GOODNESS (4:4-12)

A Man's knowledge of the goodness of God (4:5-7)

B Articles of belief (4:8-10)

A' Man's knowledge of the goodness of God (4:11-12)

4:4 **Benjamin again opened his mouth.** It's not clear how long the break was—nothing in the text precludes it from being a longer period of time, or it could have been but a few minutes—but it was probably long enough for Benjamin to rest for a bit and to receive the feedback of the people and see their true repentance.

4:6-7 Benjamin reminded his people of the source of their salvation and the marvelous joy they just experienced, and that they were not done, but needed to "continue in the faith even unto the end of his life."

4:9-10 Benjamin gave seven incremental and sequential steps to achieving salvation, which are (1) believe that he is, (2) believe that he created all things, (3) believe that he has all wisdom and power, (4) honestly admit that man does not comprehend all, (5) believe that you must repent and forsake your sins, (6) humble yourself before God, and (7) ask in sincerity of heart for forgiveness. He then commands them that if they do indeed believe all these things, they need to "do them" (see John W. Welch, "Benjamin's Speech: A Masterful Oration," in Ricks and Welch, *King Benjamin's Speech*).

4:11 **tasted of his love.** As grand as was the experience of the people at this time, it was only a taste of what God had in store for them.

your own nothingness. Benjamin repeatedly reminded them of their nothingness compared to God. Humility is a critical character trait to enable a person to keep the commandments and apply the atonement. With no sense of sin and a fallen nature, man tends to lack a motivation to turn to God except in a time of crisis or personal tragedy.

calling on the name of the Lord daily. Regular prayer in all its forms—personal, couple, family, and groups of worshippers—is an essential part of our staying humble and faithful.

in the faith of that which is to come. This refers to Jesus Christ, who at that time was yet to come.

4:12 The results of staying humble, constant prayer, and an exercise of faith in Christ are outlined here: 1) always rejoice; 2) be filled with the love of God; 3) retain a remission of sins; 4) grow in the knowledge of the glory of God; 5) grow in the knowledge of the truth.

6. RIGHTEOUS BEHAVIOR OF THE REDEEMED (4:13-30)

neighbor! As Latter-day Saints, we must be fastidious about that, and return it in as good if not better shape than when we borrowed it.

4:29 ***I cannot tell you all the things.*** After running through perhaps some of the things that he felt were most important—his ‘pet’ sins—Benjamin finally admitted it is quite impossible to delineate every sin. (Note that the Pharisees in Jesus’ day would have argued with Benjamin on this point; they counted 613 specific commandments in the *Torah* or the books of Moses.)

4:30 ***watch yourselves.*** Since we cannot count every possible sin, the best counsel is to exercise discipline and restraint—to deny ourselves of all ungodliness (Moroni 10:32; also Titus 2:12) by watching our thoughts, words, and deeds.

4:30 ***remember, and perish not.*** To remember is not a passive experience in the Book of Mormon, but a call to action. To “remember” is to be obedient to the covenants that we have made, because we can count on God remembering his part of the covenants and blessing us accordingly.

5:1-6a The fourth break is certainly a longer one. Benjamin wanted to know the reaction to his words, so he “sent among them” to get a reaction. It would take time to go out, talk to the various family clans, and return with feedback. As before, the people “all cried with one voice,” united in their feelings and their resolve. “We believe,” they declared, “because of the Spirit of the Lord Omnipotent, which has wrought a mighty change in us” (v. 2). They had “great views of that which is to come,” meaning that many had experienced visions and revelations from heaven, allowing them to “prophesy of all things” (v. 3). They expressed their complete willingness to “be obedient to his commandments” and avoid “the wrath of God” (v. 5). This is exactly what Benjamin desired (v. 6).

7. THE SONS AND DAUGHTERS OF GOD (5:6B-15)

A Born of Christ (5:6b-8a)

B Obedience to the name of Christ (5:8b-9)

C Excommunication for transgression (5:10-12)

B' Serving the master is the key to knowing his name (5:13-14)

A' Sealed by God (5:15)

5:7 ***ye shall be called the children of Christ.*** At last, Benjamin is satisfied that the people are truly ready for the fulfillment of the promise he had made earlier (1:11). He had told them the name and emphasized the greatness of the person with this name. Now he told them that through the covenant they had made, they had become “the children of Christ” because he had “spiritually begotten” them and changed their hearts.

5:8 ***under this head ye are made free.*** In Galatians 4, Paul explains the doctrine of “the adoption of sons,” which is plainly stated in verse 7: “Wherefore, thou art no more a servant [slave in Greek], but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.” In other words, when we become spiritual sons of Christ and are adopted into his family, we are no longer slaves to sin and Satan as when we were natural men, but sons of God and heirs of all that the Father has. Thus it is that under the leadership (the “head”) of Christ, we are truly made free.

5:9 **he shall be called by the name of Christ.** To be called by a name means to be part of that family, to be fully accepted into it and receive all the benefits and blessings of being associated with that family. See Elder Dallin H. Oaks, *Institute Manual*, 145.

5:10 **be called by some other name.** In Revelation 18, the world is presented with two choices: be part of Babylon or “come out of her” and be the people of God. Those who come out are written in the book of life (Revelation 20:12) and “shall inherit all things” because God will say that he is “my son” (Revelation 21:7).

5:11 **take heed that ye do not transgress.** God will not remove his name from us once given, but we can remove it that it is “blotted out of [our] hearts” through unrepented sin.

5:15 **steadfast and immovable.** When we are built on the rock of our salvation, we are steadfast and immovable, unable to be shaken in our faith or determination to keep God’s commandments.

MOSIAH 6 – MOSIAH FOLLOWS HIS FATHER

6:1 **take the names.** Benjamin recorded the names of every one in his kingdom who had made this covenant, not only as a record of the day’s events, but as a reminder of the promises they had collectively made. No doubt it did not say after their names “People of Zarahemla” or “People of Mosiah,” just “child of Christ.”

6:2 **there was not one soul.** What a great success story—every accountable person there was willing to enter into this new covenant!

6:3 **consecrated his son Mosiah.** The public coronation over, Mosiah officially received the anointing that transferred the kingdom to him.

6:4 **thirtieth year of his age...four hundred and seventy-six years.** The year is thus approximately 124 B.C. (following the footnote dates), meaning Mosiah was born about 154 B.C. He would live to be 63, passing away in approximately 91 B.C. (Mosiah 29:46). The internal consistency of these dates and ages across many pages and stores, given the many witnesses that Joseph Smith never worked on the Book of Mormon text with any kind of notes, is a witness to the truth of the translation—anyone who has authored a complex book like this will verify the necessity of keeping copious notes for small details like years and ages. But Joseph was translating, not authoring, so he just had to record what the Spirit directed him to say, and the internal consistency came because it was a true ancient record.

6:5 **Benjamin lived three years and he died.** Approximately 121 B.C. We don’t know his age, but if he was 70 at his death, he would have been born about 191 B.C.

6:6 **Mosiah did walk in the ways of the Lord.** Mosiah proved to be the equal of his father, a righteous, selfless king who humbly kept the commandments of God.

6:7 **he also, himself, did till the earth.** Like his father, Mosiah did his part to support himself, humbly working in the fields with his people and not relying on them for his support. What a contrast to King Noah, whom we will encounter shortly!

MOSIAH 7-8 – AMMON FINDS THE PEOPLE OF LIMHI

This part of the lesson introduces us to a new story that has only been hinted at before. Mosiah₂ sent some people to try and discover what had happened to some of the Nephites who had returned to their former homeland, the land of Nephi, sometime after his grandfather, Mosiah₁, had led many Nephites north to the land of Zarahemla. They find the descendents of those people there and Mormon backtracks in the chronological history to tell us their story. Before we are done, we will cover three separate story lines that all finally converge back in Zarahemla. See the helpful chart in the *Institute Manual*, 146.

7:1 *who went up to dwell in the land of Lehi-Nephi.* We know about these people from Omni 1:27-30. A few years after Mosiah₁ had led his people away from the land of Nephi (or Lehi-Nephi, as it is called here) to the land of Zarahemla and united with the people of Zarahemla (see Omni 1:12-13), a group of Nephites returned, hoping to reclaim their lands. Perhaps they had decided they liked their old homeland in the highlands better than the river valley of Zarahemla—because of the climate, the quality of the farmland, desire to be near Nephi’s original temple, or something else. Whatever their reason, they were anxious to go back and live there again. So they went up to the land, led by an unnamed man who is described as “strong and mighty” but “stiffnecked” (v. 28). The party had internal problems which resulted in a battle before they even reached the land of Nephi, and all were killed but fifty, who returned to Zarahemla. Sometime later, another group was organized by the same fifty survivors, led by Zeniff (Mosiah 9:1-3) and they set out again (v. 29). This group included a man who was Amaleki’s brother (v. 30). They never came back, nor did the people in Zarahemla ever receive word of what happened to them. Three generations later, Mosiah₂ was being pestered by his people who wanted to know what had become of these people many years before.

7:2 *sixteen of their strong men.* Mosiah determined to send sixteen men to investigate and try to discover what had happened to those people who left about 80 years previously.

7:3 *Ammon.* Mosiah appoints Ammon as the leader of this group. This is not his son, Ammon, who will later be a great missionary among the Lamanites, though it is possible that he named his son after this man. This Ammon was “strong and mighty” and a descendent of Zarahemla, so of the royal line among the people of Zarahemla.

7:4 *they knew not the course they should travel.* As mentioned above, it had been three generations since the Nephites had left Nephi for Zarahemla. No one alive had probably ever been there (or at least, it had been so long that anyone still alive probably couldn’t remember). So the group wandered for forty days looking for it. This gives some idea of the distance from Zarahemla to Nephi: a group wandering through the wilderness without a known course might cover 10-15 miles a day, so perhaps they went perhaps 400-600 miles total, but that’s certainly not on a straight line. Had they known the way, they certainly would have taken much less time, so the distance is certainly less than 400 miles, and possible half that.

7:5 *a hill, which is north of the land of Shilom.* This is probably the same hill where Noah built his watch tower to let him see the whole valley (Mosiah 11:13). It makes sense to camp here because they could probably see the cities and farms below and could use it as a base from which to observe the people before making contact. That Limhi had no troops here shows the desperation of his situation at this time.

7:6 **Amaleki, Helem, and Hem.** Not the same Amaleki as mentioned in Omni 1:12, since this one is Ammon's brother and thus a descendent of Zarahemla.

7:7 The four brothers are immediately arrested. Though not explained here, it is explained shortly (verses 10-11) and with some additional details in Mosiah 21:18-23.

7:9 **Limhi, the son of Noah, who was the son of Zeniff.** Our introduction to Limhi and his family, who will figure prominently in the next several chapters.

7:10 **I, myself, was with my guards without the gate.** Ammon and his brothers surely didn't even know about Limhi's presence, but it turned out to be a blessing, since they achieved an audience with the king, though not until after two days of prison time.

7:13 **ye would not have suffered that I should have worn these bands.** Ammon and his brothers were still bound, but that would be addressed quickly once they explained who they were.

7:14 **my brethren who were in the land of Zarahemla are yet alive.** Limhi had sent forty-three men to try and find Zarahemla some time earlier (Mosiah 8:7-9; 21:25-27), but they came back having only found a land destroyed, causing them to believe that Zarahemla had been overrun. They would have reason to believe this because of the Lamanite wars against Zarahemla, which they must have known about (Words of Mormon 1:13-14; compare to Mosiah 10).

7:15 **better that we be slaves to the Nephites.** This indicates how hard life was for the people of Limhi, that they were willing to become Nephite slaves just to escape the Lamanite rule they found themselves under.

7:16 What a relief it must have been for Ammon's men to finally get word that they were safe and that they could all come into the city, after sitting for two days with no knowledge of what was going on.

7:17 **gather themselves together to the temple.** This was probably the same temple built originally by Nephi, though perhaps modified by Noah during his reign (see Mosiah 11:8-13).

MOSIAH 7:18-33 LIMHI'S SPEECH TO THE PEOPLE

The rest of chapter 7 is a speech that Limhi gave to his people after the arrival of Ammon and his brethren, because he wanted them to "rejoice" with him about this news (Mosiah 7:14).

7:18 'We're not out of the woods yet, but the end is in sight.'

7:19-20 **out of the land of Egypt...out of the land of Jerusalem.** In many places, the Book of Mormon compares Lehi's leaving Jerusalem to the Israelite exodus from Egypt, starting with Nephi himself. For more details, see S. Kent Brown, "Exodus Pattern in the Book of Mormon," <http://mi.byu.edu/publications/transcripts/?id=23> and Terrance L. Szink, "Nephi and the Exodus," <http://mi.byu.edu/publications/books/?bookid=72&chapid=859>.

7:21-22 We'll learn more about this when we go into Zeniff's record next week.

7:22-23 **one half.** The Lamanite tax on the Nephites was half of their crops and flocks, which tax they found "grievous to be borne" and a "great reason" to mourn. As a note of interest and for

comparison, the following countries reportedly have average tax rates nearly the same as or higher than the “grievous” Lamanite tax on the people of Limhi: Angola, Austria, Belgium, Benin, Cuba, Denmark (perhaps the highest with as much as 63%), France, Gabon, Israel Netherlands, Norway, Sweden. A large number of others fall in the 40% or higher range. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tax_rates_around_the_world.

7:26 **a prophet of the Lord have they slain.** This is, of course, Abinadi.

7:27-28 **they did put him to death.** It is interesting to note that Limhi attributes Abdinadi’s death to his teaching of Jesus’ mortal ministry, not his proclamation that Noah (Limhi’s father) and his court were wicked men (“he has reviled the king,” the record says in Mosiah 17:12).

7:29-31 Limhi appears to quote scripture, because he said, “the Lord hath said.” But none of these quotations can be identified as anything in our Old Testament. They were probably additional quotations from plates of brass prophets such as Zenos.

7:33 **turn to the Lord with full purpose of heart.** “Full purpose of heart” is another unique Book of Mormon phrase, similar in meaning to “eye single to the glory of God” (McConkie and Millet, 2:187). In this case, Limhi promises deliverance from their bondage if they do it.

MOSIAH 8:1-21 A SEER

8:2 **rehearse unto them all that had happened.** Ammon stood before Limhi’s people and gave them a summary of their history for the last three generations, since Zeniff had left Zarahemla.

8:3 **the last words which king Benjamin had taught.** Demonstrating the impact Benjamin’s teachings had on him and his group, Ammon teaches them Benjamin’s final speech. The reaction of the people of Limhi was not the same as those who heard it directly from Benjamin, but it did certainly help prepare them to integrate with Nephite society later.

8:5 **the plates which contained the record of his people.** Zeniff had kept records on plates, and that had continued down to Limhi’s time, so Ammon is given these plates that he might know the history of this people also.

8:7 **forty and three of my people should take a journey.** This group of people set out to find Zarahemla but never made it there (which says something about how remarkable it is that Ammon and his group found Limhi’s people). Forty-three hardy men was probably a significant loss while they were gone, since this group of people could not have been very large, especially after Alma left with many of the believers and Amulon and the priests of Noah left as well.

8:8 **traveled in a land among many waters.** We will later learn that they discovered the land of the Jaredites, the same people who made the stone that was found by the people of Zarahemla (Omni 1:20-22). When Limhi’s men arrived there, they found nothing but bones and ruined buildings and some other artifacts.

8:9 **twenty-four plates.** The most important thing they found was we now know to be Ether’s plates of “pure gold.” But they couldn’t read them, hence Limhi’s reason for bringing them to Ammon’s attention.

8:12 ***desirous to know the cause of their destruction***. More than just idle curiosity motivated Limhi to want to know about this destroyed people. Was there a civilization that was conquering and would be coming for them next? This was potentially a life and death situation for a leader.

8:13 ***the things are called interpreters***. See Pres. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Institute Manual*, 147.

8:15-17 ***seer is a revelator and a prophet***. See Pres. Howard W. Hunter's and Elder John A. Widtsoe's comments, *Institute Manual*, 147.

8:19-21 ***how marvelous are the works of the Lord***. This is Limhi's doxology, a prayer-like praising of God. Many psalms are doxologies, and many others are contained in the New Testament.

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