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KnoWhy #104 - How was Mosiah a Type of Christ?

Author(s): Book of Mormon Central Staff

Published by: Springville, UT; Book of Mormon Central, 2016

Abstract: Two kings in the Book of Mormon bore the name Mosiah. The first was the father of Benjamin and king over Zarahemla, while the second was his grandson and is the Mosiah of the book of Mosiah. At first glance, this name could be derived from the Hebrew word messiah (“anointed one”). Kings, after all, were anointed, and so something like this name or title may have been used in the line of Nephite kings. Yet a more likely suggestion is that the name Mosiah derives from the Hebrew word môšîa‘ (mo-she-ah), or “a champion of justice in a situation of controversy, battle or oppression.” As explained by John Welch, the book of Mosiah is a book of saviors and deliverers.

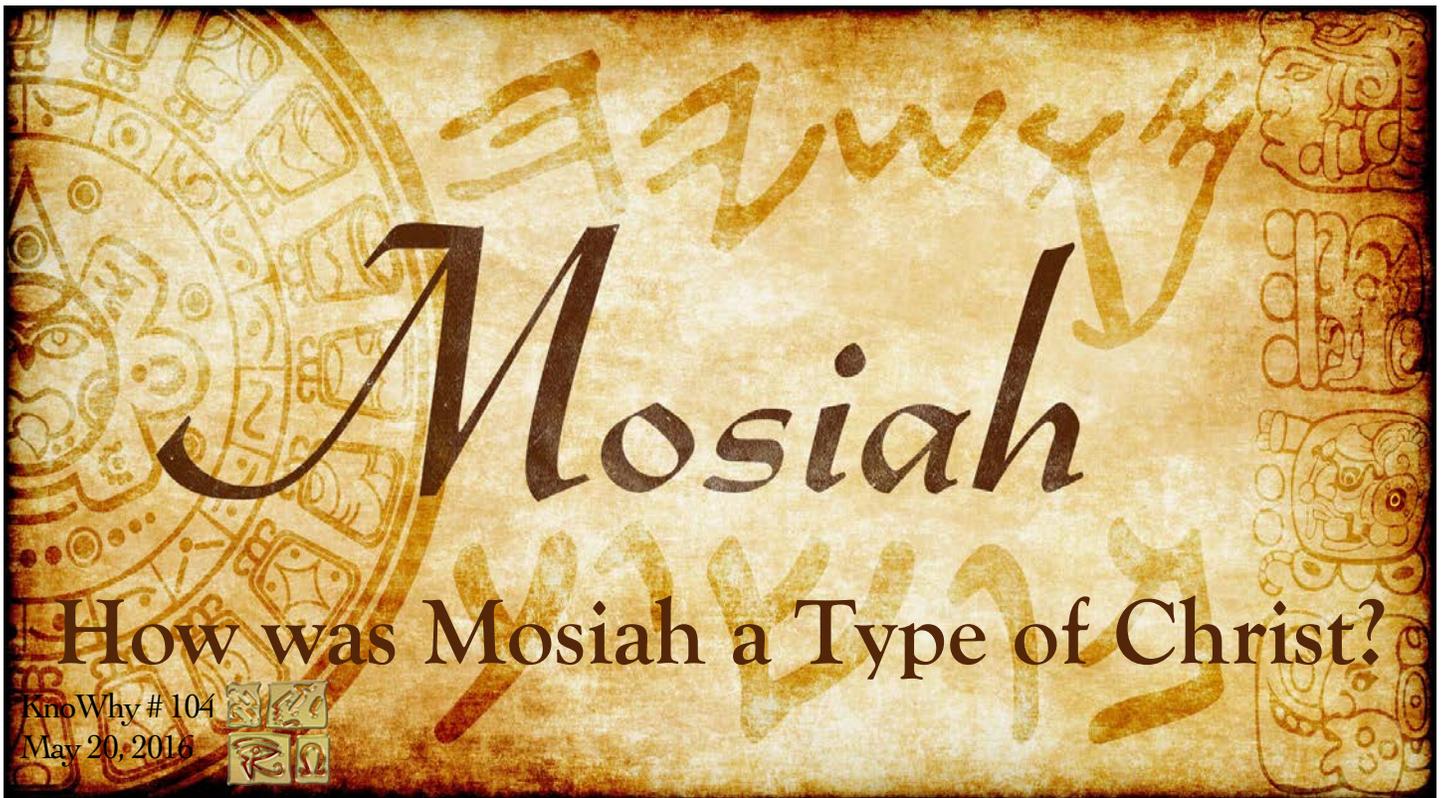


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“But king Mosiah said unto Alma: Behold, I judge them not; therefore I deliver them into thy hands to be judged.”

Mosiah 26:12

The Know

Two kings in the Book of Mormon bore the name Mosiah. The first Mosiah was the father of Benjamin and king over Zarahemla (Omni 1:12, 14–19, 20, 23). The second Mosiah was his grandson, and is the Mosiah of the book of Mosiah. Both Mosiahs are depicted in the Book of Mormon as exemplary leaders of extraordinary practical and spiritual ability. They both were champions of justice and mercy.

At first glance the name Mosiah might be seen as being derived from the Hebrew word *messiah*. Kings, after all, were anointed, and so something like this name or title may have been used in the line of Nephite kings.

A more likely suggestion is that the name Mosiah derives from the Hebrew word *môšia* (*mo-SHE-ah*), or “a champion of justice in a situation of controversy, battle or oppression.”¹ This word comes from the verb *yasha*, meaning “to help,” or “save.”² (Its nominal form *yehsa* means “deliverance, rescue, salvation,” etc.³) As a noun for a deliverer or rescuer, *môšia* appears several

times in the Hebrew Bible. Ehud is called a *môšia* (“deliverer”) in Judges 3:15. The Lord Himself is described as Israel’s *môšia* (“saviour”) in Isaiah 49:26. The term likewise appears in the legal context of the Law of Moses (Deuteronomy 22:27), as well as Moses’ final speech before the children of Israel entered Canaan (Deuteronomy 28:29).

The Why

While it is not possible to determine absolutely the origin of the name Mosiah, or whether *Mosiah* was the given name or the title of these two Nephite leaders,⁴ it is not at all implausible to see it as deriving from the Hebrew word *môšia*. In fact, in the absence of any better alternate propositions, this appears to be the strongest theory.

This is strengthened by the fact that the name Mosiah being derived from *môšia* would have had significance for the Nephites. The two Book of Mormon Mosiahs

share all six of the characteristics common to those who bear this name or title. For example, it was the first Mosiah who delivered the Nephites from the highlands of the land of Nephi down into the land of Zarahemla (Omni 1:12–13). Their escape was nonviolent. Perhaps recognizing that God had “saved” (*yasha*) His people by His right hand (Psalm 17:7), Mosiah named his son “Benjamin,” meaning “son of the right (hand).”

Likewise, the second Mosiah was appointed by the authority of God (Mosiah 2:30–31). He received the people of Limhi under his protection, delivering them from oppression after they had cried out for help (Mosiah 24). He authorized Alma the Elder to organize the church (Mosiah 25), forbade the persecution of church members (Mosiah 27:1–2), promoted justice and “equality among all men” (Mosiah 27:3), and ultimately reformed the Nephite government away from a monarchy and into a system of judges (Mosiah 29).

The book of Mosiah is a book of saviors and deliverers, as explained by John W. Welch:

Indeed, the themes of God’s salvation and the deliverance of his people are strong in the book of Mosiah. It tells of one *môšia* after another. Alma was a God-inspired *môšia* who peaceably saved his people from king Noah and the Lamanites. Zeniff tried to return to the land of Nephi to repossess the rightful property of the Nephites. His efforts failed, however, and his grandson Limhi eventually functioned as a *môšia* by leading his people in their escape back to Zarahemla. . . . Thus, the book of Mosiah, like the book of Judges in the Old Testament, appears to have been meaningfully named.⁵

This not only strengthens the proposed theory above, it also adds significant richness and depth to this book’s ultimate message. The central core of Benjamin’s speech is about the coming of the promised messiah and the only way to be saved through His blood (Mosiah 3). The centerpiece of the book of Mosiah is Abinadi’s testimony that God Himself will come down to suffer and to take upon Himself the iniquity and transgressions of His people, to redeem them and satisfy the demands of justice (Mosiah 15:9; 17:8). The culminating crux of the book of Mosiah is the conversion of Alma the Younger, who after three days and nights of spiritual overshadowing was “redeemed of the Lord” (Mosiah 27:24). The

book of Mosiah repeatedly witnesses that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Savior (*môšia*), the Redeemer, and the Mighty One of Israel (Isaiah 49:26). The book of Mosiah is, in short, a book of salvation.

Further Reading

“Mosiah,” Book of Mormon Onomasticon, ed. Paul Y. Hoskisson, online at <https://onoma.lib.byu.edu/onoma/index.php/MOSIAH>.

John W. Welch, “What Was a ‘Mosiah?’” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, ed. John W. Welch (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1992), 105–107.

John Sawyer, “What Was a Mošia?” *Vetus Testamentum* 15 (1965): 475–486.

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Notes

1. John Sawyer, “What Was a Mošia?” *Vetus Testamentum* 15 (1965): 476.
2. Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 1:448; Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, eds. and comps., *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 446–447. Jesus’ own name ultimately derives from this Hebrew root.
3. Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 447.
4. Similar to how Nephi became a title for those who succeeded Nephi in the kingship (Jacob 1:9–11).
5. John W. Welch, “What Was a ‘Mosiah?’” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, ed. John W. Welch (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1992), 106–107.