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King Benjamin's Sermon: A Manual for Discipleship

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CHAPTER 1

KING BENJAMIN'S SERMON: A MANUAL FOR DISCIPLESHIP

Elder Neal A. Maxwell

First of all, my congratulations to FARMS for sponsoring this celebration of King Benjamin's special sermon.¹ This celebration will be carried out most effectively by those who speak after me and will help us understand even more the ways in which, as we sang together, we "have been given much."²

I should have been more careful in selecting the title of this talk. Using the word *manual* suggests something stodgy and very lengthy, which this sermon clearly is not. King Benjamin's sermon is anything but stodgy and lengthy, especially with what phrases like "lively . . . guilt" and "bright testimony" (Mosiah 2:38; 3:24) signify, and with inspired interrogatories like "Are we not all beggars?" (Mosiah 4:19).

Almost fifty years ago, I arrived at the mission home in Toronto, Canada. The first assignment given to all of us who arrived, by what seemed to me a very stern mission president, Octave W. Ursenbach, was to memorize and recite orally and in unison Mosiah 2:20–25. I could not appreciate back then the significance of what we were reciting.

Furthermore, the ending words of that particular selection about how even the dust of the earth from which we were created belongs to him who created us also seemed quite stern. But it didn't take long for me to appreciate and love that stern mission president and to love those stern words of Benjamin, words that were just what I needed as I came home from World War II as a first sergeant in the infantry after the battle at Okinawa and many months in the Pacific.

We have no biography of King Benjamin; nevertheless, we have his words, which are what we most need for our discipleship. The combined efforts of the angel who inspired King Benjamin and King Benjamin himself, together with the selectivity of Mormon as editor have given us high relevancy amid the paucity of the Benjamin pages. Of course, while a special portion of King Benjamin's sermon was directed by an angel, angels, in turn, "speak by the power of the Holy Ghost" in what is a seamless process (2 Nephi 32:3).

Since the Book of Mormon itself "shall go from generation to generation as long as the earth shall stand" (2 Nephi 25:22), this means, much as we appreciate them today, that the words of King Benjamin will have their widest and greatest influence—personal and global—in the decades ahead.

Benjamin's Character

As for his own exemplification of discipleship, we begin to learn of Benjamin's character well before his sermon. Just as this special king labored to produce his own necessities, he personalized his leadership in other ways. As a warrior-king, he "did fight with the strength of his own arm, with the sword of Laban" in putting down unrest (Words of

Mormon 1:13), to which false Christs, false prophets, and false preachers doubtless contributed (see Words of Mormon 1:16). In this challenging context he was not alone, for there were “many holy men in the land” who assisted him (Words of Mormon 1:17). Thus, well before the great sermon, King Benjamin had been involved with typical single-mindedness in his successful efforts to deal with contention and dissension. He acted, as was his pattern, “with all the might of his body and the faculty of his whole soul” and established peace in the land (Words of Mormon 1:18).

Even with all this turbulence, King Benjamin did not become jaded, nor was he preoccupied with or defined by his role as a warrior-king. Clearly, he knew that his was a spiritual ministry. Even a cursory cruise through modern political and military history attests to how often lesser individuals are both confined and defined by their contemporary events. We never would have had the great King Benjamin sermon if he had been confined and defined by such prior events. Likewise, we would never have had the sermon and his example if he had become desensitized by his victories and achievements. Benjamin’s meekness in the face of his many accomplishments marks this man.

Ours is an age when we yearn for more consistency and for more correct character in the private and public behaviors of secular leaders. Benjamin was Benjamin, whether he was in his garden, on the battlefield, with his family, or practicing statecraft. For him there was no such thing as a public persona. Moreover, how many other warrior-kings, for instance, would have chosen to regard themselves as teacher more than king?

So concerned was Benjamin with his major sermon that he sent among the people to see if they really believed in his

words (see Mosiah 5:1). Benjamin was much more concerned over connecting with his spiritual constituency than with his political constituency. He was continually concerned about communicating. For example, Benjamin did not want his people to forget the name by which they were called (see Mosiah 5:14). Illustratively, too, he was anxious to complete the covenant with them, yet he concluded it only when he was sure that their hearts had been touched and that they understood clearly what he had taught (see Mosiah 5:6–7). Such is the great teaching style of this remarkable man whose sermon we celebrate.

Additionally, though the information on the subject is scanty, we know that Benjamin was a special father. Significantly, his own lack of interest in status and power was apparently successfully transmitted to his sons. Evidently they were not power hungry and did not vie with one another for ascendancy, as so often has happened in the process of political succession. Their father-king had set the example for those whom he affectionately addressed as “O my sons” (Mosiah 1:6). His successor son even tilled the soil just as his father had done, signaling to the people that they were not required to sustain him either (see Mosiah 6:7).

King Benjamin’s tutorial efforts not only included encouraging his sons, but also teaching them in the language of his fathers, as well as teaching them how to appreciate and search sacred records (see Mosiah 1:2–3). “And many more things did king Benjamin teach his sons, which are not written in this book” (Mosiah 1:8). “Many more things” which we do not have, it says. Intriguing, is it not?

In contrast to Benjamin’s effective fatherhood, one cannot help but remember Eli, whose sons “knew not the Lord” and in their iniquity were not restrained (1 Samuel 2:12; see 3:13). With no desire whatsoever to be judgmental, one ponders those comparative implications.

Removing Stumbling Blocks

The general substance of the Book of Mormon itself, of course, encapsulates this rich and special sermon, which is like a sparkling, doctrinal diamond that can be approached and appreciated in so many different ways. Surely King Benjamin kept his promise not to “trifle” with words (Mosiah 2:9), for his was a rich and whole-souled sermon.

Earlier, Nephi wrote of how the Lord would, “in word, and also in power,” remove stumbling blocks in order to help some people believe (1 Nephi 14:1). In our time, the prevailing intellectual pattern is secular, and an “exceedingly great many do stumble” over and experience difficulty in accrediting and taking seriously revelations and sacred records (1 Nephi 13:29). Nephi also advised that the Lord will stir, even “shake,” the kingdom of the devil in order to help bring some therein to repentance (2 Nephi 28:19). For the meek, however, the Book of Mormon removes some very large stumbling blocks, including the clear pattern of revelation set forth therein:

And after God had appointed that these things should come unto man, behold, then he saw that it was expedient that man should know concerning the things whereof he had appointed unto them;

Therefore he sent angels to converse with them, who caused men to behold of his glory.

And they began from that time forth to call on his name; therefore God conversed with men, and made known unto them the plan of redemption, which had been prepared from the foundation of the world; and this he made known unto them according to their faith and repentance and their holy works. (Alma 12:28–30)

This, of course, is the very pattern featured in the great latter-day restoration, which is so rich in revealed knowledge about God’s plan of salvation. Brigham Young was, as

usual, “spot on” in noting how strange the doctrine of modern revelation was in his setting of religious revival, saying:

The first Elders can recollect, when we commenced preaching “Mormonism,” that present revelation and a Prophet of God on the earth were the great stumbling blocks to the people, were what we had to contend against, and were, seemingly, the most potent obstacles in our way to the introduction of the Gospel.³

George Q. Cannon confirmed:

There was a day in our history when it was considered a crime for us to believe in revelation from God. I do not know that that day is entirely past. There was a day in our history when it was considered very improper for us to believe in Prophets or Apostles—that is, to believe that they ought to be in the Church. There was a time when we were indicted by a mob in its written proclamation for believing in miracles. . . . You have doubtless thought, all of you, about the character of the men whom Jesus chose to be His Apostles. They were men who were stumbling-blocks to their generation, for they did not belong to the popular classes. They were not learned men, they were not rich men—that is in the worldly sense of the word—they were not dignified men; and Jesus Himself, the Lord of life and of glory, was a constant stumbling-block to His generation.⁴

After all, revelations do tell us, as Jacob said, of “things as they really will be” (Jacob 4:13), just as the angel revealed to King Benjamin things about the impending Messiah (see Mosiah 3:2, 5–9).

Given the multifaceted richness of King Benjamin’s sermon, it is instructive to note the one thing another prophet cited ninety years later. Helaman chose this passage out of Benjamin’s rich and resplendent sermon:

O remember, remember, my sons, the words which king Benjamin spake unto his people; yea, remember that there is no other way nor means whereby man can be saved, only through the atoning blood of Jesus Christ, who shall come; yea, remember that he cometh to redeem the world. (Helaman 5:9)

As we see from the content of Benjamin's sermon, the so-called mysteries referred to by King Benjamin are actually the plain but precious things required for salvation and for exaltation:

I say unto you, my sons, were it not for these things, which have been kept and preserved by the hand of God, that we might read and understand of his mysteries, and have his commandments always before our eyes, that even our fathers would have dwindled in unbelief, and we should have been like unto our brethren, the Lamanites, who know nothing concerning these things, or even do not believe them when they are taught them, because of the traditions of their fathers, which are not correct. (Mosiah 1:5)

Wise King Benjamin knew personally of the importance of sacred records. Just a few years before Benjamin's reign, some of the people of Zarahemla ended up denying "the being of their Creator" (Omni 1:17). Why? Because they had no sacred record. Within one generation of Benjamin's great sermon, it was reported that:

There were many of the rising generation that could not understand the words of king Benjamin, being little children at the time he spake unto his people; and they did not believe the tradition of their fathers.

They did not believe what had been said concerning the resurrection of the dead, neither did they believe concerning the coming of Christ. (Mosiah 26:1-2)

How ironic that the last words of King Benjamin were lost on “many” of the first generation after him!

The very things a secular society in any age is so quick to discount or to deny are the existence of God and the reality of the resurrection. No wonder King Benjamin prophesied that the reactions of so many to Jesus would be merely to “consider him a man” (Mosiah 3:9). For the Jews, Jesus was and is a “stumblingblock,” and for the Greeks and their philosophical heirs, he is “foolishness” (1 Corinthians 1:23). Some continue to demand a sign, while others emphasize secular wisdom, with each of these tendencies deflecting or rejecting Christ’s divinity.

In Wisdom’s Paths: Prayer and Revelation

Benjamin, who twice pointedly mentions his “clear conscience” (Mosiah 2:15, 17), did not do so to be legalistic; instead, he wanted to do everything he could to keep his people “in wisdom’s paths” (Mosiah 2:36). But the path of wisdom he cited is sharply distinguished from the “world and the wisdom thereof” (1 Nephi 11:35). Benjamin knew that without revelations, prophets, and sacred records, mankind must settle for “preach[ing] up . . . their own wisdom” (2 Nephi 26:20), which is not much of an offering. Only the Holy Ghost can keep us on the strait and narrow path, which is wisdom’s path (see Mosiah 2:36).

It is no safer, therefore, to rely on the mind of flesh than on the arm of flesh. Unfortunately, many pridefully make that mistake. I cite as an example an “ancient retiree from the Research Department of the British Foreign Office [who] reputedly said, after serving from 1903–50: ‘Year after year the worriers and fretters would come to me with awful predictions of the outbreak of war. I denied it each time. I was only wrong twice’”⁵—World War I and World War II!

Of course, the world's wisdom can be helpful—but only like a lighthouse that works some of the time. Observe, for instance, how America currently tries to solve what is becoming the massive challenge of illegitimacy without meaningful concern over the importance of chastity and fidelity. It would be comic if it were not so tragic! Thus the need for revelation and its refreshment is so fundamental.

Mentioned earlier was the seamless web of revelation. Given this reality, one should not be surprised by all the correlations and parallels among various prophetic utterances. Consider, for example, how many sincerely believe that if they simply ask for something in prayer, God will grant it, especially if they ask with at least a modicum of faith. King Benjamin counseled us, however, that while we are to pray in faith, it should be for “that [which] is right” (Mosiah 4:21). The resurrected Jesus so confirmed, saying: “And whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, which is right, believing that ye shall receive, behold it shall be given unto you” (3 Nephi 18:20).

The phrase *which is right* is correlated. Not surprisingly, Paul also understood the need for inspired prayers, saying, “Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered” (Romans 8:26). I hope I am not the only one in this audience who has sometimes wondered what to pray for. Therefore, how much, in the complexities of life's situations, we need to have our very prayers inspired!

When the resurrected Savior viewed his devout followers engaged in prayer, “they did not multiply many words, for it was given unto them what they should pray, and they were filled with desire” (3 Nephi 19:24). Inspired prayers

do not require the multiplying of words. Rather, true petitioners are filled with desire. This role of desire in discipleship is another topic for another time. Can God give us desire or is it something only we can bring to the altar of faith? In any case, we worship an omniscient God, as Benjamin emphatically reminded us:

Believe in God; believe that he is, and that he created all things, both in heaven and in earth; believe that he has all wisdom, and all power, both in heaven and in earth; believe that man doth not comprehend all the things which the Lord can comprehend. (Mosiah 4:9)

In the face of that pleading, that heartfelt entreaty from Benjamin, our need is great for submissiveness to God's will, especially since from time to time you and I, if only innocently, will ask most earnestly for something that is not expedient or right. When it is not granted, this can adversely affect our faith or at least our feelings about God. This may seem to be a minor matter, but in day-to-day discipleship each must work his way through this recurring reality. I find it is more difficult to do when our unanswered but heartfelt petitions involve those we love. Here again we see the instructive practicality and the spirituality of Benjamin.

Submissiveness

The submissiveness of Benjamin in all things tells us how far along he was in his discipleship. In the aggregate, his attributes gave him the impressive authority of example to accompany his holding of the Holy Priesthood. Though to a lesser degree than Jesus, their perfect Master, prophets like Benjamin can with some justification echo his entreaty, "Come, follow me" (Luke 18:22). Such was the case with Benjamin as he followed the Lord's example. Benjamin's

adoration of the Lord led to his emulation of the Lord attribute by attribute. Therefore, he was not only a model king and father, but he was also correspondingly a model disciple, being a “holy” and a “just man” (Words of Mormon 1:17 and Omni 1:25, respectively).

King Benjamin both counted and weighed his blessings. He had a sense of the proportion between large and small blessings, but he also had gratitude for all blessings. On this point, the eminent historian Will Durant wrote of the human need for perspective and proportion, pleading “to know that the little things are little, and the big things big, before it is too late; we want to see things now as they will seem forever—in the light of eternity.”⁶ King Benjamin understood the difference between the large and the small blessings. He understood how God’s generosity and graciousness are expressed in what he and a fellow prophet termed God’s “infinite goodness” and his “immediate goodness” (Mosiah 5:3; 25:10), thus distinguishing between the strategic and tactical blessings, respectively, that he bestows on us.

A second searching interrogatory is eloquently expressed by Benjamin in his superb sermon: “For how knoweth a man the master whom he has not served, and who is a stranger unto him, and is far from the thoughts and intents of his heart?” (Mosiah 5:13).

Discipleship requires extensive thinking about, praying to, and serving the Lord. Otherwise, distance develops. There can be no deep discipleship if we do not think about him, serve him, and have heartfelt intentions concerning him; otherwise, estrangement will engulf us.

If one “mind[s] the things of the flesh,” one cannot “have the mind of Christ” (Romans 8:5; 1 Corinthians 2:16). One such person’s thought patterns are thereby focused

“far from” Jesus, as are the desires and “intents of his heart” (Mosiah 5:13).

Jesus said, “Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly” (Matthew 11:29). If we go unyoked very long, there will be no real understanding on our part. However, when a person combines this divine instruction of Jesus with the answers implicit in the query of King Benjamin, then he or she has exposed the totality of what is required of serious disciples.

Consecration

Benjamin is such a superb example of consecration. He did things with the “faculty of his whole soul” (Words of Mormon 1:18). Such is the very “heart . . . might, mind, and strength” required in connection with keeping the first great commandment (D&C 59:5; see Matthew 22:37). No wonder Benjamin urged us to be sufficiently consecrated to give all that we “have and are” (Mosiah 2:34). How appropriate that his sermon was given near a temple.

However, without consecration, we may be “honorable,” but we are not “valiant” (D&C 76:75, 79). Honorable individuals are certainly not wicked, nor are they necessarily unhappy; they are just unfulfilled. It is not usually what is done but what is left undone that is amiss. In King Benjamin’s consecration, there was no holding back, and it must become the same with us.

The spirit of consecration pervades the lines of King Benjamin’s speech as he urges followers, for instance, “to render to [God] all that you have and are” (Mosiah 2:34), thus touching a raw and reminding nerve in each of us insofar as we hold back some of ourselves.

Ironically, if the Master is a stranger to us, then we will merely end up serving other masters. The sovereignty of

these other masters is real, even if it is sometimes subtle. They do call their cadence, for “we are all enlisted,”⁷ if only in the ranks of the indifferent. To the extent that we are not willing to be led by the Lord, we will, instead, be driven by our appetites and be preoccupied with the lesser things and the pressing cares of the day.

So many of us are kept from eventual consecration because we mistakenly think that somehow, by letting our will be swallowed up in the will of God, we lose our individuality. Abinadi cited the key example, for he spoke of how Jesus let his will be “swallowed up in the will of the Father” (Mosiah 15:7).

What we are really worried about, of course, is not giving up self, but rather selfish things—like our roles, our time, our preeminence, and our possessions. No wonder we are instructed by the Savior to lose ourselves (see Luke 9:24). He is only asking us to lose the old self in order to find the new self. This is part of what Benjamin’s sermon is all about—to put off the natural man in order to come into our spiritual inheritance. So, it is not a question of losing one’s identity but of finding it. Ironically, so many people already lose themselves anyway—but in their consuming hobbies and preoccupations.

Loving-Kindness

Benjamin stressed knowing God’s attributes. Again, he touched firmly though subtly on a profound point. As we come to know the attributes of God, this can awaken us, as King Benjamin said, to our comparative fallen state (see Mosiah 4:5–6). It is true, as you know, that God’s goodness actually draws us to him and thus leads us to repentance. Paul confirmed this (see Romans 2:4). God’s gravitational pull is real. This was well expressed by Jeremiah, speaking

for the Lord: “Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee” (Jeremiah 31:3). Surely the Psalmist was correct in declaring, “Whoso is wise . . . shall understand the lovingkindness of the Lord” (Psalm 107:43). And Benjamin drove that point home. No wonder the Prophet Joseph would say that unless we comprehend the character of God, we do not comprehend ourselves.⁸ Thus, as we read in *Lectures on Faith*, we must first gain a correct idea of the character of God in order to have real faith.⁹ In all these ways, as we come to know God, he draws us to him.

The apogee of Benjamin’s address is the atonement. Benjamin’s foretelling of Jesus’ ministry revealed that Christ would bleed at every pore, “so great shall be his anguish for the wickedness . . . of his people” (Mosiah 3:7). It was real blood, pore by pore, removing any reason to think of the precious liquid as only being symbolic sweat. Benjamin’s reference to Jesus’ great anguish parallels the later-revealed words about how Jesus experienced “the fierceness of the wrath of Almighty God” (D&C 76:107) and, likewise, how Jesus “descended below all things, that he comprehended all things” (D&C 88:6; see D&C 122:8). The perfected personal empathy of Jesus includes his knowing our sicknesses as well as our sufferings as a result of sin (see Alma 7:11–12).

Of the characteristics of a true disciple, given to us by Benjamin, we are not surprised that Benjamin emphasized having no intent to injure others, living peaceably with them, rendering unto others what is due, and not suffering people to be in hunger or poverty. Each of these expressions, of course, branches from the second great commandment. Brigham Young put the various attributes in perspective with these words: “There is one virtue, attribute, or principle, which, if cherished and practised by the Saints,

would prove salvation to thousands upon thousands. I allude to charity, or love, from which proceed forgiveness, long-suffering, kindness, and patience.”¹⁰

Though it may seem obvious, these varied expressions do grow out of genuine love for others. Such concern is not possible if one is selfish or lacking in either empathy or meekness. The fact that the expressions of love occur in such variety is almost incidental to the basic and underlying attribute of love. Thus, for instance, love would clearly and quickly veto stealing from a neighbor, but it would also keep one from withholding from that same neighbor needed and deserved praise. Hence, as Benjamin said, just as it is impossible to catalogue the many ways in which we can sin (see Mosiah 4:30), it is likewise impossible to set forth the many ways we can love and serve others. Therefore, when we engage in various expressions of loving service, we are merely in the service of our God. The second great commandment is really part of the first commandment. Who would care to try to fix the precise border between these two commandments?

Other Virtues

Benjamin was so poignant in his sharp, one-liner inquiry, “For behold, are we not all beggars?” (Mosiah 4:19). In stressing our continuing dependence on God for all the necessities of life, Benjamin moved quickly to note our spiritual dependence—especially our dependence on the atonement, the only means by which we can have a remission of our sins (see Mosiah 4:19–20). Since we are utterly and totally dependent on the Lord, Benjamin urged us to be especially sensitive to others and to impart to them. In the spiritual domain, those who are rich spiritually have a duty to impart to and nurture those who are weak. While Benjamin

stressed the imparting of material and physical substance to the poor, he would doubtless agree with Isaiah about the need to clothe others as well in “the garment of praise” (Isaiah 61:3). Those who have enough bread may shiver for recognition and yearn for the succor of deserved commendation.

Yet in the intensity of King Benjamin’s discipleship, there is also balance. After his exhortation on caring for the poor, he nevertheless urged that we do things “in wisdom and order” (Mosiah 4:27). How like the counsel of the Lord to the Prophet Joseph Smith: “Do not run faster or labor more than you have strength and means provided to enable you to translate” (D&C 10:4). A lack of balance can burn out discipleship. Hence we have Benjamin’s wisdom and order test, and we have the strength and means test given to Joseph Smith by the Lord. I wonder if, in this connection, Benjamin’s time spent gardening and farming in order to avoid being a burden might also have provided him with much-needed therapy and with time for unhurried reflection.

Much emphasis was given by King Benjamin to retaining a remission of our sins (see Mosiah 4:26). We do not ponder that concept very much in the church. We ought to think of it a lot more. Retention clearly depends on the regularity of our repentance. In the church we worry, and should, over the retention of new members, but the retention of our remissions is cause for even deeper concern.

What King Benjamin said with such clarity and humility about becoming more saintly and childlike, in my opinion, has a fulness and specificity unrivaled in all of scripture. In my opinion, if King Benjamin had uttered only the words in Mosiah 3:19, the verse would still rank among the great gems in all our scriptures. This verse is so succinct. By way of comparative illustration, if needed, today’s mis-

sionary handbook could be further compressed into these lines from Alma: "Use boldness, but not overbearance; and also see that ye bridle all your passions, that ye may be filled with love; see that ye refrain from idleness" (Alma 38:12). In a similar way, the goals and the process of discipleship could be compressed into that precious verse 12. Its concision and compression are in such stark contrast to the repetition and multiplication we often see in so many human communications.

Granted, the adjuration for us to be childlike also occurs in the New Testament: "Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:3). But contextuality is given in King Benjamin's sermon:

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 which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon him, even as a child doth submit to his father. (Mosiah 3:19)

It is noteworthy that twice in that verse *submissiveness* is mentioned, since it is the crowning quality needed for consecration.

Yes, Paul wrote helpfully, "[See] that ye have put off the old man with his deeds" (Colossians 3:9). However, King Benjamin parallels and exceeds what is preserved from Paul. Brigham Young, such a careful student of the Book of Mormon, was quick to see and use numerous times in his teachings counsel concerning the natural man, for instance:

How difficult it is to teach the natural man, who comprehends nothing more than that which he sees with the

natural eye! . . . Talk to him about angels, heavens, God, immortality, and eternal lives, and it is like sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal to his ears; it has no music to him; there is nothing in it that charms his senses, soothes his feelings, attracts his attention, or engages his affections, in the least.¹¹

Brigham understood the natural man, as did King Benjamin and the apostle Paul. Paul concurred, of course, noting that to the natural man the things of the Spirit “are foolishness” (1 Corinthians 2:14).

Meekness

Meek King Benjamin could have wallowed in public esteem. He could have worried over how to preserve and keep his image intact. Instead, he was concerned with having Christ’s image in his countenance (see Alma 5:14). Being meek, he quickly deflected praise, as we all should, giving glory to God and deferring to our heavenly King (see Mosiah 2:19).

Benjamin’s impressive meekness actually mirrors the majestic and mutual meekness of the Father and the Son, on which I have reflected lately. So I share these brief thoughts with you. Consider these illustrations of the majestic mutual meekness of the Father and the Son.

Deferential Jesus said:

- “There is none good but one, that is, God” (Matthew 19:17).
- “My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me” (John 7:16).
- “The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise” (John 5:19).

The Father said:

- “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17; Jesus would have known intellectually how well he had done, but to have his Father say it is something else again).
- “And I heard a voice from the Father, saying: Yea, the words of my Beloved are true and faithful” (2 Nephi 31:15; the Father meekly testified to the truthfulness of his Son).
- The Father’s very voice, as we all know, was “small” but penetrating, not “harsh” or “loud” (3 Nephi 11:3).

There is a majestic mutual meekness about the Father and the Son, and we should learn from it. We certainly see meekness in the life and sermon of King Benjamin.

With our joy as their objective, God and Jesus, though profoundly meek, are determined to bring to pass their purposes, for “there is nothing that the Lord thy God shall take in his heart to do but what he will do it” (Abraham 3:17). Indicatively, after completing their vast creative activities, they “watched those things which they had ordered [i.e., their creations] until they obeyed” (Abraham 4:18). What doing that meant, astrophysically, we do not know—but affectionately and determinedly they pursued their “work and . . . glory” in behalf of God’s spirit children (Moses 1:39). Actually, the Lord meekly understates his cosmic competency twice in the Book of Mormon by saying simply, “I am able to do mine own work” (2 Nephi 27:20, 21). Is he ever!

God has foreseen all the details in human wickedness, and he has made “ample provision” so that all his purposes will still come to pass.¹² No wonder Benjamin exhorted us to believe that God comprehends all things, including things we don’t comprehend.

We are counseled by Benjamin to “continue in the faith even unto the end of [our lives]” (Mosiah 4:6). We can be sure that King Benjamin endured well and meekly in the remaining three years of his life after his great sermon (as he taught us to do; see Mosiah 4:30).

One wonders if he still worked in his garden, at least a little bit. If so, did passersby stop to greet him? Did they perhaps notice, near the end, that he was not in his garden anymore?

Revered as Benjamin was, what an engaging experience it must have been to hear him preach personally—especially while sitting in one’s family circle in a tent facing the temple.

But we can hear him now. If we read him reverently, the intervening centuries soon melt away. His earnestness emerges, and his personableness almost caresses us, giving King Benjamin such immediacy and high relevancy as his example combines with such powerful words about discipleship. I wonder if, like meek President Spencer W. Kimball, meek Benjamin also did not realize how unique he was in the eyes of the Lord. How blessed we are to have such models.

Notes

1. The Ninth Annual FARMS Symposium on the Book of Mormon, featuring King Benjamin’s speech, was held on 13 April 1996 in Provo, Utah.

2. “Because I Have Been Given Much,” *Hymns* (1995), no. 219.

3. Brigham Young, in *JD*, 3:158.

4. George Q. Cannon, in *JD*, 22:261–62.

5. Thomas L. Hughes, *The Fate of Facts in a World of Men—Foreign Policy and Intelligence-Making* (New York: Foreign Policy Association, 1976), 48, cited in Richard K. Betts, “Analysis, War, and Decision: Why Intelligence Failures Are Inevitable,” *World Politics* 31/1 (1978): 62 n. 2.

6. Will Durant, *The Story of Philosophy: The Lives and Opinions of the Great Philosophers* (Garden City, N.Y.: Garden City Publishing, 1927), 1.
7. "We Are All Enlisted," *Hymns*, no. 250.
8. See *The Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 343.
9. See *Lectures on Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 33.
10. Brigham Young, in *JD*, 7:133–34.
11. *Ibid.*, 1:2; see *Discourses of Brigham Young* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1954), 260.
12. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 220.