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Learning to Love the Book of Mormon - The Book of Mosiah

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Abstract: This work consists of a rather comprehensive commentary on the verses of the Book of Mormon. I believe it may be read and enjoyed by the casual student of the Book of Mormon who might, for example, find use for it as a reference source. The book's intended purpose, however, is to assist the serious student who would like to begin a thorough, intensive, and searching tour through the book.

Learning to Love the Book of Mormon

Updated August 2013 to February 2014

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Introduction

In the Church, our study and understanding of the Book of Mormon has undergone a most interesting evolution since the book's translation in 1829. As late as the early twentieth century our understanding of the book was not far advanced. Almost no serious studies of the book and its contents had been published, and the book was not heavily used in worship service discourse or in gospel instruction. There was even some skepticism about the literal divine origins of the Book within the LDS community, particularly among the more educated. By the mid 1900s, beginning with an acknowledged assumption of the book's divine origins, Sidney B. Sperry, Hugh W. Nibley, John L. Sorenson, and a few others had launched serious scholarly inquiries into the book. In the mid-1970s the rate of publications on Book of Mormon topics began to increase.

The rate of publications on the Book of Mormon particularly soared after President Ezra Taft Benson, soon after his ordination as president and prophet, called the Church to repentance in November of 1985 and at the April General Conference of the Church in 1986. The Church worked the Book of Mormon into the regular cycle of the new correlated curriculum for adults, and church leaders began using the Book of Mormon more frequently and systematically in speeches and instructional situations. Since then, the book's authenticity as an ancient scriptural record has become more firmly and generally established. Those who remain vocal doubters of the book's literal divine origins are no longer identified with the committed LDS community.

In the October General Conference in 1986, President Benson said:

We must make the Book of Mormon a center focus of our study [because] it was written for our day. The Nephites never had the book; neither did the Lamanites of ancient times. It was meant for us. . . . Under the inspiration of God, who sees all things from the beginning, [Mormon] abridged centuries of records, choosing the stories, speeches, and events that would be most helpful to us. . . .

If they [the Book of Mormon writers] saw our day then chose those things which would be of greatest worth to us, is not that how we should study the Book of Mormon? We should constantly ask ourselves, "Why did the Lord inspire Mormon (or Moroni or Alma) to include that in his record? What lesson can I learn from that to help me live in this day and age?" (*Conference Report*, October 1986, 3-7).

President Benson would later write:

It is not just that the Book of Mormon teaches us truth, though it indeed does that. It is not just that the Book of Mormon bears testimony of Christ, though it indeed does that, too. But there is something more. There is a power in the book which will begin to flow into your lives the moment you begin a serious study of the book. You will find greater power to resist temptation. You will find the power to avoid deception. You

will find the power to stay on the strait and narrow path. The scriptures are called the “words of life” (D&C 84:85), and nowhere is that more true than it is of the Book of Mormon. When you begin to hunger and thirst after those words, you will find life in greater and greater abundance (“The Book of Mormon—Keystone of Our Religion,” *Ensign*, November, 1986, 16:7).

Further:

I would like to speak about one of the most significant gifts given to the world in modern times. The gift I am thinking of is more important than any of the inventions that have come out of the industrial and technological revolutions. This is a gift of greater value to mankind than even the many wonderful advances we have seen in modern medicine. It is of greater worth to mankind than the development of flight or space travel. I speak of the gift of the Book of Mormon (*The Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft] 1988, 51).

President Benson often reiterated the prophet Joseph Smith’s statement when Joseph referred to the Book of Mormon as “the keystone of our religion” (*TPJS*, 194). A keystone, sometimes called the headstone, is the central stone in an arch. It holds all the other stones in place, and if it is removed, the arch crumbles.

Your author has developed the habit, as I read the Book of Mormon, of reading slowly and actually looking for words or phrases or concepts whose meanings are unclear. I search for ideas that are not completely compatible with the framework of knowledge I already possess. I have been surprised to learn that I seldom have to read more than two or three verses before coming upon some puzzlement, large or small. On each occasion, I am left with an unsettled perplexity, a sort of uncomfortable disequilibrium. “Why are there so many verses in this basic scriptural work,” I have wondered, “that cause me to struggle so?” Disquieting as these feelings are, I have come to recognize them as a first step in learning some valuable new insight.

Once I come upon a phrase or verse I don’t understand, I begin my search for the answer by reading and re-reading the “offending” passage, by checking cross references, by reading supplemental explanatory materials, by sometimes asking help of my learned friends, and often praying about the verse. Mercifully, I have found that my efforts are most always fruitful. I am able to re-establish my equilibrium with the verse, and, at the same time, find myself possessing a greater insight on some particular point. With some satisfaction, I then continue on in my reading, only to find the process beginning again a verse or two later. I heartily recommend this same approach to my readers, and I have attempted in this commentary to spare you some of the pain of finding your answers. I hope I have anticipated many of your perplexities as you study the Book of Mormon, yet I suspect that each of us will encounter and be obliged to overcome our own unique set of questions. There is certainly a magic in enduring in this process, for certainly as we do so, we are “treasur[ing] up . . . the words of life” (D&C 84:85).

Your author prefers to think of this work as an “enrichment commentary.” I believe it may be read and enjoyed by the casual student of the Book of Mormon who might, for example, find use for it as a reference source. The book’s intended purpose, however, is to assist the serious student who would like to begin a thorough, intensive, and searching tour through the book. Though it may be useful to the student who wishes to skip from one verse here to another verse there, it is intended to be read sequentially. Some concepts discussed in earlier verses in the book or even earlier verses in a particular chapter may receive more casual attention when encountered later in the text.

This work consists of a rather comprehensive commentary on the verses of the Book of Mormon. Some may have reservations about the basic concept of this book. I am aware of Peter’s warning: “Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of men: but Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost” (2 Peter 1:20-21). I have endeavored in this project not to add or detract from the scripture, but only clarify. Some will say that such a comprehensive commentary is not possible without placing a “private interpretation” on some verses. I have earnestly attempted to avoid assigning any purely individual or private interpretations to the scriptural verses. Your author is a student of the Book of Mormon and in no wise an expert. To create this volume I have prayerfully studied and utilized the thoughts and explanations of many authors and scholars whose explanations of the Book of Mormon verses might be generally considered to be “authoritative” and “scholarly.” I have collected materials from general authorities and from individuals with undeniable scholarly credentials who openly profess a spiritual witness of the book. When I have borrowed their ideas only, and have rephrased them for my purposes, no reference will be cited. When I have quoted another author’s wording, acknowledgment is provided. Indeed, I have begun and completed this project as a student who is simply trying to make it possible for myself and for others to understand the book’s sometimes difficult verses. I acknowledge the fact, however, that my private biases have not been completely eliminated.

I am also sensitive to the need to avoid proof-texting in a work such as this. That is, I have tried very hard to let the scriptures speak for themselves. An author guilty of proof-texting presupposes the doctrine and then seeks support from the scriptures. I have attempted to consider each verse in its historical and sequential context.

I have tried to include timely and necessary background information to make the book’s words, phrases, and verses really come alive. I have tried to avoid rhetoric and concentrate on the meat. It is not my purpose to preach about the principles contained in the book, rather my goal is to improve understanding. This work presupposes, in its reader, an “average” understanding of the Book of Mormon. I have tried to eliminate those commentary materials which would likely be redundant and unnecessary for my

so-called average reader. It is my intent to explain, clarify, and enrich your study and understanding of the book.

The work includes a variety of “supplemental articles” to which reference is made appropriately in the text. Among these supplemental articles is a purely historical telling of the Book of Mormon story entitled, *A Narrative Summary of the Book of Mormon*. From this “historical” summary, doctrinal materials have been omitted, but all characters, events, and places are included. It is hope that this historical account may be useful to the student who wishes to quickly “brush up” on the historical narrative.

A few “housekeeping” notes about this work are pertinent. The text of the Book of Mormon is included in bold with a blue color to clearly distinguish it from the commentary. All commentary is colored black. The paragraphs of commentary material are often preceded by a quoted phrase, also of blue color, without any punctuation except for quotation marks. These are phrases taken directly from the verse of text immediately above the commentary paragraph. The commentary then follows these quoted phrases. Sometimes the verse commentary for a group of verses will precede, rather than follow, the actual text rendering of the verses. This is done if it felt that a word of explanation before reading a passage would be helpful. Most block quotes appear in red print and are not double-indented. Finally, in this current updated version of this commentary (2014) page numbers have been eliminated, as they are considered unnecessary.

In reading the Book of Mormon, often we tend to regard some of the materials contained therein as non-essential. We wonder, “Why was the report of this battle or that incident included in the book?” As we study the book, we will assume that there is no “filler” material in the Book of Mormon. Every item in the book was placed there for a reason and purpose. In making his abridgment of the sacred records of the Book of Mormon people, Mormon wrote, “I cannot write the hundredth part of the things of my people” (Words of Mormon 1:5). Hence, we must assume that all items in the book have been included following thoughtful and inspired consideration.

There is a miracle in the scriptures. If a person reads the scriptures regularly, he or she will invariably have his or her life touched by them eventually. “Whosoever believeth on my words,” the Lord said in reference to the Book of Mormon, “them will I visit with the manifestation of my Spirit” (D&C 5:16). Isaiah prophesied that the Book of Mormon would bring a spiritually blind generation to an understanding of the doctrine of Christ (2 Nephi 27:35; Isaiah 29:24). It has been suggested by those experienced in gospel study that no individual who studies the scriptures daily will be remiss in keeping the commandments.

Our scriptures advise us of several other books of scripture yet to come forth. One day, “all things shall be revealed unto the children of men which ever have been . . . and which ever will be” (2 Nephi 27:11). Perhaps, though, we will never be privileged to receive additional scriptures until we learn to appreciate fully those we already have.

Consider the following testimony of The Book of Mormon by President Ezra Taft Benson:

We invite all men everywhere to read the Book of Mormon, another testament of Jesus Christ.

The Bible sits on the pulpit of hundreds of different religious sects. The Book of Mormon, the record of Joseph, verifies and clarifies the Bible. It removes stumbling blocks, it restores many plain and precious things. We testify that when used together, the Bible and the Book of Mormon confound false doctrines, lay down contentions, and establish peace (see 2 Nephi 3:12).

We do not have to prove that the Book of Mormon is true. The Book is its own proof. All we need to do is read it and declare it! The Book of Mormon is not on trial—the people of the world, including the members of the Church, are on trial as to what they will do with this second witness for Christ” (*Conference Report*, October 1984, 7; *Ensign* November 1984, 8).

I am deeply committed to the book as an authentic ancient scripture. The Spirit has born witness to my soul on numerous occasions as I have studied and pondered its verses. I know with all my heart that the book was written by ancient prophets who intended for their writings to come forth to the world and be translated in our day by Joseph Smith, Jr., through the “gift and power of God.”

Michael J. Preece

The Book of Mosiah

We now begin our study of Joseph Smith's translation of the plates of Mormon. These plates are comprised of:

1. Mormon's abridgment of the large plates of Nephi, including his abridgment of his own history entered onto the large plates of Nephi (Mormon 1-5);
2. some unabridged writings of Mormon directly onto the plates of Mormon (Mormon 6-7); and
3. the unabridged writings of Mormon's son, Moroni (Mormon 8-9, book of Ether, and book of Moroni).

The book of Mosiah, with its twenty-nine chapters, covers a period of only about forty years from 130 BC to 91 BC. Those authors whose writings have been abridged by Mormon to form the book of Mosiah include: king Benjamin, Zeniff, Mosiah—the son of king Benjamin—and the senior Alma. Before beginning your study of the text, please read carefully the *Narrative Historical Summary of the book of Mosiah*.

Chapter Outline of Mosiah

A brief outline of the book of Mosiah, worth committing to memory, is as follows:

Mosiah 2-5 King Benjamin's Speech

Mosiah 3 The Natural Man

Mosiah 9-22 Account of the People of Zeniff, Noah, and Limhi

Mosiah 11-17 The Preaching and Martyrdom of Abinadi and the Conversion of Alma

Mosiah 23-24 The Senior Alma and his People in the Wilderness

Mosiah 27 The Rebellion and Conversion of the Younger Alma and the Four Sons of Mosiah

The book of Mosiah begins with a father, king Benjamin, instructing his sons, as was the custom in ancient Israel (Deuteronomy 6:7).

Mosiah Chapter 1

1 And now there was no more contention in all the land of Zarahemla, among all the people who belonged to king Benjamin, so that king Benjamin had continual peace all the remainder of his days.

verse 1 The author of these initial materials in the book of Mosiah is king Benjamin. Note, however, that Benjamin is not the first person or persona in these writings. The first person in the book of Mosiah, and indeed in the remainder of the books in the Book of Mormon is no longer the author of the individual books. Who is the first person? He is the one who abridged the record, the prophet Mormon.

2 And it came to pass that he had three sons; and he called their names Mosiah, and Helorum, and Helaman. And he caused that they should be taught in all the language of his fathers, that thereby they might become men of understanding; and that they might know concerning the prophecies which had been spoken by the mouths of their fathers, which were delivered them by the hand of the Lord.

verse 2 “he called their names Mosiah, and Helorum, and Helaman” Benjamin’s kingship will soon be bestowed on his son Mosiah. It is never explicitly stated that Mosiah was Benjamin’s firstborn son, but this seems likely since his name here is mentioned first.

“he caused that they should be taught in all the language of his fathers” Benjamin’s three sons were taught to read and write the form of writing in which the small and large plates of Nephi were written. What language was this? If you have not yet read the article, *The Language of the Book of Mormon*, then please do so now. The language of the large and small plates is Hebrew, written using a reformed or cursive style of Egyptian hieroglyphics.

The large and small plates of Nephi, plus the brass plates of Laban, constituted the “standard works” of the Church of Jesus Christ among the Nephites. The brass plates contained the word of the Lord from the creation down to the ministry of Jeremiah. The large and small plates of Nephi contained “the sayings of our fathers from the time they left Jerusalem” (see verse 6).

“the prophecies which had been spoken by the mouths of their fathers” These prophecies were available to the sons of king Benjamin in the large and small plates of Nephi, two of their “standard works.”

“which were delivered them by the hand of the Lord” “Which” refers to the “prophecies,” and “them” refers to “their fathers.”

3 And he also taught them concerning the records which were engraven on the plates of brass, saying: My sons, I would that ye should remember that were it not for these plates, which contain these records and these commandments, we must have suffered in ignorance, even at this present time, not knowing the mysteries of God.

verse 3 Here in this verse, Mormon records the beginning of a quotation of King Benjamin's.

We have previously discussed the meaning of the expression “mysteries of God.” In general we might say that mysteries are spiritual truths which may be grasped only through divine revelation. We might divide them into two types:

1. A mystery may be a point of doctrine that is not understood by an individual because that individual simply has insufficient knowledge of the matter. The point of doctrine may be basic and not particularly sacred, speculative, or secret. To one man a

point of doctrine may be a mystery, but another may understand the doctrine, and to him it is not a mystery. This type of mystery is available by revelation from the Holy Ghost based on one's obedience.

2. Also a mystery may be a point of doctrine that is unusually sacred or esoteric, and one should not speak freely about it. Usually the Lord has not given a complete revealed explanation of this type of mystery, nor is it necessarily his intent to do so. Here in verse 3, definition (1) applies.

4 For it were not possible that our father, Lehi, could have remembered all these things, to have taught them to his children, except it were for the help of these plates; for he having been taught in the language of the Egyptians therefore he could read these engravings, and teach them to his children, that thereby they could teach them to their children, and so fulfilling the commandments of God, even down to this present time.

verses 3-4 Mormon is still quoting king Benjamin, which quotation continues through verse 7. We are taught explicitly that the brass plates of Laban were written in the Egyptian language. Perhaps they were written in the same language used by the Book of Mormon authors—Egyptian-type glyphic script with a distinct set of glyphic characters constructed for writing Hebrew text with Hebrew manners and culture. A recent suggestion has been made that the five books of Moses may have been written on the brass plates in Egyptian, but that “the prophets” (Isaiah, Malachi) on the brass plates were probably written in Hebrew (see Thomas A. Wayment, “The Hebrew Text of Alma 7:11,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, 2005, 14:98). See also the commentary for Alma 7:11.

verse 4 “that thereby they could teach them to their children, and so fulfilling the commandments of God” Parents are commanded to teach gospel truths to their children (Deuteronomy 6:6-7; Moses 6:58-62; D&C 68:25).

5 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.

verse 5 “have his commandments always before our eyes” Here is a vital principle. Unless you the reader “have his commandments [the scriptures] always before [your] eyes,” you also are in danger of dwindling in unbelief.

The expression “traditions of their fathers” refers to the oral traditions passed from generation to generation by the Lamanites. These unwritten doctrinal and

historical traditions invariably became altered in the passing. They are summarized in the commentary for Enos 1:14 and Mosiah 10:12-17.

6 O my sons, I would that ye should remember that these sayings are true, and also that these records are true. And behold, also the plates of Nephi, which contain the records and the sayings of our fathers from the time they left Jerusalem until now, and they are true; and we can know of their surety because we have them before our eyes.

verse 6 Benjamin testifies of the truth and value of the scriptures. **“These sayings”** are Benjamin’s teachings in verses 3 through 5 above. **“These records”** are the brass plates of Laban.

“the plates of Nephi” In this case this expression refers to both the large and the small plates of Nephi. Obviously the materials contained upon the plates of brass and upon both the large and small plates of Nephi were somehow made available to the Nephite people and became their scriptures.

7 And now, my sons, I would that ye should remember to search them diligently, that ye may profit thereby; and I would that ye should keep the commandments of God, that ye may prosper in the land according to the promises which the Lord made unto our fathers.

verse 7 Trite though they may seem, here are the grand keys to exaltation: study the scriptures and keep the commandments.

“promises which the Lord made unto our fathers” We have discussed previously the Lord’s promise to the Book of Mormon people: “Inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments, ye shall prosper” (1 Nephi 2:20). There is also a corollary to that promise: “Inasmuch as ye will not keep my commandments ye shall not prosper in the land” (Omni 1:6).

8 And many more things did king Benjamin teach his sons, which are not written in this book.

9 And it came to pass that after king Benjamin had made an end of teaching his sons, that he waxed old, and he saw that he must very soon go the way of all the earth; therefore, he thought it expedient that he should confer the kingdom upon one of his sons.

verse 9 It is interesting to note that Benjamin conferred the kingdom on his son Mosiah fully three years before Benjamin’s death (see Mosiah 6:5). This was a practice not unheard of in ancient Israelite culture (see the commentary for Mosiah 6:5). During these three years Mosiah and his father may have administered the kingdom jointly.

10 Therefore, he had Mosiah brought before him; and these are the words which he spake unto him, saying: My son, I would that ye should make a proclamation throughout all this land among all this people, or the people of Zarahemla, and the people of Mosiah who dwell in the land, that thereby they may be gathered together; for on the morrow I shall proclaim unto this my people out of mine own mouth that thou art a king and a ruler over this people, whom the Lord our God hath given us.

verse 10 “throughout all this land among all this people” Benjamin instructs his son Mosiah to announce his speech to take place the following day. He is to announce throughout the land to all the people. Just what size land is referred to here? The phrase “land of Zarahemla” may refer to at least two and sometimes three different land areas. First, there is the greater land of Zarahemla, bordered on the south by the narrow strip of wilderness, on the east and west by the East and West Seas, and on the north by the land Desolation. Second, the text may refer to the local land of Zarahemla, that land which immediately surrounds the city of Zarahemla. Finally, on occasion, the expression land of Zarahemla may be used to refer to the city of Zarahemla. Likely examples of this latter usage are found in Alma 2:15 and in Alma 15:18. In the verse we are now discussing, Benjamin likely has reference to the local land of Zarahemla including the city of Zarahemla and that land immediately surrounding the city.

Note that at the time of king Benjamin, the “people of Zarahemla” (the Mulekites) and the “people of Mosiah” (the Nephites) are still counted separately.

“whom the Lord our God hath given us” It is interesting to note that the king in ancient Israel was thought to be chosen by God (Stephen D. Ricks, “The Ideology of Kingship in Mosiah 1-6,” a FARMS reprint, August 1987). It is obvious that Benjamin believed that God had called Mosiah to be king. It was traditional that the eldest son succeed his father, though the king had his prerogatives if he felt God wanted otherwise. As previously mentioned in verse 2 of this chapter, we are never told that Mosiah was Benjamin’s eldest son, though it is likely since his name is mentioned first in verse 2 of this chapter.

In our commentary of Mosiah 1-6, we will comment on some other features of the Nephite concept of kingship and how closely it correlates with that of the ancient Israelite view of kings.

11 And moreover, I shall give this people a name, that thereby they may be distinguished above all the people which the Lord God hath brought out of the land of Jerusalem; and this I do because they have been a diligent people in keeping the commandments of the Lord.

verse 11 “that thereby they may be distinguished above all the people” In English we would be more likely to say, “that thereby they may be distinguished from all the people.” The construction in this verse is awkward English but excellent Hebrew

(John A. Tvedtnes, “The Hebrew Background of the Book of Mormon” in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, 90).

12 And I give unto them a name that never shall be blotted out, except it be through transgression.

verses 10-12 These are most intriguing and provocative verses. Benjamin’s people will gather “on the morrow.” Two of the purposes of the gathering, as explained in verse 10, are to announce Benjamin’s retirement and bestow the kingship on his son Mosiah. Another purpose is mentioned in verse 11: “I shall give this people a name, that they may be distinguished above all the people which the Lord God hath brought out of the land of Jerusalem.” What exactly is going to happen to this people gathered at the temple? What great blessing are they about to receive? Keep in mind that these people are not spiritual novices. They are already a baptized and commandment-keeping people who had been “diligent” in “keeping the commandments of the Lord.” Yet they are about to receive a blessing which will render them unique among all Book-of-Mormon peoples. What is this great blessing? We will learn in Mosiah 5:7-9 that the name to be given to the people is that of the Savior Jesus Christ. Benjamin’s people will hereafter be called, as long as they continue in righteousness, by the name Christ. This title will symbolize a sacred covenant between the Lord and his people (Mosiah 5:7). This covenant, involving a great spiritual endowment of power and knowledge, seems likely a covenant or set of covenants similar to those entered into by members of the Church today in the temple, the temple endowment. The temple endowment and the other covenants made available to us in the temple, result in a special covenant relationship between man and the Lord that “never shall be blotted out, except it be through transgression.” *Blotted out* means removed.

13 Yea, and moreover I say unto you, that if this highly favored people of the Lord should fall into transgression, and become a wicked and an adulterous people, that the Lord will deliver them up, that thereby they become weak like unto their brethren; and he will no more preserve them by his matchless and marvelous power, as he has hitherto preserved our fathers.

verse 13 All covenants with God impose an obligation upon the covenant maker. The loftier the covenant, the more binding the obligation. Since Benjamin’s people are about to enter into a covenant which will render them “highly favored,” they must beware lest they fall into transgression. If they were to fall, the Lord would “deliver them up” to spiritual destruction.

14 For I say unto you, that if he had not extended his arm in the preservation of our fathers they must have fallen into the hands of the Lamanites, and become victims to their hatred.

15 And it came to pass that after king Benjamin had made an end of these sayings to his son, that he gave him charge concerning all the affairs of the kingdom.

verse 15 “he gave him charge concerning all the affairs of the kingdom” It is apparent that in this verse Mosiah is given charge over the temporal affairs of the kingdom. In the next verse he will be given charge over the kingdom’s spiritual affairs.

16 And moreover, he also gave him charge concerning the records which were engraven on the plates of brass; and also the plates of Nephi; and also, the sword of Laban, and the ball or director, which led our fathers through the wilderness, which was prepared by the hand of the Lord that thereby they might be led, every one according to the heed and diligence which they gave unto him.

verse 16 Benjamin passed on to his son the records, the sword of Laban, and the Liahona. These three items have been regarded as the three tokens of Nephite kingship (Gordon C. Thomasson, “Mosiah: The Complex Symbolism and the Symbolic Complex of Kingship in the Book of Mormon,” a FARMS reprint).

“plates of Nephi” Mosiah would have been given charge over both the small plates of Nephi and the large plates of Nephi.

In addition to the items mentioned here in verse 16, Mosiah was also given (or subsequently obtained) a set of “interpreters.” For a discussion of the interpreters, see the commentary for Mosiah 8:13 and Appendix A, *The Process of Translating the Book of Mormon Plates in Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2. With the interpreters he would later translate the twenty-four gold plates comprising the record of the Jaredites (see Mosiah 8:13, 19; 28:11-17). Do we have access to this translation today? We probably do not. Rather we have the book of Ether which is probably *Moroni’s* independent translation of the twenty-four Jaredite plates. Alternatively, it is possible that the book of Ether is Moroni’s abridgment of king Mosiah’s translation of the Jaredite record.

All of these items (the small plates of Nephi, the large plates of Nephi, the sword of Laban, the Liahona, and the interpreters) will be passed along to Alma the younger, then to Alma’s son Helaman. From Helaman, they will be passed along the line of prophets, eventually to Mormon and Moroni. Moroni will eventually bury Mormon’s abridgments of the large plates of Nephi, the small plates of Nephi, the sword of Laban, and the Liahona where they would later be discovered by Joseph Smith (D&C 17:1). Also Moroni will bury a set of the interpreters, the Urim and Thummim, fastened to a breast plate. Apparently these interpreters were the same as those used by the brother of Jared. Whether or not Mosiah’s interpreters were the same as those later delivered to Moroni and then to Joseph Smith is unknown.

Mosiah chapters 1-6 include the account of the coronation of Benjamin's son Mosiah. Brother Stephen D. Ricks has compared Mosiah's coronation with the coronation ceremonies of the Hebrews and other ancient near eastern cultures recorded in the Old Testament and other texts ("The Coronation of Kings," a FARMS reprint, July 1989). He cites a few similarities which will be mentioned in the commentary for these chapters. An example is found in this verse. In ancient Israel, during the coronation of a new king, various tokens of kingship were regularly bestowed upon the new monarch. In the Old Testament, these included such things as a "copy of [the] law" which the king was required to read (Deuteronomy 17:18-19), the diadem or crown, and other material symbols of power. In this verse these various objects were given to Mosiah as symbols of his power and leadership.

17 Therefore, as they were unfaithful they did not prosper nor progress in their journey, but were driven back, and incurred the displeasure of God upon them; and therefore they were smitten with famine and sore afflictions, to stir them up in remembrance of their duty.

verse 17 The prophet Mormon comments upon the travails and the cause of those travails experienced by the families of Lehi and Ishmael as they sojourned in the wilderness before coming to the New World (see particularly the commentary for 1 Nephi 16:35).

18 And now, it came to pass that Mosiah went and did as his father had commanded him, and proclaimed unto all the people who were in the land of Zarahemla that thereby they might gather themselves together, to go up to the temple to hear the words which his father should speak unto them.

verse 18 "the temple" Just when this temple was built in Zarahemla and by whom we are not informed. Probably it was built by the senior Mosiah, the father of Benjamin, during his reign as king over the Nephites and the people of Zarahemla. This temple is actually the second Nephite temple, as the first had been built centuries before by Nephi himself in the land of Nephi (see 2 Nephi 5:16).

It is interesting to note that in ancient Israel the temple site always served as the site of coronations (Ricks, 1989). We will note, as we continue our study of the Book of Mormon, that the entire Nephite society was quite temple-centered. Nephite kings made important announcements at the temple (Mosiah 2:5-6; 7:17). When the resurrected Jesus Christ visited the Nephites, he appeared to them at their temple in the land Bountiful (3 Nephi 11:1-10). Even the wicked king Noah spent extravagant amounts of money to furnish the temple.

Mosiah Chapter 2

Scripture Mastery

Mosiah 2-5 King Benjamin's speech

Mosiah 2:17 When ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God.

Mosiah 2:20-21 If you should render all the thanks and praise, yet ye would be unprofitable servants.

Mosiah 2:22-24 And behold, all that he requires of you is to keep his commandments; and he has promised you that if ye would keep his commandments ye should prosper in the land. And now, in the first place, he hath created you, and granted unto you your lives, for which ye are indebted unto him. And secondly, he doth require that ye should do as he hath commanded you; for which if ye do, he doth immediately bless you; and therefore he hath paid you. And ye are still indebted unto him, and are, and will be, forever and ever; therefore, of what have ye to boast?

Mosiah 2:38 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.

Nothing specific is known about Benjamin's birth, though we can speculate that he was probably born between 195 and 187 BC. If he acceded to his father's throne at age thirty, then his reign began some time between 165 and 157 BC. Thus, both he and his father Mosiah each ruled about 40 years in Zarahemla. He fought a major war with the Lamanites around 160-150 BC. He was likely in his late 60s at the time of his sermon.

King Benjamin had fought a good fight. He had led his people and wielded the sword of Laban in their defense against the attacking Lamanites whom he had driven out of the land. He had successfully contended with "false Christs," "false prophets, and false preachers and teachers," and he had dealt with "much contention and many dissensions" among his people (Words of Mormon 1:12-18). In his sermon, we will learn that although he was a military hero in leading his people to victory against attacking Lamanites, he was meek and unassuming. Elder Neal A. Maxwell said of him, "Benjamin's meekness in the face of his many accomplishments marks this man. . . . 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?” (*King Benjamin’s Speech Made Simple*, ed. John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks [FARMS: Provo, Utah], 3).

He was now ready to report his stewardship to his people. As we have already learned, Benjamin had three primary reasons for calling his people together: (1) to announce his retirement; (2) to name a new king (Mosiah 1:10); and (3) to ask his people to covenant to take upon themselves the name of Christ (Mosiah 1:11-12).

Benjamin’s sermon may be divided into three separate orations, each treating a different topic:

1. Mosiah 2:9-41—This is the report of his royal stewardship in which he declares that he had provided his people with temporal and spiritual peace.

2. Mosiah 3:1-27—Here he speaks as a prophet teaching his people how to achieve spiritual success. He relays to his people the words of an angel emphasizing Christ’s ministry and atonement.

3. Mosiah 4:4-30—This is his discourse on how people can obtain remission of their sins through the principle of service.

This sermon was delivered about 124 BC. It is likely that Mormon recorded onto the plates of Mormon the entire account of Benjamin’s speech without abridging it. It is actually difficult to classify this great sermon. It is, at once, a prophetic text, a coronation text, a covenant renewal text, a farewell speech, a doctrinal discourse, and a personal testimony.

King Benjamin’s sermon has been oft analyzed by able scholars and is generally highly regarded today as a masterful oration. It has not always been so. It has taken us as a people a long time for our understanding of his speech to mature. B. H. Roberts viewed the speech as an elementary discussion, as if given, he said, to “little children who were taking first lessons” (“God’s Great Men: Jacob and Benjamin,” *Millennial Star* 50 [3 December 1888], 774). Sidney B. Sperry saw the speech as “remarkable in many respects,” but he thought it was “highly improbable that Benjamin had received much instruction in the making of sermons or speeches” (*Book of Mormon Compendium* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1968], 293).

Benjamin’s speech has been credited with facilitating the transition in Nephite government between kingship and a more democratic form of government, the rule of judges (John W. Welch, FARMS *Brown Bag Lecture*, April 8, 1998). This was accomplished by certain features of the speech including Benjamin’s teaching that he as king was no better than any other person in the society (2:10-11). Benjamin made certain that his people understood that the only real king was God (2:19). In traditional Israelite coronations, only the king entered into a covenant with God, however in Benjamin’s speech every person in the kingdom was allowed to enter into the covenant (5:2-7). Through the speech the people became spiritually begotten, free, and empowered (3:17; 5:7-9). Benjamin shared the royal duties such as caring for the poor (4:16, 21-30), and he prohibited slavery (2:13).

King Benjamin's Speech and the Feast of Tabernacles

One of the exciting developments in Book of Mormon research in the past few years has been the discovery of evidence of the ancient Israelite pilgrimage festivals in the Book of Mormon. No single Book of Mormon source has been more fertile for these discoveries than King Benjamin's sermon. There is good reason to believe that the events recorded in Mosiah 2-6 took place during a Nephite observance of the Israelite Feast of Tabernacles.

Among the features of this account that are typical of the Israelite Feast of Tabernacles are the pilgrimage of whole families to the temple site, the sacrifice of animals, and the people's dwelling in tents. The mention made of the Feast of Tabernacles in the Old Testament suggests that its purpose was to enable the Israelites to renew their covenant with God, and that appears to be what the Nephites were doing as they assembled at their temple (Mosiah 5:5; 6:1). If you have an interest in this topic, please read the supplemental article, *The Jewish Pilgrimage Festivals and Their Relationship to King Benjamin's Speech*.

Covenant Renewal Pattern

Another interesting pattern found in King Benjamin's sermon is described by Blake T. Ostler ("The Covenant Tradition in the Book of Mormon," in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, 230-40). In the Israelite pilgrimage festivals and on the occasions of the coronation of a new king or ordination of a high priest, as described in the Bible, Brother Ostler has discovered a pattern of a covenant-renewal ritual with eight distinctive features. These are:

1. The gathering of the people, usually to the temple (Mosiah 1:10, 18).
2. The introduction of the person who will stand as the representative of the people before God and state the terms of the covenant (Mosiah 2:1, 9).
3. The covenant speech emphasizing the reasons why the people ought to be obedient to the terms of the covenants (Mosiah 2:21).
4. The outlining of the terms of the covenant (Mosiah 2:22-24).
5. Summarizing the blessings of obedience to the covenant and the penalties or cursings for disobedience (Mosiah 5:8-10).
6. Identifying those to stand as witnesses for the covenant (Mosiah 2:14).
7. The recording of the covenant (Mosiah 6:1).
8. Formal dismissal from the session (Mosiah 6:3).

A similar pattern has been identified in the gathering of the people to the temple in the land of Nephi by King Limhi (see Mosiah 7:17–8:4).

Farewell Speech Pattern

Scholars have recently taken an interest in similarities in the farewell speeches of many ancient religious and political leaders. Certain themes appear consistently in these addresses given by people such as Moses and Socrates at the end of their lives. It almost seems as if these ancient speakers were following a customary pattern. William S. Kurz has published a detailed study comparing twenty-two addresses from the classic and biblical traditions (“Luke 22:14-38 and Greco-Roman and Biblical Farewell Addresses,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 104 [1985]: 251-68). Kurz signals four of the elements as particularly common to Hebrew farewell addresses: The speaker:

1. proposes tasks for successors
2. reviews theological history
3. reveals future events
4. declares his innocence and fulfillment of his mission.

These elements all appear in King Benjamin’s sermon.

Treaty/Covenant Pattern

Yet another ritual pattern has been identified in King Benjamin’s speech by Stephen D. Ricks (“Treaty and Covenant in King Benjamin’s address” in *Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon*, [FARMS, 2002], 389-94). This is the “treaty/covenant pattern” in ancient Israelite literature—a literary feature that was completely unknown when the Book of Mormon was published in 1830 and was not identified and studied until the past two generations. In 1954 George Mendenhall described in detail the connection between a treaty pattern from ancient Hittite (inhabitants of Asia Minor or Turkey from 1900 to 1200 BC) treaties and Israelite covenant making (“Covenant Forms in Israelite Tradition,” *Biblical Archaeologist* 17 [1954]: 66). He identified the specific elements of the treaty/covenant pattern:

1. The king/prophet gives a preamble that introduces God as the one making the treaty or covenant or that introduces his prophet as a spokesman for God. Benjamin’s covenant assembly preamble in the book of Mosiah begins: “These are the words which [Benjamin] spake and caused to be written, saying” (Mosiah 2:9). Although Benjamin is speaking, he is clearly acting as the mouthpiece of God. In fact, a sizable part of his address consists of words that had been made known to him “by an angel from God” (Mosiah 3:2).

2. The king/prophet gives a brief review of God’s dealings with Israel in the past. The book of Mosiah passage includes a long account of the past relations between King Benjamin and his people as an *a fortiori* (with even a stronger reason) argument for the people’s obligation to God (see Mosiah 2:19).

3. The king/prophet notes the terms of the treaty or covenant, listing specific commandments and obligations that God expects Israel to keep. Benjamin’s address

also contains numerous commandments; for example: “Believe in God. . . . Believe that ye must repent of your sins and forsake them, and humble yourselves before God; and ask in sincerity of heart that he would forgive you” (Mosiah 4:9-10).

4. The people bear witness in formal statements that they accept the treaty or covenant. Following King Benjamin’s address, the people express a similar desire “to enter into a covenant with [their] God to do his will, and to be obedient to his commandments” (Mosiah 5:5). They further witness their willingness to obey by allowing their names to be listed among those who have “entered into a covenant with God to keep his commandments” (Mosiah 6:1).

5. The king/prophet lists the blessings and curses for obedience or disobedience to the treaty or covenant. The curses and blessings in Benjamin’s speech are implied rather than stated outright: “Whosoever doeth this shall be found at the right hand of God. . . . Whosoever shall not take upon him the name of Christ must be called by some other name; therefore, he findeth himself on the left hand of God” (Mosiah 5:9-10).

6. The king/prophet makes provisions for depositing a written copy of the treaty or covenant in a safe and sacred place and for reading its contents to the people in the future. The words of King Benjamin were written and sent out among the people, not only so they could be studied and understood but also, it can be surmised, so they could serve as a permanent record of the assembly (see Mosiah 2:8-9). At the end of Benjamin’s address, when all of the people expressed a willingness to take upon themselves Christ’s name, their names were recorded and presumably preserved as a memorial of the covenant (see Mosiah 6:1).

Coronation Ceremony Pattern

Mosiah 2-5 is also a coronation ceremony for Benjamin’s son Mosiah. Kingship in ancient Israel and in the ancient Near East and the various steps of the coronation ceremony remained unexamined until the first decades of the twentieth century, when they became the subject of systematic investigation. The account of Mosiah’s coronation contains the following four key elements of ancient Israelite coronations:

1. The sanctuary (temple) as the coronation site. A society’s most sacred spot is the location where the sacred act of coronation takes place. For Israel, the temple was that site (see 2 Kings 11:14; 1 Kings 1:45; and 1 Kings 1:39). In the case of the Nephites, the temple at Zarahemla was the sacred site chosen for Benjamin’s address to the people and for Mosiah’s consecration as king (see Mosiah 1:18).

2. Installation in office with insignia. For a biblical example, see the coronation of Joash (see 2 Kings 11:12). At the coronation of Mosiah, Benjamin gave him certain objects, passing on the official records of the people (the plates of brass and the plates of Nephi), the sword of Laban, and the miraculous ball—the director or liahona (see Mosiah 1:15-16).

3. Anointing. To anoint the king with oil was a significant part of coronation ceremonies in ancient Israel and in the ancient Near East generally. The Bible records the anointing of six kings: Saul, David, Solomon, Jehu, Joash, and Jehoahaz. Indeed, the name-title Messiah, which was used to refer to several of the kings of Israel, means “anointed” or “the anointed one,” no doubt referring to the rite of anointing the king during his installation in office. Following his address and the people’s renewal of the covenant, Benjamin “consecrated his son Mosiah to be a ruler and a king over his people” (Mosiah 6:3). The context does not indicate whether this “consecration” included anointing. However, some ritual act was evidently involved since almost the beginning of Nephite history, for Jacob mentioned a coronation that included anointing. He reported that his brother Nephi, the first king, “began to be old, and he saw that he must soon die; wherefore, he anointed a man to be a king and a ruler over his people now, according to the reigns of the kings” (Jacob 1:9). “According to the reigns of the kings” clearly refers to the pattern of kingship in Judah, with which Nephi was personally familiar.

4. Receiving a throne name. In many ancient societies a king received a new name or throne name when he was crowned king. Several Israelite kings had two names, a birth name and a throne name. Similarly, use of a single royal title marked the early Nephite kings. Jacob wrote, “The people having loved Nephi exceedingly, . . . wherefore, the people were desirous to retain in remembrance his name. And whoso should reign in his stead were called by the people, second Nephi, third Nephi, and so forth, according to the reigns of the kings; and thus they were called by the people, let them be of whatever name they would” (Jacob 1:10-11). While we do not know that this new name was given to the Nephite rulers as part of the coronation rite, there is every reason to expect that it was.

John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks said of king Benjamin’s speech:

Many points have deeply impressed us about Benjamin’s speech. Our studies have convinced us that if a person were to sit down to write such a speech, that person would need to know hundreds of facts and details; and after years of research seeking to grasp all of those details correctly, that author would still be left with the staggering task of embedding all that information fluently and purposefully into an organized composition that accomplishes simultaneously multiple objectives and does so in an unassuming and artistically lucid manner. Benjamin’s speech is not a creation that just happened. Its very existence, with all that it enfolds, testifies of God, that he is, that he loves his children despite their weaknesses, and that he blesses those who keep his commandments.

We conclude, both on spiritual and intellectual grounds, that Benjamin’s speech bears true and valuable testimony of the prophesied atonement of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Creator of the heavens and the earth and all things that in them are. We apologize if it takes readers more than a day and a half to read this book [*King*

Benjamin's Speech Made Simple], but we remind the impatient that Joseph Smith took only about that long to translate this section in the Book of Mormon containing King Benjamin's Speech (*King Benjamin's Speech Made Simple*, Introduction).

1 And it came to pass that after Mosiah had done as his father had commanded him, and had made a proclamation throughout all the land, that the people gathered themselves together throughout all the land, that they might go up to the temple to hear the words which king Benjamin should speak unto them.

verse 1 In ancient Hebrew culture one always went “up to the temple” implying that the temple was located on a high vantage point. Ascending the “mountain of the Lord's house” (Isaiah 2:2) was a ritual climb to the presence of the Lord.

2 And there were a great number, even so many that they did not number them; for they had multiplied exceedingly and waxed great in the land.

verse 2 We do not know the size and population of the land of Zarahemla in 124 BC, but it is possible to speculate:

1. The people were given only one day's notice to gather (Mosiah 1:10). This would make it unlikely that any point in the land of Zarahemla was more than twenty miles from the city. If in fact Benjamin's speech did take place at the time of the Feast of Tabernacles, as has been suggested above, then this point might be rendered invalid. In that case the people would have already been intending to gather for the observance of the Israelite pilgrimage festival.

2. “The number who attended Benjamin's assembly was somewhat greater than could be accommodated ‘within the walls of the temple’—likely the plaza or sacred courtyard area” (Mosiah 2:7). Initially the king had supposed that the crowd could fit into the area so that he might speak to them directly, but the group proved too big to hear the aged ruler. John Wesley, at age 70, was able to preach to 20,000 people in the open in England, which suggests that the size of the assembly in Zarahemla was perhaps a little larger. The extent of the land plus the number of people assembled suggest that the population centered in Zarahemla at the time of Benjamin, about 125 BC, was on the order of 25,000, many of whom lived in villages near the settlement, especially along the river” (John L. Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*, 156-57).

3 And they also took of the firstlings of their flocks, that they might offer sacrifice and burnt offerings according to the law of Moses;

verse 3 Here is evidence that King Benjamin's speech coincided with the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles which was also called the Festival of the New Year. In the Jewish world, the new year festival traditionally began with burnt offerings of animals.

“they also took of the firstlings of their flocks, that they might offer sacrifice” See the important commentary for 2 Nephi 2:9.

4 And also that they might give thanks to the Lord their God, who had brought them out of the land of Jerusalem, and who had delivered them out of the hands of their enemies, and had appointed just men to be their teachers, and also a just man to be their king, who had established peace in the land of Zarahemla, and who had taught them to keep the commandments of God, that they might rejoice and be filled with love towards God and all men.

5 And it came to pass that when they came up to the temple, they pitched their tents round about, every man according to his family, consisting of his wife, and his sons, and his daughters, and their sons, and their daughters, from the eldest down to the youngest, every family being separate one from another.

6 And they pitched their tents round about the temple, every man having his tent with the door thereof towards the temple, that thereby they might remain in their tents and hear the words which king Benjamin should speak unto them;

verses 5-6 “tents” Perhaps this is further evidence that this occasion coincided with the ancient Jewish holiday known as the Feast of Tabernacles. This annual festival among ancient Jews was also called the Feast of Booths. It took place in the autumn and commemorated the completion of the agricultural year and celebrated the beginning of the new year. It was also held to recall Israel’s wilderness pilgrimage and to renew Israel’s covenant with the Lord. “Booths” were shelters constructed of branches and vines. The original significance of the “booths” derived from an agricultural practice: to protect the olive orchards in the month of harvest (September), their owners used to guard them by night, standing in these booths. Later on, the booth was reinterpreted as a symbol of Israel’s wilderness experience. Each celebrant had to provide himself with a booth in which he slept and ate all his meals for seven days. This was done in remembrance of Israel’s journey through the wilderness.

If you have not already read the supplemental article *The Jewish Pilgrimage Festivals and Their Relationship to King Benjamin’s Speech*, then you might wish to do so now.

7 For the multitude being so great that king Benjamin could not teach them all within the walls of the temple, therefore he caused a tower to be erected, that thereby his people might hear the words which he should speak unto them.

verse 7 “he caused a tower to be erected” The building of wooden structures from which the prophet may speak to his people at important times of covenant making is well-established Hebrew tradition. For example, Josiah stood upon a “pillar” (2 Kings 23:3), Solomon built a “scaffold” (2 Chronicles 6:13), and Ezra stood upon a “pulpit of wood” (Nehemiah 8:4). Why did Benjamin build a “tower” and not a pulpit or scaffold or

pillar? It is interesting that the “pulpit of wood” upon which Ezra stood was translated from the Hebrew word which may be transliterated in English “migdal” or “migdawl.” This Hebrew word is commonly translated from the Hebrew as “tower.”

See also the commentary on “tower” in Omni 1:22.

8 And it came to pass that he began to speak to his people from the tower; and they could not all hear his words because of the greatness of the multitude; therefore he caused that the words which he spake should be written and sent forth among those that were not under the sound of his voice, that they might also receive his words.

9 And these are the words which he spake and caused to be written, saying: My brethren, all ye that have assembled yourselves together, you that can hear my words which I shall speak unto you this day; for I have not commanded you to come up hither to trifle with the words which I shall speak, but that you should hearken unto me, and open your ears that ye may hear, and your hearts that ye may understand, and your minds that the mysteries of God may be unfolded to your view.

verse 9 “hear my words which I shall speak unto you this day” The phrase “this day” may mean more than merely “at this time.” It may have significant religious import. The words “this day” appears eighteen times in the Book of Mormon. Eleven of these appear in conjunction with Nephite gatherings at their temples. It has been suggested in an article (“This Day” by John W. Welch, Donald W. Parry, and Stephen D. Ricks, a FARMS reprint, 1990) that this phrase may be specific for one of the three Jewish pilgrimage festivals or feasts which may well have been observed by the Nephite people. “All Israelites were commanded to assemble at their temple ‘before the Lord God’ three times a year on their high holy days (see Exodus 23:17). The Nephites were ‘exceedingly strict’ in observing the law of Moses (in their looking forward to the Christ whom that law typified; see 2 Nephi 5:10; 11:4; Jarom 1:5; Alma 30:3). It thus follows that they also regularly gathered in holy assemblies on such days” (*Ibid.*). For a review of these three annual festivals, see the supplemental article *The Jewish Pilgrimage Festivals and Their Relationship to King Benjamin’s Speech*.

“mysteries of God” These “mysteries of God” likely refer to the temple endowment covenants about to be revealed to the people. Benjamin is able to reveal these mysteries by virtue of his holding the Melchizedek priesthood (D&C 84:19).

10 I have not commanded you to come up hither that ye should fear me, or that ye should think that I of myself am more than a mortal man.

verse 10 “I have not commanded you to come up hither . . . that ye should think that I of myself am more than a mortal man” It is interesting to note that in ancient Mesopotamian and Egyptian societies, the king was viewed as being divine or

at least as being the adopted offspring of deity. In contrast, in Israelite and Nephite cultures, kingship was viewed rather ambivalently (*Ibid.*, 1987). Later on, Mosiah will warn of the danger of kingship (Mosiah 29:16-17).

11 But I am like as yourselves, subject to all manner of infirmities in body and mind; yet I have been chosen by this people, and consecrated by my father, and was suffered by the hand of the Lord that I should be a ruler and a king over this people; and have been kept and preserved by his matchless power, to serve you with all the might, mind and strength which the Lord hath granted unto me.

12 I say unto you that as I have been suffered to spend my days in your service, even up to this time, and have not sought gold nor silver nor any manner of riches of you;

verses 11-12 “consecrated by my father” Benjamin’s father Mosiah had designated Benjamin as king and accordingly Benjamin’s life would be wholly dedicated to governing his people—he was “suffered to spend [his] days” in the service of his people.

13 Neither have I suffered that ye should be confined in dungeons, nor that ye should make slaves one of another, nor that ye should murder, or plunder, or steal, or commit adultery; nor even have I suffered that ye should commit any manner of wickedness, and have taught you that ye should keep the commandments of the Lord, in all things which he hath commanded you—

verse 13 Here, the verb “suffered” might be alternatively interpreted as tolerated.

In this verse King Benjamin sets forth a law specifying that five things will henceforth be prohibited. These are:

1. murder,
2. plunder (steal valuables by open force),
3. theft,
4. adultery, and
5. any manner of wickedness.

Apparently the Nephites regarded this set of laws as a legal precedent. This five-part list will appear seven other times in the Book of Mormon (see Mosiah 29:36; Alma 23:3; 30:10; Helaman 3:14; 6:23; 7:21; and Ether 8:16). It has been observed that this repetition of these five items provides a compelling example of the internal consistency in the text of the Book of Mormon. When Joseph Smith translated the Book of Mormon, he dictated as he went, never taking time to go back and review. How then could he have remembered these five items and be able to repeat them accurately? The reason is simple—he was translating and not writing or editing.

Kings in ancient Israel were obligated to maintain justice and to protect the rights of the weakest members of society. “Indeed, these qualities were invariably mentioned in descriptions of good kings” (*Ibid.*, 1987). See also Mosiah 4:26.

14 And even I, myself, have labored with mine own hands that I might serve you, and that ye should not be laden with taxes, and that there should nothing come upon you which was grievous to be borne—and of all these things which I have spoken, ye yourselves are witnesses this day.

verse 14 Benjamin had not required that his people support him financially. He had earned his bread by his own sweat just as the Lord had commanded Adam to do. Consequently the people were not burdened with taxes. “Burdensome, unjust taxation is a form of theft. King Benjamin realized that a government has no more right to steal from its citizens than the citizens have to steal from one another. When all labor, none are oppressed. Since political morality depends upon personal morality, the strict observance of the moral code by both the ruler and the ruled was the very foundation of his benevolent reign” (Rodney Turner, “The Great Conversion,” *Studies in Scripture, Volume Seven, 1 Nephi to Alma 29*, 211).

15 Yet, my brethren, I have not done these things that I might boast, neither do I tell these things that thereby I might accuse you; but I tell you these things that ye may know that I can answer a clear conscience before God this day.

16 Behold, I say unto you that because I said unto you that I had spent my days in your service, I do not desire to boast, for I have only been in the service of God.

verse 16 In ancient Hebrew culture, the kings were intended to be types or symbols of what the Messiah would one day be. Benjamin, with his selfless service and dedication to his people, was an apt symbol.

17 And behold, I tell you these things that ye may learn wisdom; that ye may learn that when ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God.

18 Behold, ye have called me your king; and if I, whom ye call your king, do labor to serve you, then ought not ye to labor to serve one another?

verses 19-24 Benjamin is about to teach his people one of the more profound lessons found in all scripture. A casual reading of these verses might fail to bring this idea to your attention. He will teach the doctrine of “divine indebtedness.” It is a universal truth, as applicable today as it was in Benjamin’s day. It is simply the necessity of viewing our relationship with our Savior in its true and proper perspective. And what is that perspective? It is that we are deeply in his debt. He has created us (verse 20) and granted unto us our lives (verse 23). He continues to preserve us from

day to day (verses 20, 21). Even if we were to serve him with all our might and render unto him all the thanks our souls possess, we would yet be unprofitable servants (verses 20, 21). All he requires of us is that we keep his commandments (verse 22). When we do, he blesses us more than we have merited which only increases our indebtedness (verses 22, 24). Therefore we have nothing of which to boast (verse 24).

Our material possessions are not ours, but his (D&C 104:13-14; Psalm 24:1). Consider, for a moment, what a different place the world would be if we all truly accepted the truth that material possessions are of no eternal significance. Instead, we observe today, desperate struggling to acquire possessions, possessiveness by those who “earned” their material goods, and the denial of those goods to those who don’t “deserve” them. We see crimes of theft and deception committed by the “have nots” and sins of hoarding and over-protectiveness committed by the “haves.” We see blood shed and war fought by nations in an effort to “own” more land.

Divine indebtedness also may be referred to as gratitude or humility. A man possessing this gift is said to have a “broken heart and contrite spirit.” He is truly humble. Divine indebtedness is the very antithesis of pride. Benjamin is not merely suggesting to his people that they express their gratitude to God, rather he is relaying to them a commandment of God to do so (D&C 59:7, 21; 78:19). The acquisition of true gratitude to God—divine indebtedness—is not merely a mental exercise, but rather a spiritual one. Only the Spirit of the Lord can impart the eternal perspective necessary for us to truly feel this indebtedness. Gratitude is thus a spiritual gift which can only be received by revelation. It is said that gratitude is not only the greatest virtue, but the parent of all other virtues. Why is this so? If a man can successfully obtain from the Holy Spirit a sense of complete and utter dependence upon God for all that he is, for all that he has, and for all that he can become, then he will realize the desperate need he has for the atoning blood of Jesus Christ. He will then be blessed to know that only through the atonement of Jesus Christ can he be saved and exalted.

19 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!

verse 19 “If I . . . do merit any thanks from you, O how you ought to thank your heavenly King!” Note how Benjamin is striving to obey the principle stated in Matthew 5:16: “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.” He wanted the people’s gratitude for his service to be extended to the Lord instead of towards him.

Elder Neal A. Maxwell commented further on Benjamin’s meekness. In so doing, he commented also on the meekness and deference evident in both the Father and the Son:

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: 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). "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'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 (*King Benjamin's Speech Made Simple*, ed. John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks [FARMS: Provo, Utah], 18-19).

20 I say unto you, my brethren, that if you should render all the thanks and praise which your whole soul has power to possess, to that God who has created you, and has kept and preserved you, and has caused that ye should rejoice, and has granted that ye should live in peace one with another—

21 I say unto you that if ye should serve him who has created you from the beginning, and is preserving you from day to day, by lending you breath, that ye may live and move and do according to your own will, and even supporting you from one moment to another—I say, if ye should serve him with all your whole souls yet ye would be unprofitable servants.

verses 20-21 These two verses contain one of the longer sentences in the Book of Mormon.

"if ye should serve him with all your whole souls yet ye would be unprofitable servants" Aren't these verses, on their face, a bit discouraging? Is it really true that a man may labor with all his heart and soul and yet be unprofitable to the Lord? It is true, but the reason is an exciting one. The Lord is so generous with us, we cannot possibly cause him to be in our debt. As we obey and serve him, he rewards us with spiritual blessings and gifts. These do not necessarily come as earthly blessings. He rewards us far in excess of our service to him. We are constantly and increasingly in his debt.

As I write these words, I have just returned from watching a professional tennis tournament. In each tennis tournament, one finds a few entrants referred to as "wild cards." These are individuals who are invited to join a tournament who did not actually qualify for entrance by virtue of the points they have accumulated. In spite of their failure to qualify, the tournament committee extends to them an invitation—often for sentimental reasons. It is felt they will add to the quality and interest of the tournament. Though my analogy suffers from being only superficially apt, are we not all "wild cards" in the kingdom of God?

In perhaps one other sense, we are all unprofitable servants. God is the creator of all things. He is perfect in his knowledge and power. What could any of us possibly do to profit him? What could we do to improve his status or assets?

It is poignantly true that if we are as diligent as we can be, we cannot keep the Lord from blessing us. Just today, as I write these words, I have been made aware of a physician author writing recently in the *British Medical Journal* who commented on the “accidental” or serendipitous discoveries made in medicine over the years, especially the discovery of penicillin. He supposes that these discoveries are probably not, in fact, accidental, but rather the rewards of a merciful God to an individual who has done the work to prepare himself to make the discovery. Rather than being due to serendipity, they are due to “divinipity.” This author has coined the saying, “Serendipity is ‘divinipitous,’ but ‘divinipity’ is not serendipitous.” This would seem to be a saying well worth remembering.

22 And behold, all that he requires of you is to keep his commandments; and he has promised you that if ye would keep his commandments ye should prosper in the land; and he never doth vary from that which he hath said; therefore, if ye do keep his commandments he doth bless you and prosper you.

verse 22 This verse clearly spells out the way each of us can please God. We must simply “keep his commandments.”

23 And now, in the first place, he hath created you, and granted unto you your lives, for which ye are indebted unto him.

verse 23 The “first place” is the premortal existence.

24 And secondly, he doth require that ye should do as he hath commanded you; for which if ye do, he doth immediately bless you; and therefore he hath paid you. And ye are still indebted unto him, and are, and will be, forever and ever; therefore, of what have ye to boast?

verses 23-24 Benjamin is teaching the idea that each of us is deeply indebted to God for the blessings of life we all enjoy but have not earned. These include life itself and the Lord’s protective care. We know not the way we should travel in this eternal universe, but he does, and he will lead us.

25 And now I ask, can ye say aught of yourselves? I answer you, Nay. Ye cannot say that ye are even as much as the dust of the earth; yet ye were created of the dust of the earth; but behold, it belongeth to him who created you.

26 And I, even I, whom ye call your king, am no better than ye yourselves are; for I am also of the dust. And ye behold that I am old, and am about to yield up this mortal frame to its mother earth.

verse 25-26 “**can ye say aught of yourselves**” “Aught” means *anything*. Benjamin is asking, “Do you have anything to brag about?”

“**Ye cannot say that ye are even as much as the dust of the earth**” Have we no worth at all? This stinging indictment is initially puzzling as it seems to debase mankind. Yet we know that man is supremely important to God (Moses 1:39). This expression is not just hyperbole. Rather it refers to natural and fallen man’s propensity for disobedience. Man, in his naked carnal state, devoid of the Spirit of God, is disinclined to respond to promptings in matters of the Spirit. Rather he is inclined to respond only to worldly influences. The “dust of the earth,” in contrast, is obedient to God’s commands: “For behold, the dust of the earth moveth hither and thither, to the dividing asunder, at the command of our great and everlasting God” (Helaman 12:7-8). Here is a great irony, since all God requires of us, in order to clear our indebtedness to him, is obedience to his laws.

27 Therefore, as I said unto you that I had served you, walking with a clear conscience before God, even so I at this time have caused that ye should assemble yourselves together, that I might be found blameless, and that your blood should not come upon me, when I shall stand to be judged of God of the things whereof he hath commanded me concerning you.

28 I say unto you that I have caused that ye should assemble yourselves together that I might rid my garments of your blood, at this period of time when I am about to go down to my grave, that I might go down in peace, and my immortal spirit may join the choirs above in singing the praises of a just God.

verses 27-28 We read in latter-day scripture: “It becometh every man who hath been warned to warn his neighbor. Therefore, they [the neighbors] are left without excuse, and their sins are upon their own head” (D&C 88:81-82). And what if we fail to warn our neighbors? Then “their blood would come upon our garments, and we would not be found spotless at the last day” (Jacob 1:19).

verse 28 “**at this period of time when I am about to go down to my grave**” A Bible scholar, William S. Kurz, has published a study comparing several farewell addresses from the classical and biblical traditions (“Luke 22:14-38 and Greco-Roman and Biblical Farewell Addresses,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 104 (1985): 251-68). He has identified some twenty elements common to these farewell addresses. John W. Welch and Daryl R. Hague have compared King Benjamin’s farewell address with these elements and have found a remarkable correlation (“Benjamin’s Speech: A Classic Ancient Farewell Address,” a FARMS reprint, 1987). The details of their comparison will not be reported here. The interested reader is referred to their article.

29 And moreover, I say unto you that I have caused that ye should assemble yourselves together, that I might declare unto you that I can no longer be your teacher, nor your king;

30 For even at this time, my whole frame doth tremble exceedingly while attempting to speak unto you; but the Lord God doth support me, and hath suffered me that I should speak unto you, and hath commanded me that I should declare unto you this day, that my son Mosiah is a king and a ruler over you.

verse 30 “my whole frame doth tremble exceedingly while attempting to speak unto you” A physician student of the Book of Mormon, such as myself, may well wonder whether Benjamin intended a literal rather than a figurative meaning to this phrase. I cannot help but wonder if he might have developed a neurologic disorder involving a tremor in his later years. Might he have had Parkinson’s Disease or some other neurologic disease characterized by a tremor?

31 And now, my brethren, I would that ye should do as ye have hitherto done. As ye have kept my commandments, and also the commandments of my father, and have prospered, and have been kept from falling into the hands of your enemies, even so if ye shall keep the commandments of my son, or the commandments of God which shall be delivered unto you by him, ye shall prosper in the land, and your enemies shall have no power over you.

verse 31 “I would that ye should do as ye have hitherto done” Benjamin is commending his people for their obedience during his reign. Again, we are reminded that these Nephites are already committed church members. Since Benjamin and his father Mosiah were righteous men, as the people obeyed their commandments, they were obeying the commandments of God.

32 But, O my people, beware lest there shall arise contentions among you, and ye list to obey the evil spirit, which was spoken of by my father Mosiah.

verse 32 “ye list to obey the evil spirit, which was spoken of by my father Mosiah” To *list* is to lean toward or be inclined to. It is interesting to note that in all of the scriptures, the phrase “list to obey the evil spirit” is unique to this verse. The shorter phrase “list to obey” is found in only one other place, in D&C 29:45. In this latter Doctrine and Covenants reference it also refers to those who choose to obey evil influences.

“which was spoken of by my father Mosiah” We have no record of Benjamin’s father Mosiah’s speaking of the “evil spirit” or, for that matter, we have no report of his speaking on any subject. We are thus reminded again that the large plates of Nephi were heavily edited by Mormon, and Mormon’s record contains only a small fraction of the original writings of the Book of Mormon prophets.

33 For behold, there is a wo pronounced upon him who listeth to obey that spirit; for if he listeth to obey him, and remaineth and dieth in his sins, the same drinketh damnation to his own soul; for he receiveth for his wages an everlasting punishment, having transgressed the law of God contrary to his own knowledge.

verse 33 It is important to note that throughout the remainder of King Benjamin's sermon, and indeed even previously in other passages, the Book of Mormon speaks of our eternal destiny in terms of extremes—the highest heaven and the lowest hell, salvation in the celestial kingdom with God or eternal damnation in outer darkness with the devil. There is “no middle ground. The doctrine of multiple degrees of salvation or multiple heavens revealed to the Prophet Joseph in February, 1832, in the 76th section of the Doctrine and Covenants is not contained in the Book of Mormon. This is not to say that the Book of Mormon prophets did not know about the three degrees of glory, but it is a simple fact that they did not write about them. An example is seen in 1 Nephi 15:35: “The final state of the souls of men is to dwell in the kingdom of God, or to be cast out.” See also verses 40 and 41 below.

Another related doctrine that is not found in the Book of Mormon is that the “probation” through which each of us must pass includes not only our mortal lives on earth, but also the period of time spent in the “spirit prison.” Those that are blessed to enter the “paradise” part of the spirit world have already completed their probation (see also the commentary for 2 Nephi 9:25-26). The fact that it is possible to repent after this mortal life, then, is missing from the Book of Mormon.

The doctrine of the Book of Mormon is thus: Repent during this earth life and be saved or you will be lost and suffer everlastingly. This is obviously incomplete doctrinal truth.

Why do we find incomplete gospel truths in the “most correct book” ever written? Two reasons seem most likely: (1) The Book of Mormon prophets may have known the complete truths of the plan of salvation, but they were able to teach only a limited version to their spiritually shallow congregations. (2) Those prophets may not as yet have received the full plan of salvation story, and thus they were able to teach only an incomplete version—that taught in the Book of Mormon. The Lord obviously intended the Book of Mormon to come forth in the nineteenth century. Perhaps he knew that a version of the doctrine which was more in line with the Protestant mind of the time would be more likely to be received by the people of that time. If the book contained the complete truths of the three degrees of glory, the temple ordinances, celestial marriage, and man's ultimate potential destiny, it would have been held suspect by those of Joseph's time and insurmountable ideological obstacles might have prevented the book's success. Hence, perhaps the Lord intended the partial rendering of the plan of salvation which we read throughout the Book of Mormon.

One plausible way to interpret Book of Mormon passages on the subject of heaven is to interpret the concept of “heaven” as referring to the “multiple heavens,” or all three of the degrees of glory—celestial, terrestrial, and telestial.

This particular verse teaches that a person who responds to an evil spirit and dies in his sins drinks “damnation to his soul” and receives an “everlasting punishment” (see a brief discussion on what it means to be damned in the commentary for 2 Nephi 9:24). The implication is that a man who dies without repenting is banished to outer darkness to live with the devil and his angels eternally. Perhaps some further clarification would be helpful. One possibility is that perhaps the verse does refer to the individual who will be banished to outer darkness. The phrase “dieth in his sins” may refer, not to the physical death, but to the person who lives out his time in the spirit prison and never does repent and accept Christ as his Savior. He persistently refuses to repent and remains “filthy still” (2 Nephi 9:16; D&C 88:35). Such a person will reside with the devil forever. Along the same lines, perhaps the phrase “having transgressed the law of God contrary to his own knowledge” gives us a clue as to its meaning. Perhaps this verse refers to that individual who accepts the gospel and lives its principles to the point where he is blessed to be visited by the “Second Comforter”—he has his calling and election made sure. Subsequently he comes out in open rebellion against the Church and seeks its destruction. He thus transgresses the law “contrary to his own knowledge.” Such a treacherous soul will spend eternity with Satan.

An alternate explanation is that the expression “everlasting punishment” may not refer to outer darkness at all. In the Doctrine and Covenants, Martin Harris was taught by the Lord that the terms “Endless” or “Eternal” (and perhaps “Everlasting”) are simply names for God. Eternal or endless or everlasting punishment is not punishment that has no end, but rather is simply God’s punishment (D&C 19:4, 6, 10-12). When an unrepentant sinner dies, he is placed in the spirit prison. There he must be taught and refined. He will suffer much personal pain, even to produce “weeping, wailing and gnashing of teeth.” Such an individual is suffering God’s punishment, which may also be called “eternal punishment,” “endless punishment,” or “everlasting punishment.” The usual end result is that the individual will repent and be purified to the point where he will inherit a degree of glory—either terrestrial or telestial or even possibly celestial.

34 I say unto you, that there are not any among you, except it be your little children that have not been taught concerning these things, but what knoweth that ye are eternally indebted to your heavenly Father, to render to him all that you have and are; and also have been taught concerning the records which contain the prophecies which have been spoken by the holy prophets, even down to the time our father, Lehi, left Jerusalem;

verse 34 This verse seems a little awkward in the reading. If the phrase “except it be your little children that have not been taught concerning these things” were placed

in parentheses, and if the words “all of you” were inserted after “also,” it might read more smoothly. Basically the verse says, “All of you know that you are sufficiently eternally indebted to your heavenly Father that you ought to completely dedicate yourself to him. Also, each of you is familiar with the writings of the prophets on the brass plates.”

“**render to him all that you have and are**” “The earth is the Lord’s, and the fulness thereof” (Psalm 24:1).

35 And also, all that has been spoken by our fathers until now. And behold, also, they spake that which was commanded them of the Lord; therefore, they are just and true.

verses 34-35 Here Benjamin summarizes the scriptures or “standard works” available to his people. They consist of (1) “the records which contain the prophecies which have been spoken by the holy prophets, even down to the time our father, Lehi, left Jerusalem”—the plates of brass, and (2) “all that has been spoken by our fathers until now”—the writings on the large and small plates of Nephi.

verses 36-39 These verses seem to refer to the unpardonable sin or the sin against the Holy Ghost. To reiterate, the essential elements of this sin are: (1) Accepting Christ and his gospel and living the commandments to the point where one is blessed to be sealed up to eternal life either by the Holy Ghost or by a personal visit from the Savior himself. (2) After achieving such a favored state, one must then deny one’s testimony and come out in open rebellion against the Church and seek for its destruction.

It is apparent that the great spiritual endowments about to be received by this people impose upon them a most solemn and binding obligation.

36 And now, I say unto you, my brethren, that after ye have known and have been taught all these things, if ye should transgress and go contrary to that which has been spoken, that ye do withdraw yourselves from the Spirit of the Lord, that it may have no place in you to guide you in wisdom’s paths that ye may be blessed, prospered, and preserved—

37 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.

verse 37 The phrase “open rebellion” originated with the Book of Mormon. It is found nowhere in the scriptures but in this verse, in Alma 3:18, and in Mormon 2:15.

38 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.

verse 38 “shrink from the presence of the Lord” Here is the condition exactly opposite to that described in D&C 121:45: “Let virtue garnish thy thoughts unceasingly; then shall thy confidence wax strong in the presence of God.”

39 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.

40 O, all ye old men, and also ye young men, and you little children who can understand my words, for I have spoken plainly unto you that ye might understand, I pray that ye should awake to a remembrance of the awful situation of those that have fallen into transgression.

41 And moreover, I would desire that ye should consider on the blessed and happy state of those that keep the commandments of God. For behold, they are blessed in all things, both temporal and spiritual; and if they hold out faithful to the end they are received into heaven, that thereby they may dwell with God in a state of never-ending happiness. O remember, remember that these things are true; for the Lord God hath spoken it.

verse 41 “O remember, remember that these things are true” The Hebrew verb *zakhor* (to remember) carries a richer meaning than usually attributed to the verb *remember* in English. It seems to mean far more than the mere mental recall of information, though of course that is part of its meaning. This verb occurs in the Old Testament over two hundred times and means “to be attentive, to consider, to keep divine commandments, or to act. . . . Indeed, to remember involves turning to God, or repenting, or acting in accordance with divine injunctions. . . . Conversely, the antonym of the verb to remember in Hebrew—to forget—does not merely describe the passing of a thought from the mind, but involves a failure to act, or a failure to do or keep something. Hence, forgetting God and his commandments is the equivalent of apostasy” (Louis C. Midgley, “O Man, Remember, and Perish Not,” a FARMS reprint, March 1990). For examples of other uses of the verb *to remember* in the Book of Mormon see Mosiah 4:30; 13:29-30; Alma 37:35; and Moroni 4:3.

Mosiah Chapter 3

Scripture Mastery

Mosiah 3 The Natural Man

Mosiah 3:8 (see also Alma 7:10) Specific prophecy of Jesus Christ and Mary: And he shall be called Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Father of heaven and earth, the Creator of all things from the beginning; and his mother shall be called Mary.

Mosiah 3:17 There is no other name given nor any other way nor means whereby salvation can come unto the children of men, only in and through the name of Christ .

Mosiah 3:19 For the natural man is an enemy to God.

1 And again my brethren, I would call your attention, for I have somewhat more to speak unto you; for behold, I have things to tell you concerning that which is to come.

2 And the things which I shall tell you are made known unto me by an angel from God. And he said unto me: Awake; and I awoke, and behold he stood before me.

verse 2 “an angel” Angels may be commissioned by God to show to men the mysteries of God and to assist prophets in teaching their people. We do not know the identity of this messenger, but keep in mind that at the time of King Benjamin, no one had as yet been resurrected. This angel might have been a translated being. A man like Enoch, for example, might qualify for such an assignment. For a more complete discussion of angels, see the commentary for Alma 29:1.

3 And he said unto me: Awake, and hear the words which I shall tell thee; for behold, I am come to declare unto you the glad tidings of great joy.

verse 3 The “glad tidings of great joy” are announced in verses 5 through 11.

4 For the Lord hath heard thy prayers, and hath judged of thy righteousness, and hath sent me to declare unto thee that thou mayest rejoice; and that thou mayest declare unto thy people, that they may also be filled with joy.

verse 4 Here we gain insight into how a prophet receives revelation. This verse also contains the two keys for any individual’s receiving a testimony of Christ and his gospel. What are those keys? They are righteous living and prayerful seeking.

5 For behold, the time cometh, and is not far distant, that with power, the Lord Omnipotent who reigneth, who was, and is from all eternity to all eternity, shall come down from heaven among the children of men, and shall dwell in a tabernacle of clay, and shall go forth amongst men, working mighty miracles,

such as healing the sick, raising the dead, causing the lame to walk, the blind to receive their sight, and the deaf to hear, and curing all manner of diseases.

verse 5 It is interesting to note that the term “Lord Omnipotent” or “Lord God Omnipotent” is used in very few places in our scripture. Aside from being used in Mosiah chapters 3 and 5 (Mosiah 3:5, 17, 18 21; 5:2, 15), it is used in only one other place in all four of the standard works, in Revelation 19:6. This term is likely used here to emphasize the contrast between the Lord’s complete power and his children’s inability to save themselves.

“who was, and is from all eternity to all eternity” The Savior has always existed. We all share this characteristic with the Savior (D&C 93:29). Our intelligence—the essence of our individual being—like his, was neither created nor can it be destroyed. If this phrase is intended to refer to his reign, then it is hyperbolic, since his dominant role in our round of creation did have a finite beginning.

“the Lord shall come down from heaven among the children of men, and shall dwell in a tabernacle of clay” For a discussion of the concept of the condescension of God, see the commentary for 1 Nephi 11:16.

He shall dwell in a mortal body made up of materials from this mortal world (“clay”).

6 And he shall cast out devils, or the evil spirits which dwell in the hearts of the children of men.

7 And lo, he shall suffer temptations, and pain of body, hunger, thirst, and fatigue, even more than man can suffer, except it be unto death; for behold, blood cometh from every pore, so great shall be his anguish for the wickedness and the abominations of his people.

verse 7 “he shall suffer . . . even more than man can suffer, except it be unto death” It is clear that the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual suffering that Christ endured in Gethsemane and on the cross were of a greater magnitude than any mortal man is able to endure without fainting or succumbing. Elder James E. Talmage wrote: “He struggled and groaned under a burden such as no other being who has lived on earth might even conceive as possible. It was not physical pain, nor mental anguish alone, that caused him to suffer such torture as to produce an extrusion of blood from every pore; but a spiritual agony of soul such as only God was capable of experiencing. No other man, however great his powers of physical or mental endurance, could have suffered so; for his human organism would have succumbed, and syncope would have produced unconsciousness and welcome oblivion” (*Jesus the Christ*, 613).

What of the enigmatic phrase “except it be unto death”? What does this phrase imply? Apparently it means that no other mortal would have been able to suffer the qualitative and quantitative pain the Savior suffered and remain alive.

We are taught that no man is capable of suffering himself without help to the point of being saved in a kingdom of glory. The unrepentant sinner in spirit prison will begin to suffer for his own sins: “But if they would not repent they must suffer even as I; which suffering caused myself, even God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of pain, and to bleed at every pore, and to suffer both body and spirit—and would that I might not drink the bitter cup and shrink” (D&C 19:17-18). But then—if the sinner confesses Christ and covenants to obey him—he will be spared the additional suffering by virtue of the Savior’s atoning suffering and death. While in a qualitative sense the sinner’s suffering resembles the suffering of the Savior, the suffering of no man will measure up to the quantitative magnitude of the Savior’s agony.

A poignant point to ponder: This verse proves that Jesus knew in explicit detail the fate that awaited him on the earth even before he came. Since the angel was able to prophesy the details of Jesus’s mortal experiences, then certainly Jehovah himself knew all of those details. In the pre-existence he thus accepted the assignment to come to earth, not blindly, but with full knowledge of all he would suffer.

It must also be noted that not all of the mortal suffering the Savior would endure occurred in Gethsemane or on the cross. During his life and ministry he also suffered many of the pains of mortality (see John 4:6 and its commentary).

8 And he shall be called Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Father of heaven and earth, the Creator of all things from the beginning; and his mother shall be called Mary.

verse 8 It is fascinating to contemplate the process by which we have received the words contained in the Book of Mormon’s verses. See *The Process of Translating the Book of Mormon* in volume 2, Appendix A of *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*. In this particular verse, Joseph Smith, as he translated, was given words that may not have been completely appropriate in the days of the Book of Mormon people. Some have been critical of the Book of Mormon because it contains, for example, words of Greek origin such as “Christ” and “Mary.” The Greek language, so far as we know, was unknown to the Book of Mormon people. As Joseph Smith translated, it was necessary that he perceive the meanings of text he was given. The words in this verse are rich in meaning. Jesus, which would be *Joshua* in Hebrew, means “Jehovah saves.” *Christ* is a title of Greek origin meaning “anointed one.” *Mary* is the Greek form of the Hebrew name *Miriam* and means “exalted of the Lord” or, alternatively, “bitter tears.”

“the Father of heaven and earth” Jesus Christ is identified as the Father or Creator of both heaven and earth. The term “heaven” has a few different meanings in the Book of Mormon. (1) The abode of Deity, where God the Father and his angels dwell. (2) The expanse or firmament containing the sun, moon, and stars. This definition pertains in this particular verse. (3) The eternal residence of the righteous

where they may dwell forever with God the Father and God the Son. (4) The Lord's (the Son's) heavenly kingdom—the “kingdom of heaven.”

9 And lo, he cometh unto his own, that salvation might come unto the children of men even through faith on his name; and even after all this they shall consider him a man, and say that he hath a devil, and shall scourge him, and shall crucify him.

verse 9 “he cometh unto his own” He will be born into the house of Israel, the chosen lineage.

“that salvation might come” Again, as has been mentioned previously, the word *salvation*, when used in the Book of Mormon, is usually synonymous with exaltation. Here, however, *salvation* may refer to any degree of salvation—to any degree of glory.

“they shall consider him a man” They will refuse to recognize that he is divine—the literal Son of God.

10 And he shall rise the third day from the dead; and behold, he standeth to judge the world; and behold, all these things are done that a righteous judgment might come upon the children of men.

verse 10 The apostle Paul wrote, “He rose again the third day according to the scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:4). Just where is this prophecy referred to by Paul? Where did he read this prophecy in the Old Testament? It is not found in the Old Testament! We have learned previously that this prophecy was commonly known among the Nephite people and that it likely originated with the prophet Zenos (1 Nephi 19:10; 2 Nephi 25:13). Undoubtedly Paul's scriptures, the Old Testament before plain and precious truths were removed by that great and abominable entity, contained the specific prophecy of Christ's resurrection written by more than one prophet.

“that a righteous judgment might come upon the children of men” Through the process of the atonement, Christ became the perfect judge capable of meting out “righteous judgment” upon the children of men. For a further discussion of the concept of “righteous judgment” see “Just What Did Happen in Gethsemane and at Calvary?” in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 19, *The Essence of the Lord's Atonement*.

11 For behold, and also his blood atoneth for the sins of those who have fallen by the transgression of Adam, who have died not knowing the will of God concerning them, or who have ignorantly sinned.

verse 11 “who have ignorantly sinned” The modern mind might tend to interpret sin as the conscious violation of a commandment of God. Hence, some might say that a person cannot ignorantly sin. To the ancient Hebrew mind, however, sinning

in ignorance was a definite category of sin (see Numbers 15:22-29). Unintentional sin was of much greater concern to ancient people than it is to us today. It is likely that we worry very little about such sins, since we know they will be dealt with lightly until the individual is informed of the pertinent commandment (see John W. Welch, FARMS Update in *Insights* [April 1996], 2).

This verse refers to a specific group of people—those “who have ignorantly sinned.” What of these? Do they enjoy a favored status? Are they, at death, automatically ushered into paradise because of their ignorance of the law? Let us review the basics: Adam’s transgression brought upon mankind mortality and separation from God. This means that all men will eventually suffer a physical death and also will live out their mortal sojourn on this telestial earth outside of God’s presence. Also because each individual commits sins on his own, he or she will be excluded from God’s presence until the effect of those sins is overcome. If there had been no atonement made, then at death all men would live eternally with a spirit body with Satan in outer darkness (2 Nephi 9:8-9). Christ’s atonement automatically eliminates the consequences of Adam’s transgression. Thus, all mankind will be resurrected, and none will be kept out of God’s presence because of anything Adam did. But what of our own sins? We are each responsible for these. We must strive to repent and improve our performance relative to the law as we understand it. All will be judged according to the light and knowledge available to them. Eventually all will have their sins remitted and be exalted in the celestial kingdom or saved in a lesser degree of glory. Some few who remain unrepentant will be banished to outer darkness forever.

And what of those who lived on the earth without an opportunity to hear the gospel and thus those who “ignorantly sinned”? Do they escape the necessity of having to live the gospel law? No indeed. These will be judged by an all-knowing Savior (D&C 137:5-9). Those who would have embraced the gospel and endured in its principles had they the opportunity to hear it will be directed, at death, to paradise and later to the celestial kingdom. Those who would not have accepted the gospel will receive an appropriate lesser reward (see the commentary for 2 Nephi 9:25-26).

12 But wo, wo unto him who knoweth that he rebelleth against God! For salvation cometh to none such except it be through repentance and faith on the Lord Jesus Christ.

13 And the Lord God hath sent his holy prophets among all the children of men, to declare these things to every kindred, nation, and tongue, that thereby whosoever should believe that Christ should come, the same might receive remission of their sins, and rejoice with exceedingly great joy, even as though he had already come among them.

verse 13 “to declare these things to every kindred, nation, and tongue” All of mankind is in a fallen state, and therefore all need to hear the message that would redeem them from the fall.

Was the future mortal advent of Jesus Christ really preached widely and specifically to the ancient world by prophets? Was there a knowledge of Christ more widely had by the ancient world than is commonly thought? This verse declares it (see Jacob 4:4; Luke 24:25-27).

“the same might receive remission of their sins . . . even as though he had already come among them” Here is a fascinating truth! The blessings of Christ’s atonement are extended to the people of Benjamin’s day, indeed all the way back to the days of Adam, even though the Savior will not actually experience his atoning sacrifice for another hundred and fifty or so years!

14 Yet the Lord God saw that his people were a stiffnecked people, and he appointed unto them a law, even the law of Moses.

verse 14 Since the people were unwilling to accept the full message of the prophets, they were given the lesser law.

15 And many signs, and wonders, and types, and shadows showed he unto them, concerning his coming; and also holy prophets spake unto them concerning his coming; and yet they hardened their hearts, and understood not that the law of Moses availeth nothing except it were through the atonement of his blood.

verse 15 Here is one of the great religious ironies of all time. The early Israelites misinterpreted the Lord’s giving them the law of Moses. They had to be given the law of carnal commandments because of their spiritual immaturity. It was a temporary means to help them with their spiritual growth. Yet, they believed that the law was a permanent end—that it proved them superior to all the rest of God’s children. They believed they only needed to adhere rigorously to the law. They saw no need for Christ and his atonement. They sought to become “justified” by the law itself. They failed to understand the vital fact that “the law of Moses availeth nothing except it were through the atonement of his blood” (see also Mosiah 13:28-32). For a summary of the ways in which the law of Moses was the typifying of Jesus Christ, see the commentary for 2 Nephi 11:4.

16 And even if it were possible that little children could sin they could not be saved; but I say unto you they are blessed; for behold, as in Adam, or by nature, they fall, even so the blood of Christ atoneth for their sins.

verse 16 This verse begins with two assumed hypotheses. First it assumes that no atonement will ever be made for mankind. It also assumes that in the absence of an

atonement, even little children could not be saved in a kingdom of glory. Benjamin then goes on to teach that because of the atonement, all children will be saved.

Benjamin's conclusions seem clear enough, but we might benefit from a bit of discussion of his assumptions and his teachings.

Why precisely is it that little children who have not yet reached the age of accountability could not be saved in God's heavenly kingdom had there been no atonement made? One may reason, "Wouldn't little children, who are not accountable, be totally innocent of any sin and therefore 'justified by the law'? Thus they would not need an atonement?" We have been taught that, in the absence of an atonement, all mankind would be lost to outer darkness (2 Nephi 9:8-9). It has been suggested that declaring an infant or young child innocent and free of sin until the age of eight years may be more than simply an arbitrary designation by the Lord. It is not that they are good by nature. Certainly there was an opportunity to sin in the premortal world, and doubtless many individuals left that realm guilty of sin. They are innocent because the Lord has decreed them so. The actual mechanism whereby they are made innocent is that at the time of their mortal birth into mortality they are cleansed by the blood of Christ's atonement. Without the atonement, they would not be innocent and free of sin during those early childhood years up until age eight. This has been so since the time of Adam.

But how could infant children at the time of Adam benefit by the blessings of the atonement, since Christ's atoning blood would not be shed for thousands of years? In the scriptures, it is clear that the blessings of the atonement have been extended to all mankind since the days of Adam. The blessings of his atoning blood have always been available to all men. The scriptures refer to this phenomenon by saying that Christ is the Lamb "slain from the foundations of the world" (Revelation 13:8; Moses 7:47).

Benjamin then goes on to say that an atonement will indeed be made, and because of that atonement, the little children "are blessed; for behold, as in Adam, or by nature, they fall, even so the blood of Christ atoneth for their sins." Because of the atonement, no one will suffer for the transgression of Adam. All will be resurrected and no one will remain outside the presence of God because of Adam. But still, every man, child or adult, is still responsible for his own "nature" and inclinations.

Some Christian religions have taught the doctrine that children are born into this world with the "original sin" of Adam weighing upon them, and unless they are baptized in the name of Christ to remove that sin, they are consigned to eternal misery and damnation. For a discussion of this phenomenon, see the introductory commentary for Moroni chapter 8. Are children "guilty" because of Adam's transgression? Certainly not. The law of justice would not allow a guiltless person to be kept out of God's heavenly kingdom because of the sins of another person.

"as in Adam, or by nature, they fall" The parenthetical expression "or by nature" within this phrase has added significantly to our understanding of the expression

“as in Adam.” Here Benjamin teaches us that the expression “as in Adam” actually means “or by nature”—because of the nature of man, because of the natural self or “natural man” within us. The Hebrew common noun *adam* occurs over five hundred times in the Old Testament with the generic meaning “man” or “mortal man” or “natural man.” Thus the expression “as in Adam” simply means because of the “natural man” within us, and perhaps the proper noun *Adam* here should have been rendered as the common noun *adam* in this verse.

It seems true that most apostate doctrines have at their roots true doctrines that have been adulterated. Perhaps the doctrine of “original sin” actually is simply an altered or adulterated version of the doctrine or concept of the “natural man.”

“but I say unto you they are blessed” If there had been no atonement, even innocent little children would be lost. But of course they are not lost. Christ did atone, and his atonement applies to them as well as to all mankind.

Some special groups of people here on earth are not considered fully responsible for their sins. These include the mentally handicapped, little children who have not reached the age of accountability, and even those who have not received the gospel (see the commentary for 2 Nephi 9:25-26). This is not to say that each of these hasn’t sinned. The apostle Paul taught that “*All* have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23, emphasis added). But the sins of these special groups are committed in ignorance. Even so, they cannot be saved in a kingdom of glory without the atonement of Christ. Because of the atonement, Jesus is empowered to judge each of the members of these special groups as if they had received the gospel in a non-ignorant condition (again, see the commentary for 2 Nephi 9:25-26).

17 And moreover, I say unto you, that there shall be no other name given nor any other way nor means whereby salvation can come unto the children of men, only in and through the name of Christ, the Lord Omnipotent.

verse 17 It is apparently this very passage written by King Benjamin that Helaman will refer to when he says to his sons Lehi and Nephi, “Remember, remember, my sons, the words which king Benjamin spake unto his people” (Helaman 5:9).

This verse forms the very essence of Benjamin’s sermon. It is an absolute verity and is true regardless of how any man may regard the Savior. All other “gods” of this world will eventually pass from importance. “Princes come, princes go. An hour of pomp, [an hour of] show” (Kismet: A Musical Arabian Knight, Boston: Frank, 1955).

“salvation can come unto the children of men, only in and through the name of Christ” Everything redemptive is accomplished in the name of Christ, who mediates all transactions between God and man. In an important conference address in April of 1985, Elder Dallin H. Oaks gave important insight into the phrase “the name of Jesus Christ.” He said: “Scriptural references to the name of Jesus Christ often refer to the *authority* of Jesus Christ (italics added).” Elder Oaks taught that salvation, or in

this case exaltation, can only come to the children of men through this authority particularly when it is employed in the temple to administer sacred covenants. Thus, no man can be exalted in the celestial kingdom without entering into those most sacred covenants available to us in the temple.

verses 18-19 These verses contain a compelling example of chiasmus which is a pattern of writing found in Hebrew writings. See the supplemental article, *The Hebrew Language and the Book of Mormon*. If the reader has an interest, the following chiastic diagram is included:

humble
 children
 atoning blood of Christ
 natural man
 God
 has been
 will be
 Holy Spirit
 natural man
 atonement of Christ
 child
 humble

The mention of chiasmus brings to mind an insightful statement by Dr. John W. Welch, the discoverer of chiasmus. As he was discussing the role of evidence in strengthening our faith in the Book of Mormon, he wrote, “Marshaling evidence builds respect for the truth. I have been amazed and pleased to watch the Book of Mormon win respect for itself and for the gospel of Jesus Christ. I had long appreciated and valued the Book of Mormon, but it was not until I began to see it speaking for itself before sophisticated audiences, especially in connection with such things as chiasmus and law in the Book of Mormon, that I began to sense the high level of respect that the book really can command. On many grounds, the Book of Mormon is intellectually respectable. The more I learn about the Book of Mormon, the more amazed I become at its precision, consistency, validity, vitality, insightfulness, and purposefulness. I believe that the flow of additional evidence nourishes and enlarges faith” (“A Book You Can Respect,” *Ensign*, September 1977, 45-48).

18 For behold he judgeth, and his judgment is just; and the infant perisheth not that dieth in his infancy; but men drink damnation to their own souls except they humble themselves and become as little children, and believe that salvation was, and is, and is to come, in and through the atoning blood of Christ, the Lord Omnipotent.

verse 18 “men drink damnation to their own souls” For a brief discussion of what it means to be damned, see the commentary for 2 Nephi 9:24.

19 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.

verse 19 “the natural man is an enemy to God, and has been from the fall of Adam” Who is this “natural man” who is an enemy to God? There has been some difference of opinion on this matter. Some of the brethren, including even Joseph Smith and Brigham Young, have taken issue with the idea that man naturally is an enemy to God. Rather, they have taught man is naturally good—it is the nature of man to be good. It is natural to be happy and at peace with God, and it is unnatural to be wicked and an enemy to God. Further they have taught that King Benjamin here must be interpreted in context: He is talking here about the incorrigible sinner, the carnal man who won’t repent.

There is an alternate interpretation: The term “natural man” describes a trait common to *all* men and women born into this world. This label does not refer to any particular individual’s moral character but rather to a universal characteristic of all mankind. A “natural man” or “natural” characteristics of men are those which have not been touched or refined by the influence of the Holy Ghost. Every man or woman has tendencies of the natural man that are not alterable except through the influence of the Holy Ghost. The natural man is an “enemy to God” because his nature is alien to things of a spiritual or eternal nature. His perspective is limited to the carnal and worldly, and he is completely incapable of understanding spiritual things. “[Spiritual truths] are foolishness unto him” (1 Corinthians 2:14). He is blind and deaf to matters of the Spirit. He is independent rather than submissive and humble, though, ironically, he usually ends up conforming to the worldly trends of the day. He is proud, overly-competitive, and driven by rewards of the world. His behavior is likely to be influenced by his animal passions.

Every man is a natural man and in bondage to the flesh until 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.” Once sanctified by the Holy Spirit, man is fundamentally and profoundly changed. He is “born again.” He is a “new creature.” He transforms from a state of carnality to being “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.” He cannot look upon sin “save it be with abhorrence.” He receives Christ’s “image” in his “countenance.” He experiences a “mighty change” of heart. He enjoys

the “fruits of the Spirit” which, according to the Apostle Paul, are “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, faith, meekness, temperance” (Galatians 5:22-23). He is then said to possess the “divine nature” rather than a “natural” nature. His perspective is not confined to this earthly sojourn but is rather an eternal one. He knows that this earth life is not the “real life.”

It is essential to become a “new creature” of the Holy Ghost because the natural man is unable to withstand the light and glory of God. Elder Bruce Hafen has written:

The purpose of our existence here is to have an opportunity to develop the skills, the capacities, that are necessary for us to live in the celestial kingdom. When my nine-year-old boy says he wants to drive the car, I must explain to him that if he goes out onto the freeway, he is going to be dangerous—he might kill himself and a lot of other people as well. He does not yet have the capacity to use the freedom offered by a freeway. Until I can help him develop that capacity—the skill, the judgment, the maturity—going out there freely will kill him. The same would be true of our premature introduction to the freedom—and the responsibility—of living in a kingdom governed by celestial laws. The assumption of responsibility can be liberating or crushing, depending upon one’s preparation to receive it (“The Value of the Veil,” *Ensign* [June 1977] 7:10-13).

Only when man is transformed by the Spirit does he come to realize how totally dependent is humanity upon the Lord. This true humility comes only with revealed divine knowledge to the sanctified individual. The proud (worldly), on the other hand, are never humble. They are ignorant of man’s dependence upon the Lord, and they are unaware of their own ignorance. For supplemental reading on this important subject, see the following chapters in volume 1 of *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*: chapter 5, *The “Natural Self” and “Spiritual Self”* (especially the subheading “Pride” in that chapter). See also chapter 17, *Justification and Sanctification*.

20 And moreover, I say unto you, that the time shall come when the knowledge of a Savior shall spread throughout every nation, kindred, tongue, and people.

verse 20 This prophecy was likely intended to have its fulfillment in these latter days and in the Millennium, and the Book of Mormon will be the very means by which it will be fulfilled.

21 And behold, when that time cometh, none shall be found blameless before God, except it be little children, only through repentance and faith on the name of the Lord God Omnipotent.

verse 21 Once an individual has a knowledge of the Savior, his gospel, and the significance of his atonement, an obligation or responsibility is placed upon him. He may only then become “blameless” or free of sin through the process of obedience and repentance.

22 And even at this time, when thou shalt have taught thy people the things which the Lord thy God hath commanded thee, even then are they found no more blameless in the sight of God, only according to the words which I have spoken unto thee.

verses 21-22 In the future, when the gospel message is promulgated widely, no one other than children will be able to plead ignorance. Even “at this time”—at the time of King Benjamin—Benjamin tells his people, when you hear the gospel and teach it to your families and friends (“thy people”), then you and they have an obligation to repent and obey.

“only according to the words which I have spoken unto thee” This phrase seems to say that only through the blessings of the atonement can we become blameless in the sight of God.

23 And now I have spoken the words which the Lord God hath commanded me.

verses 24-27 Again, these verses illustrate the fact that the Book of Mormon makes no allowance for post-mortal repentance and lesser degrees of glory. Men are categorized as simply “good” or “evil.” In verses 25 through 27, those who are evil apparently inherit what sounds much like outer darkness (see the commentary for Mosiah 2:33).

24 And thus saith the Lord: They shall stand as a bright testimony against this people, at the judgment day; whereof they shall be judged, every man according to his works, whether they be good, or whether they be evil.

verse 24 The first “they” refers to the words which Benjamin has just spoken. The second refers to “this people,” the third and fourth to “the works of every man.”

What constitutes a man’s “works”? Plausibly his “works” consist of his behaviors (the things he says and does), the *real* intentions and feelings of his heart, and his obedience to the commandments.

25 And if they be evil they are consigned to an awful view of their own guilt and abominations, which doth cause them to shrink from the presence of the Lord into a state of misery and endless torment, from whence they can no more return; therefore they have drunk damnation to their own souls.

verse 25 This verse has been an object of ridicule. Some anti-Mormon critics have suggested that Joseph Smith borrowed from William Shakespeare when he wrote it. For a possible explanation of why the wording in this verse resembles Shakespeare’s phraseology, see the commentary for 1 Nephi 22:15.

“therefore they have drunk damnation to their own souls” For a brief discussion of what it means to be damned see the commentary for 2 Nephi 9:24.

26 Therefore, they have drunk out of the cup of the wrath of God, which justice could no more deny unto them than it could deny that Adam should fall because of his partaking of the forbidden fruit; therefore, mercy could have claim on them no more forever.

27 And their torment is as a lake of fire and brimstone, whose flames are unquenchable, and whose smoke ascendeth up forever and ever. Thus hath the Lord commanded me. Amen.

verse 27 “lake of fire and brimstone” This expression, of course, does not describe the literal fate of anyone. Rather, it is a figurative or symbolic expression that is discussed more fully in the commentary for 2 Nephi 9:19.

Mosiah Chapter 4

Scripture Mastery

Mosiah 4:14-15 Benjamin's counsel to teach your children to walk in the ways of truth and soberness.

Mosiah 4:16-19 Benjamin's counsel for dealing with a beggar: Ye will not suffer that the beggar will put up his petition to you in vain. Are we not all beggars?

Mosiah 4:27 It is not requisite that a man should run faster than he has strength.

Mosiah 4:30 Benjamin counsels: If ye do not watch yourselves, ye must perish. O man, remember, and perish not.

1 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.

verse 1 Why do we today not fall to earth or prostrate ourselves as a manifestation of our humility and respect? Today our cultural habits of worship do not include this outward display as they obviously did with the Nephites. Other ancient and contemporary cultures have in the past and do today practice this form of worship. We can only hope that in spite of our reservedness regarding the outward physical displays of our worship, we feel inwardly the same adoration and respect and reverence as these other cultures.

“the fear of the Lord had come upon them” The word “fear” here does not mean fright. Rather it implies awe, reverence, or respect.

2 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.

verse 2 “they had viewed themselves in their own carnal state” Earlier, it was said of Benjamin's people, “They have been a diligent people in keeping the commandments of the Lord.” Why do they now view themselves as being in a carnal state? Certainly, the ability of mortal man to see himself in a perfect eternal perspective can only be achieved as a gift from the Spirit of God. How might we refer to such a gift? Perhaps it may be appropriately called *gratitude* or *humility* or *divine indebtedness* (see the discussion of this vastly important gift of the Spirit in the introductory commentary for Mosiah 2:19-24). Only the recipients of this gift are able to perceive their utter and

absolute dependence upon the Savior. Only those so blessed can see clearly the very real and potentially deadly, in an eternal sense, weakness each of us possesses as a result of the “natural self” potential within each of us.

What remarkable spiritual blessings these people had experienced as a result of Benjamin’s words and the ministrations of the Spirit. They had been significantly boosted along the path toward their sanctification. As with all of us, though, every level of spiritual progress is potentially fleeting lest we continually strive.

There is also a completely positive aspect to the Lord's revealed perspective our true spiritual condition. This is the gift of hope. See a discussion of this gift in "Perquisite Gifts of the Spirit" in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1 of chapter 8, *The Blessings of Spiritual Gifts*.

“even less than the dust of the earth” For a discussion of the meaning of this alarming expression, see the commentary for Mosiah 2:25.

“And they all cried aloud with one voice, saying: O have mercy” Whom are the people addressing? King Benjamin? It is more likely they are addressing the Lord himself.

It has been suggested that the people’s falling to the ground and crying out in unison “O have mercy” may have been part of the ritual of the annual festival celebration (Terrence L. Szink and John W. Welch, “An Ancient Israelite Festival Context,” in *King Benjamin’s Speech Made Simple*, 137).

“apply the atoning blood of Christ that we may receive forgiveness of our sins” Again here is the exciting principle initially discussed in the commentary for Mosiah 3:13. How can the atoning blood of Christ be applied to any of the Nephite people when that blood will not even be shed for some hundred and fifty or so years? How is it possible that people who lived before the time of Christ could receive forgiveness of their sins when the great atoning sacrifice had not yet been made? Did the Lord Jehovah have the power to extend to men a complete forgiveness of their sins when he had not yet atoned for those sins? Of course the Lord was able to forgive sins and did so many times in Old Testament times (see, for example, Isaiah 6:7). Those who lived before the meridian of time (even Adam and Eve) who had faith in Jesus Christ and in his future atonement and who lived his commandments, could be beneficiaries of his atoning blood just as surely as those who have lived since Christ’s atonement. In its infinite nature, the atonement is also timeless. At the time of King Benjamin, the Nephites were urged to have faith in Christ and in his future atonement. According to divine foreknowledge, that atonement would take place. If the Nephites did accept Christ and his atonement and repented of their sins, they could be forgiven just as surely as we can today. We will learn in the following verse that these repentant Nephites did in fact receive a forgiveness of their sins. Christ’s atoning blood was applied to them!

“for we believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God” Something very profound is happening to these Nephites. In the purest sense they are experiencing a more complete conversion to the gospel of Jesus Christ. How complete does our conversion need to be? Joseph Smith taught: “A religion that does not require the sacrifice of all things never has power sufficient to produce the faith necessary unto life and salvation” (*Lectures on Faith*, 6:7). This may not always mean having to give up all one’s worldly possessions to the Church, but it certainly does imply a willingness to completely forsake worldliness, embrace the Spirit, and place in highest priority matters of the eternities. We spoke previously of the endowment-like ceremony in which these Nephites had been involved. They had doubtless entered into solemn covenants over and beyond that which they made at their baptism, and they had been given the name Jesus Christ in the context of making covenants (see Mosiah 5:7).

3 And it came to pass that after they had spoken these words the Spirit of the Lord came upon them, and they were filled with joy, having received a remission of their sins, and having peace of conscience, because of the exceeding faith which they had in Jesus Christ who should come, according to the words which king Benjamin had spoken unto them.

verse 3 “the Spirit of the Lord came upon them, and they were filled with joy, having received a remission of their sins” Can an individual enjoy the companionship of the Holy Ghost without being forgiven of his or her sins? Perhaps not. After all, we know that no unclean thing can dwell in the divine presence. Let us hope that a personal experience with the Holy Ghost implies a remission of one’s sins.

Joy is that deeply fulfilling emotion that is most always associated with spiritual growth. This is the definition of joy that pertains in the scriptures. One may feel joy for his own spiritual growth, or it is possible to feel joy vicariously when someone close to you experiences spiritual growth. Joy is different from happiness or pleasure. It is a richer and more abiding emotion.

4 And king Benjamin again opened his mouth and began to speak unto them, saying: My friends and my brethren, my kindred and my people, I would again call your attention, that ye may hear and understand the remainder of my words which I shall speak unto you.

verse 4 Perhaps “my friends and my brethren” were the people of Zarahemla (Mulekites), and “my kindred and my people” were his own people, the Nephites.

5 For behold, if the knowledge of the goodness of God at this time has awakened you to a sense of your nothingness, and your worthless and fallen state—

verse 5 “the knowledge of the goodness of God” It is probably appropriate to regard this knowledge as a spiritual conviction of the atonement.

“your nothingness, and your worthless and fallen state” Though he seems guilty of using a bit of hyperbole, Benjamin likely used these words to emphasize the contrast between the exalted state of God and the fallen state of man including the latter’s complete inability to save himself. It is appropriate for man to feel a profound and abject sense of humility and utter dependence upon the Savior. An appropriate associated emotion should be a feeling of deeply-held gratitude to him for the opportunity he has given to us to be redeemed.

6 I say unto you, if ye have come to a knowledge of the goodness of God, and his matchless power, and his wisdom, and his patience, and his long-suffering towards the children of men; and also, the atonement which has been prepared from the foundation of the world, that thereby salvation might come to him that should put his trust in the Lord, and should be diligent in keeping his commandments, and continue in the faith even unto the end of his life, I mean the life of the mortal body—

7 I say, that this is the man who receiveth salvation, through the atonement which was prepared from the foundation of the world for all mankind, which ever were since the fall of Adam, or who are, or who ever shall be, even unto the end of the world.

verses 6-7 Here is another of those “longest sentences in the Book of Mormon.”

The phrase “prepared from the foundation of the world” found in each of these verses refers to something that was known about and taught about in the premortal phase even before the creation of the earth.

verse 7 The phrase “which ever were since the fall of Adam, or who are, or who ever shall be, even unto the end of the world” simply underscores the preceding adjective—“all mankind.”

8 And this is the means whereby salvation cometh. And there is none other salvation save this which hath been spoken of; neither are there any conditions whereby man can be saved except the conditions which I have told you.

verse 8 **“neither are there any conditions whereby man can be saved except the conditions which I have told you”** What are these conditions? Humble yourself and realize your utter dependence upon the Savior for your salvation (Mosiah 2:20-21; 2:25; 2:40; 3:19). Study the scriptures and learn the commandments (Mosiah 2:34-35). Deliberately obey the commandments of God (Mosiah 2:22; 2:41). Avoid evil (Mosiah 2:33; 2:27). Trust in Christ who is to come and in his atonement (Mosiah 3:5-18; 3:6-7). Confess your sins and repent of them (Mosiah 3:2), and receive the Holy Ghost (Mosiah 3:3).

What about baptism? It is not mentioned in these verses. Is not salvation impossible without baptism? It is indeed impossible. It is likely Benjamin’s people had

already been baptized by water since baptism is a doctrine of the law of Moses (D&C 84:27). Also, this verse may be an example of a *merism*. See the discussion of merismus in the introductory commentary for 2 Nephi 31.

Also we will learn that we must expand our understanding of the ordinance of baptism. Baptism is at the very heart of the spiritual progress we make here in mortality. Baptism is the very ordinance by which we grow spiritually. The ordinance of baptism consists of three distinct ordinances—the baptism of water, the baptism of the Spirit, and the baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost. Please see the important discussion of the complete ordinance of baptism in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 18, *Baptism, the Ordinance that Brings Spiritual Growth*.

9 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.

verse 9 “man doth not comprehend all the things which the Lord can comprehend” This profound truth is likely only fully appreciated by the converted, sanctified, reborn individual. Only he is fully aware of man’s relative nothingness regarding his insight and knowledge. The proud and “learned” are ignorant of this truth. This thought is continued in verse 11.

10 And again, believe that ye must repent of your sins and forsake them, and humble yourselves before God; and ask in sincerity of heart that he would forgive you; and now, if you believe all these things see that ye do them.

verse 10 “If you believe all these things see that ye do them” One is reminded of the sign President Spencer W. Kimball reportedly kept on his desk. It said simply, “Do it.”

11 And again I say unto you as I have said before, that as ye have come to the knowledge of the glory of God, or if ye have known of his goodness and have tasted of his love, and have received a remission of your sins, which causeth such exceedingly great joy in your souls, even so I would that ye should remember, and always retain in remembrance, the greatness of God, and your own nothingness, and his goodness and long-suffering towards you, unworthy creatures, and humble yourselves even in the depths of humility, calling on the name of the Lord daily, and standing steadfastly in the faith of that which is to come, which was spoken by the mouth of the angel.

verse 11 “standing steadfastly in the faith of that which is to come” Do you believe it is easier to have faith in Christ in our dispensation than it was in Benjamin’s day? After all, we have the scriptural record available to us which “proves” that Christ

did come to earth, and he atoned for our sins. Perhaps it should be easier, but I suspect it is not. Many people today will fall by the way out of apathy, ignorance, or worldliness even though the record of Christ's ministry—plus the testimonies of several eye witnesses—is available to all.

12 And behold, I say unto you that if ye do this ye shall always rejoice, and be filled with the love of God, and always retain a remission of your sins; and ye shall grow in the knowledge of the glory of him that created you, or in the knowledge of that which is just and true.

verse 12 “ye shall grow” Here is an important principle. As long as we are involved in the kingdom of God and conscientiously and pro-actively working to live the principles of the gospel, there will be continual growth in our knowledge of eternal things and in our eternal character. This is not to say that we mortals will not have our lapses—our moments of regression. Yet diligence will inevitably result in spiritual growth.

13 And ye will not have a mind to injure one another, but to live peaceably, and to render to every man according to that which is his due.

verse 13 Those individuals who are in touch with the Spirit have no disposition other than to help and bless others. It is natural that as we become more confident with our standing before God, we turn our attentions (our “arrows”) outward—to others (see the commentary for verses 20-21 of this chapter).

verses 14-15 In these verses, King Benjamin describes the blessings of deep conversion—the inclinations of the individual who has arrived at the point of a profound appreciation of and gratitude to the Savior. These verses may also be regarded as a commandment to the parents of children.

14 And ye will not suffer your children that they go hungry, or naked; neither will ye suffer that they transgress the laws of God, and fight and quarrel one with another, and serve the devil, who is the master of sin, or who is the evil spirit which hath been spoken of by our fathers, he being an enemy to all righteousness.

15 But ye will teach them to walk in the ways of truth and soberness; ye will teach them to love one another, and to serve one another.

verses 14-15 To those of us who have labored to bring up children, the counsel contained in these verses is sobering. Some children seem naturally inclined to obey and conform their lives to the principles of the gospel. Others do not. Our challenge lies with this latter group. We must never be found guilty of not doing all we can for them, even if we should ultimately fail.

verses 16-26 These next eleven verses contain King Benjamin’s notable and clearly stated teachings on Christian charity and service. Brother Rodney Turner aptly said, “We all travel the Jericho road—sometimes as the injured Jew, sometimes as the good Samaritan. *It is for God to be just. It is for his children to be merciful.* To judge others as unworthy of our help, and then to withhold it, is to assume a prerogative the Lord has not given us. Everything we have belongs to the Lord. He has commanded us to share his substance with others. . . . Inheriting the ‘true riches’ of heaven depends upon our faithfulness as stewards over the Lord’s wealth on earth” (*Studies in Scripture, volume seven, 1 Nephi to Alma 29, 221, italics added*).

In teaching his people about the importance of service, it is apparent that Benjamin was not just teaching another of a litany of saving principles. His people had already been baptized, and they had a basic understanding of the principles of repentance, baptism, and forgiveness. He now intended to give them something more, something vital. Benjamin now intended to teach them how they might retain the remission of sins which they obtained at baptism. He understood through personal revelation and experience that great mystery Christ would later teach during his earthly ministry: “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me” (Matthew 25:40). Charity and service are the covenant obligations of members of Christ’s Church. Giving deliberate service is the very mechanism for earning the spiritual gift of charity. Service is deliberate charity (see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine, volume 1, chapter 7, Spiritual Growth—Gifts of the Spirit*). No action of ours is more soul-exalting than that of selfless service. Benjamin teaches in verse 26 that Christlike service is the key to obtaining “a remission of [our] sins from day to day.”

The act of service is the earthly counterpart, indeed the “school” in which we earn the gift of charity. As we deliberately serve others, even if we don’t feel like doing so, then we are “experimenting upon [the] words” of Christ. We are qualifying ourselves to eventually receive the highest of all spiritual gifts, the gift of charity. Only by receiving this gift by divine revelation, once we are judged qualified by the Spirit of God, can we truly come to know and feel—indeed, actually possess—the pure love of Christ.

16 And also, ye yourselves will succor those that stand in need of your succor; ye will administer of your substance unto him that standeth in need; and ye will not suffer that the beggar putteth up his petition to you in vain, and turn him out to perish.

17 Perhaps thou shalt say: The man has brought upon himself his misery; therefore I will stay my hand, and will not give unto him of my food, nor impart unto him of my substance that he may not suffer, for his punishments are just—

verse 17 Chauncy C. Riddle wrote:

We observe in Nephite history the typical pattern in the societies of “natural men.” Society is stable and prosperous when there is a religious piety and humility among a people. But when pride enters, people reject God and morality and begin to fashion their own designs to foster their personal interests. Those who are proud forget that every person is a beggar before God, dependent upon him for life, breath, and prosperity. They begin to think that their good fortune in being richer or more learned or more refined than other people is due to their intelligence, or their hard work, or their superior genes. They begin to say of the poor, in their words of king Benjamin: “The man has brought upon himself his misery; therefore I will stay my hand, and will not give unto him of my food, nor impart unto him of my substance that he may not suffer, for his punishments are just” (Mosiah 4:17) (“Days of Wickedness and Vengeance: Analysis of 3 Nephi 6 and 7” in *The Book of Mormon Helaman Through 3 Nephi 8, According To Thy Word*, 196).

18 But I say unto you, O man, whosoever doeth this the same hath great cause to repent; and except he repenteth of that which he hath done he perisheth forever, and hath no interest in the kingdom of God.

verse 18 “no interest in the kingdom of God” How are we to interpret the word “interest” here? Perhaps it is referring to the fact that the uncharitable individual will have no claim upon, or no stock, stake, or holding within the kingdom. Alternatively, perhaps we are being taught that such an uncharitable man will lose his desire for the kingdom of God and will become indifferent toward it.

19 For behold, are we not all beggars? Do we not all depend upon the same Being, even God, for all the substance which we have, for both food and raiment, and for gold, and for silver, and for all the riches which we have of every kind?

verse 19 “For behold, are we not all beggars?” Do we really own anything in this world? We tend to attribute much credit to ourselves for our diligence in “earning” our material possessions. Yet, again, do we really *own* anything? How permanent is our ownership?

20 And behold, even at this time, ye have been calling on his name, and begging for a remission of your sins. And has he suffered that ye have begged in vain? Nay; he has poured out his Spirit upon you, and has caused that your hearts should be filled with joy, and has caused that your mouths should be stopped that ye could not find utterance, so exceedingly great was your joy.

verse 20 “ye have been calling on his name, and begging for a remission of your sins” In the previous verse, we learn that we are all beggars in that we all depend on the same being, even God, for the substance we have. In yet another sense, also, we are all beggars. We are all beggars for *grace*. The term *grace* refers to

a favorable merciful disposition (love) God has for man, without that favorable disposition's being earned or merited. If a man accepts the gospel, joins the Church, and adheres faithfully to all the commandments, he still, on his own merit, does not have enough eternal credits to become exalted in the celestial kingdom. He must await the grace of God—the granting of the privilege of entering into eternal life to those who do not fully merit it.

“has caused that your mouths should be stopped that ye could not find utterance” Benjamin’s people could find no words to adequately express their joy.

21 And now, if God, who has created you, on whom you are dependent for your lives and for all that ye have and are, doth grant unto you whatsoever ye ask that is right, in faith, believing that ye shall receive, O then, how ye ought to impart of the substance that ye have one to another.

verses 20-21 Note Benjamin’s compelling logic: Once you are aware of your utter dependence on the grace of God spoken of in verse 20, you are then disposed to beg for his mercy. In your helpless and pitiful state, does God abandon you? No, he comes willingly to your rescue and pours his Spirit out upon you! If God, without being compelled, comes anxiously to your rescue, shouldn’t you, in turn, come to the rescue to those of your fellow mortals who need your help even if they don’t “deserve” it. Shouldn’t you willingly impart of your substance to anyone who needs it? Eventually inheriting the eternal riches of heaven is contingent upon our stewardship over the possessions the Lord allows you to hold here upon the earth. If the Spirit has truly born witness to you of God’s mercy toward you, that same mercy cannot help but spill over into the lives of others.

22 And if ye judge the man who putteth up his petition to you for your substance that he perish not, and condemn him, how much more just will be your condemnation for withholding your substance, which doth not belong to you but to God, to whom also your life belongeth; and yet ye put up no petition, nor repent of the thing which thou hast done.

verse 22 **“And if he judge the man who putteth up his petition to you for your substance that he perish not, and condemn him . . .”** The essential issue here is that if a man comes to you and asks for some of your material goods, claiming that he will perish without them, it is not for you to pass judgment as to his worthiness. Rather, you must simply assess his need and give accordingly. After all, your material goods are not really, in the last analysis, yours at all, but God’s. All things belong to God.

“and yet ye put up no petition” A man who is devoid of the Spirit, which bears witness of man’s proper relationship to God, has no inclination to beg for God’s mercy.

He is oblivious of his abject and helpless state and his complete dependence upon God. He has no motivation to repent.

23 I say unto you, wo be unto that man, for his substance shall perish with him; and now, I say these things unto those who are rich as pertaining to the things of this world.

verse 23 “his substance shall perish with him” Worldly wealth is an illusion. No one really owns his stewardship. All things, even our lives, belong to the Lord.

24 And again, I say unto the poor, ye who have not and yet have sufficient, that ye remain from day to day; I mean all you who deny the beggar, because ye have not; I would that ye say in your hearts that: I give not because I have not, but if I had I would give.

25 And now, if ye say this in your hearts ye remain guiltless, otherwise ye are condemned; and your condemnation is just for ye covet that which ye have not received.

verses 24-25 Benjamin then instructs those who are poor relative to material goods—those who barely have enough for their needs. It is vital, even for these, to be completely converted to the concept of giving to those who are in need. They must come to the point of yearning in their heart to be able to give to the needy, and they must be prevented only by the fact that they don't possess sufficient material goods. Those who do not develop this yearning are condemned. They are accused of coveting material things they do not possess.

Joseph Fielding McConkie and Robert L. Millet have observed that these verses illustrate an important principle which they call the “doctrine of intent.” It is “the principle that we are judged by the intent of our hearts. Those unable to give must still have in their hearts the fixed determination to share with those in need and the longing that a time will come when they are in a position to do so. Should that not be their intent and desire, they are as much to be condemned as those who have refused to be caring of others” (*Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, volume II, 166-67).

26 And now, for the sake of these things which I have spoken unto you—that is, for the sake of retaining a remission of your sins from day to day, that ye may walk guiltless before God—I would that ye should impart of your substance to the poor, every man according to that which he hath, such as feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and administering to their relief, both spiritually and temporally, according to their wants.

verse 26 The message of this verse is clear, and it may come as a surprise to some of us. Is this really a doctrine of the gospel of Jesus Christ? It is indeed a vital saving principle of the gospel. There is no one in the Church who has not been

counseled to impart of their substance to the poor, yet how many of us know that the command to do so is fundamental and essential to our eventual exaltation? There can be no mistaking the emphasis Benjamin intended to give to this concept. The eternal precept is clear: In order to maintain a remission of our sins, we must “impart of [our] substance to the poor, every man according to that which he hath.” Doing so is a necessity and not just a nicety for true discipleship unto Christ.

“**according to their wants**” (italics added) We all share a tendency to give to the needy according to what we perceive as their needs as opposed to merely acquiescing to their “wants.” The spirit of Benjamin’s counsel is to be cautious about trying to sit in judgment as to a man’s needs.

Consider the image created by the contemporary author Robert Fulghum as he described a scene that occurred in Oslo, Norway, in December of 1980:

A small, stooped woman in a faded blue sari and worn sandals received an award. From the hand of a king. An award funded from the will of the inventor of dynamite. In a great glittering hall of velvet and gold and crystal. Surrounded by the noble and famous in formal black and in elegant gowns. The rich, the powerful, the brilliant, the talented of the world in attendance. And there at the center of it all—a little old lady in sari and sandals. Mother Teresa, of India. Servant of the poor and sick and dying. To her, the Nobel Peace prize. No shah or president or king or general or scientist or pope; no banker or merchant or cartel or oil company or ayatollah holds the key to as much power as she has. None is as rich. For hers is the invincible weapon against the evils of this earth: the caring heart. And hers are the everlasting riches of this life: the wealth of the compassionate spirit (*All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten*, New York: Villard, 1989).

If this counsel of King Benjamin’s is indeed eternally valid, if each of us does have an absolute obligation to care for the poor and needy, then the converse version of the same principle is also true. That is, failure to care for the poor is spiritually dangerous. If we fail in our obligation to our needy brothers and sisters, then we lose our right to have our sins remitted.

Take a moment to read the specific counsel of the prophet Moroni directed specifically to us today. It is found in Mormon 8:35-39.

27 And see that all these things are done in wisdom and order; for it is not requisite that a man should run faster than he has strength. And again, it is expedient that he should be diligent, that thereby he might win the prize; therefore, all things must be done in order.

verse 27 This verse proffers excellent advice even when taken out of context. As general counsel, the verse speaks for the importance of balance and order. It is clear, however, that Benjamin was speaking specifically of meeting the needs of the

disadvantaged. In trying to provide for the needy, a man must be cautious not to neglect the needs of his own self and family.

28 And I would that ye should remember, that whosoever among you borroweth of his neighbor should return the thing that he borroweth, according as he doth agree, or else thou shalt commit sin; and perhaps thou shalt cause thy neighbor to commit sin also.

verse 28 After all of the eloquent spiritual rhetoric, some have felt it a bit surprising that Benjamin would provide such a plain and ordinary example. Perhaps he intended that this mundane example teach us an important lesson. There is a tendency in all of us to hear inspiring teachings that touch us with the Spirit. But then as we go back to our every-day world, we may fail to see how those teachings are applicable in purely practical ways in our day-to-day lives. We may fail to make the connection between the sermons we hear at church and borrowing a shovel from our neighbor. They are indeed applicable, and we need to learn that lesson. We need to learn to make a swift transition between the spiritual principle and its worldly practical application.

29 And finally, I cannot tell you all the things whereby ye may commit sin; for there are divers ways and means, even so many that I cannot number them.

verse 29 “divers ways and means” *Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language* defines *divers* as, “Different, various, several, sundry.”

verses 28-29 Here is an important principle. Small and even apparently insignificant sins can lead to the loss of great blessings. King Benjamin, in these verses, emphasizes this principle by warning, not against overt and obvious transgressions, but against small and relatively less visible sins.

As you muse over verse 28, particularly the final phrase, “and perhaps thou shalt cause thy neighbor to commit sin also,” you will probably smile since it strikes at what is so typical of human nature.

30 But this much I can tell you, that if ye do not watch yourselves, and your thoughts, and your words, and your deeds, and observe the commandments of God, and continue in the faith of what ye have heard concerning the coming of our Lord, even unto the end of your lives, ye must perish. And now, O man, remember, and perish not.

verse 30 A true convert to the church of Christ—a saint—is not superficially converted. He is not simply able to control his outward actions. Rather, even his thoughts are attuned to the Spirit. He is fundamentally and basically changed. His whims and inclinations and idle thoughts all align themselves with things of an eternal

nature. His words and actions are mere reflections of a fundamentally changed inner personality.

“And now, O man, remember, and perish not.” The word *remember* here is far richer than simply calling to mind. See the commentary for Mosiah 2:41.

Mosiah Chapter 5

Scripture Mastery

Mosiah 5:1-2 Response of the people to Benjamin's speech: We have no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually.

Mosiah 5:13 How knoweth a man the master whom he has not served?

1 And now, it came to pass that when king Benjamin had thus spoken to his people, he sent among them, desiring to know of his people if they believed the words which he had spoken unto them.

verse 1 It is obvious that Benjamin is highly concerned over the spiritual welfare of his people.

2 And they all cried with one voice, saying: Yea, we believe all the words which thou hast spoken unto us; and also, we know of their surety and truth, because of the Spirit of the Lord Omnipotent, which has wrought a mighty change in us, or in our hearts, that we have no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually.

verse 2 One of the definitions for *wrought* in *Webster's 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language* is, "effected; produced."

"We have no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually."

One's disposition refers to one's nature, desires, inclinations, or feelings. When we experience and feel the light of Christ—when we are filled with the Spirit of God—we are also filled with the love of God. We feel this love, we experience it. It brings to us a feeling of unspeakable joy. Nephi testified: "He hath filled me with his love, even unto the consuming of my flesh" (2 Nephi 4:21). In his 1832 account of the First Vision, Joseph Smith wrote: "My soul was filled with love, and for many days I could rejoice with great joy." The 1835 account states: "A pillar of fire . . . rested down upon me, and filled me with unspeakable joy" (Backman, *The First Vision*, 157, 159). During such rare and privileged moments, the soul's darkness is swallowed up in the light of the Holy Spirit. All ungodly appetites, desires, and inclinations vanish. Thus enveloped in the very peace and virtue of Christ, sin in any form becomes, at the time, an impossibility. The divine nature prevails. It has been said that Spirit, glory, joy, and love are inseparable principles of righteousness and truth. If one is present, then they are all present to some degree. When we earn these spiritual gifts, these become permanent characteristics. Then we are ready for our exaltation. For only those who have become one with God in righteousness and truth can become one with him in power and dominion (D&C 121:36-37).

Benjamin's people had experienced, at the hands of the Spirit, the miracle of having been spiritually reborn (see the commentary for Mosiah 3:19, Mosiah 4:30, and 3 Nephi 19:13-14). Obviously their consciences and their desires had also benefited from a spiritual rebirth. See other instances of this rebirth in Alma 13:11-12 (this passage applies to those among the Church that had been ordained high priests) and in Alma 19:33-34 (this passage applies to the household of the newly converted Lamoni). Each had experienced a modicum of spiritual growth. Keep in mind, however, that their sanctification is not complete. Along the road to spiritual progress, they likely will yet experience some ups and downs.

3 And we, ourselves, also, through the infinite goodness of God, and the manifestations of his Spirit, have great views of that which is to come; and were it expedient, we could prophesy of all things.

verse 3 When we receive a testimony of Jesus by personal revelation through the Spirit of God, we may receive from him not only the gift of testimony but his other gifts as well, including the gift of prophecy.

4 And it is the faith which we have had on the things which our king has spoken unto us that has brought us to this great knowledge, whereby we do rejoice with such exceedingly great joy.

verse 4 "Our king" is Benjamin. Benjamin's people are speaking. This faith is an incremental accumulation of gifts received by personal revelation from the Holy Spirit. For a discussion of the different aspects of faith, see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1. The pertinent chapters include chapters 9, *Revealed Faith*, 10, *Deliberate Faith and Revealed Faith*, and 11, *Other Notes on Faith*.

5 And we are willing to enter into a covenant with our God to do his will, and to be obedient to his commandments in all things that he shall command us, all the remainder of our days, that we may not bring upon ourselves a never-ending torment, as has been spoken by the angel, that we may not drink out of the cup of the wrath of God.

verse 5 "that we may not bring upon ourselves a never-ending torment . . . that we may not drink out of the cup of the wrath of God" As has been previously mentioned, the people of King Benjamin were already baptized members of the Church and had already taken upon themselves the name of Christ. In association with Benjamin's sermon, his people not only renewed this covenant, but seemed to enter into an even richer covenant with the Lord at a more sacred level. In so doing, they covenanted to keep the commandments of God throughout the remainder of their mortal lives. We have previously likened this expanded covenant relationship as being

analogous to our present-day temple covenants and temple endowment (see also the verses which follow).

Again, as was discussed in the commentary for Mosiah 2:33, a word of caution is warranted in interpreting the simplified concept of our post mortal existence found in the Book of Mormon. Here Benjamin's people indicate that they have been taught that if they do not keep their covenant with God, they will bring upon themselves "never-ending torment" and "drink out of the cup of the wrath of God." Perhaps we ought to be cautious about taking this verse too literally. The only "never-ending torment" we know about is living with Satan as sons (and daughters) of Perdition. These Nephites listening to King Benjamin at the temple would not likely have been capable of sinning to that extent. It seems unlikely that they were capable of committing the sin against the Holy Ghost which they would have to commit to land themselves in outer darkness with Satan and his angels.

6 And now, these are the words which king Benjamin desired of them; and therefore he said unto them: Ye have spoken the words that I desired; and the covenant which ye have made is a righteous covenant.

verses 7-12 John W. Welch and Terrence L. Szink have seen in these next six verses evidences of the ancient Hebrew scapegoat ritual (FARMS Update in Insights [January 1995], 2). As prescribed in Leviticus 16, two goats were set before the high priest. From an urn, he drew two lots to determine which goat was to be declared "for the Lord" and which "for Azazel," a desert-dwelling demon. Apparently the lot "for the Lord" was always placed on the head of the goat on the right hand of the priest, while Azazel's would be on the left. The goat for the Lord was then sacrificed and its blood was used to purge the temple. The high priest transferred Israel's sins to the other goat, and it was then taken out into the desert.

The reader is left to himself to discover any evidence in these verses of the ancient scapegoat ritual.

7 And now, because of the covenant which ye have made ye shall be called the children of Christ, his sons, and his daughters; for behold, this day he hath spiritually begotten you; for ye say that your hearts are changed through faith on his name; therefore, ye are born of him and have become his sons and his daughters.

verse 7 The people of Benjamin had just entered into a sacred covenant with the Lord. In return, the Lord here gave them a special name (see Mosiah 1:11). What exactly is happening here? We do know that each person who joins the Church of Christ takes upon himself the name of Christ. We have argued previously, however, that most of Benjamin's people were already members of the Church of Christ.

Benjamin and other “holy men” and “prophets” had been living among them teaching them the gospel (Words of Mormon 1:17-18). Apparently something more special and more sacred was occurring here. Because of the purity of the hearts of Benjamin’s people, they are blessed to become “children of Christ.” They are adopted into the spiritual family of Christ—“spiritually begotten” by Christ. They are “born again” or “born of God” and are granted a position eternally at his “right hand.” They are given a proclivity to be like Christ—to have his spiritual image in their countenances. Indeed, they have been blessed to enter into covenants perhaps identical to those available to us in the temple today. Perhaps they are receiving something akin to their temple endowment! (see “Endowment of Power” in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, chapter 18, *The Temple*).

“ye shall be called the children of Christ” While Christ is not the father of our spirits, he is the “author of [our] eternal salvation” (Hebrews 5:9). He has been assigned by the Father to be our advocate, our Lord, our God, our *Father* during our mortal sojourns.

The children of Christ are those who have entered into the covenant of baptism, hearkened to the words of the prophets, put off the natural man, and become “new creatures” through the Holy Ghost. They have also entered into a sacred and solemn covenant relationship with the Savior (equivalent to temple endowment). Fathers give life. Jesus’s redemptive act affords both rebirth in this life and the opportunity for eternal life in the world to come.

The reader may wish to also look over the other Book of Mormon verses that contain the concept of “children” or “child” or “sons” of Christ. These include Mosiah 27:25; 3 Nephi 9:17; 4 Nephi 1:17, Mormon 9:26, Ether 3:14; Moroni 7:19; and Moroni 7:48.

8 And under this head ye are made free, and there is no other head whereby ye can be made free. There is no other name given whereby salvation cometh; therefore, I would that ye should take upon you the name of Christ, all you that have entered into the covenant with God that ye should be obedient unto the end of your lives.

verse 8 The word “head” means name or title.

“there is no other head whereby ye can be made free” Each individual possesses agency or “free agency,” as we in the Church are wont to call it. Agency is not negotiable. It can be neither given nor taken away. It is given without price to each and every individual. Agency is simply the right to choose among available alternatives.

To be free is to have *freedom*. Freedom, sometimes called liberty, is the blessing of having many, rather than limited, choices. Freedom is not the entitlement of every person. Rather, freedom must be earned, and it is often hard won. To be truly free means to have the earned opportunity, based on the righteousness of one’s

previous unrestrained decisions and choices, to rise to the loftiest heights. Because of the fall of man and also because of our own sins, each of us is deprived of our most essential freedoms. It is possible we may never again live in the presence of our God. It is possible we will never be free of Satan's rule and influences. There is only one way by which we can be free again. There is only one ultimate freedom. It is the freedom to choose whether or not we will live with God forever. And that freedom must be earned. And it will inevitably be "hard won" (see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 13, *Agency and Freedom*). And there is only one name by which we may be rescued or redeemed (D&C 18:23; 2 Nephi 2:26; Mosiah 3:17; Acts 4:12).

9 And it shall come to pass that whosoever doeth this shall be found at the right hand of God, for he shall know the name by which he is called; for he shall be called by the name of Christ.

verse 9 "whosoever doeth this" Whosoever takes upon himself the name of Christ by covenant and then endures in keeping that covenant.

10 And now it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall not take upon him the name of Christ must be called by some other name; therefore, he findeth himself on the left hand of God.

verses 9-10 "At the Great Assembly when all living things must appear in the presence of the King to acclaim him, every individual must be in his proper place, at the right hand or left hand of God" (*Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, volume 6, 305-06).

11 And I would that ye should remember also, that this is the name that I said I should give unto you that never should be blotted out, except it be through transgression; therefore, take heed that ye do not transgress, that the name be not blotted out of your hearts.

12 I say unto you, I would that ye should remember to retain the name written always in your hearts, that ye are not found on the left hand of God, but that ye hear and know the voice by which ye shall be called, and also, the name by which he shall call you.

verses 10-12 These verses contain another compelling example of chiasmus which is a pattern of writing found in Hebrew writings. See the supplemental article, *The Hebrew Language and the Book of Mormon*. For the convenience of the reader, the chiastic diagram follows:

name
called
left hand
remember
blotted out

transgression
 transgress
 blotted out
 remember
 left hand
 called
 name

verse 12 “that ye hear and know the voice by which ye shall be called” In order to “hear and know the voice” of the Savior, he must be revealed to us by the Spirit of God. Thus we come to a relationship with him where we more than merely know about him. Rather, we come to truly and intimately know him—this is a “testimony” of Jesus Christ.

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland has taught that when an individual hears a testimony born of the Savior, they sometimes perceive it as “an echo” from a former time. All of the inhabitants of earth attended the grand premortal councils before this earth was. There, all of us came to know and love the Savior. On coming here to earth, the veil was drawn, but not completely. A testimony born of him here on earth sometimes nudges and stirs within us a deeply held memory and conviction (Mission Presidents’ Training Seminar, Missionary Training Center, June 1999). President Joseph F. Smith taught: “All those salient truths which come home so forcibly to the head and heart [of men here on earth] seem but the awakening of the memories of the spirit. Can we know anything here that we did not know before we came here? . . . But in coming here, we forgot all, that our agency might be free indeed, to choose good or evil, that we might merit the reward of our own choice and conduct. By the power of the Spirit, in the redemption of Christ, through obedience, we often catch a spark from the awakened memories of the immortal soul, which lights up our whole being as with the glory of our former home” (*Gospel Doctrine*, 12-14).

13 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?

verse 13 Elder Neal A. Maxwell wrote: “By serving Jesus and by thinking of him we draw closer to him and are enlightened. Otherwise, we become estranged from his exemplification as well as from him” (*Men and Women of Christ*, 58). Elder Maxwell also described the results when a disciple seeks to know the thoughts and intents of the Master’s heart and strives to serve him: “For serious disciples, the greater their knowledge, the greater their meekness. The more such individuals associate with and are taught by the Lord, the more they strive to become like him and the more they wish to declare His gospel” (*Meek and Lowly*, 117). Clearly discipleship requires considerable thinking about, praying to, and serving God.

14 And again, doth a man take an ass which belongeth to his neighbor, and keep him? I say unto you, Nay; he will not even suffer that he shall feed among his flocks, but will drive him away, and cast him out. I say unto you, that even so shall it be among you if ye know not the name by which ye are called.

verse 14 Benjamin uses a rather hard-hitting analogy here as he compares the disobedient and wicked to an ass among a neighbor's flocks. "If ye know not the name by which ye are called," he warns them, ye shall be "cast out," as a strange animal is cast out of a flock by the owner to whom it does not belong.

15 Therefore, I would that ye should be steadfast and immovable, always abounding in good works, that Christ, the Lord God Omnipotent, may seal you his, that you may be brought to heaven, that ye may have everlasting salvation and eternal life, through the wisdom, and power, and justice, and mercy of him who created all things, in heaven and in earth, who is God above all. Amen.

verse 15 "I would that ye should be steadfast and immovable, always abounding in good works" Being "steadfast and immovable" is arriving at that state of faith and conviction which enables the saint to undergo tribulation, temptation, and persecution while remaining resolute and unwavering in their spiritual convictions (see also 1 Nephi 2:10).

Benjamin closes his sermon by reminding his people of the necessity of enduring to the end in righteousness. They were not yet sealed up to eternal life, but the promise was theirs if they persisted in good works. He then provides them with a glimpse of exaltation.

"Christ, the Lord God Omnipotent, may seal you his" Benjamin's people have had the remarkable experience of making binding and sacred covenants with God. As has been pointed out, this experience is likely analogous to receiving their temple endowments. Here they are told that if they persist in righteousness, they will be sealed up to eternal life and ultimately exalted.

Mosiah Chapter 6

1 And now, king Benjamin thought it was expedient, after having finished speaking to the people, that he should take the names of all those who had entered into a covenant with God to keep his commandments.

2 And it came to pass that there was not one soul, except it were little children, but who had entered into the covenant and had taken upon them the name of Christ.

3 And again, it came to pass that when king Benjamin had made an end of all these things, and had consecrated his son Mosiah to be a ruler and a king over his people, and had given him all the charges concerning the kingdom, and also had appointed priests to teach the people, that thereby they might hear and know the commandments of God, and to stir them up in remembrance of the oath which they had made, he dismissed the multitude, and they returned, every one, according to their families, to their own houses.

verse 3 “Benjamin . . . consecrated his son Mosiah to be a ruler and a king over his people” It was the tradition in ancient Israel to anoint the king with oil as part of the coronation ceremony. We are not told here whether Mosiah’s “consecration” included anointing. It is apparent, however, that some ritual act was involved. Earlier in the Book of Mormon we were told that Nephite kings were “anointed” (see Jacob 1:9).

“appointed priests to teach the people” It is interesting to note that in ancient Israel, during the coronation of Israelite kings, typically there was a reappointment of priests and the reconstitution of officers for the new regime (Stephen D. Ricks, “The Coronation of Kings,” a FARMS reprint, July 1989).

In the book of Mosiah, ordaining to the priesthood seems to be a royal prerogative. This is not to suggest that kings had the right to ordain because of their positions as political rulers; rather it has been suggested that kingship among the Nephites was a priesthood calling (Daniel C. Peterson, “Priesthood in Mosiah” in *The Book of Mormon: Mosiah, Salvation Only Through Christ*, 189). Brother Peterson observes: “This notion of a priestly kingship is perhaps a bit jarring to modern readers, living in a society where church and state are kept separate as a matter of principle. But it should not be so disturbing to Latter-day Saints, whose aspirations for the life to come include becoming both ‘priests and kings’ (D&C 76:56). . . . Furthermore, it seems that Christ, the true king of Israel, holds his kingship as a priesthood office. . . . Kingship in the Book of Mormon is very much a religious affair, much as it had been (or had been intended to be) among the Israelites of the Old World” (*Ibid.*, 190).

In the Book of Mormon, the verb “consecrate” is commonly used in placing a king into office (Mosiah 2:11; Alma 2:9). This very same verb is used in the Book of Mormon for ordination of priests (2 Nephi 5:26, 6:2; Jacob 1:18; Mosiah 11:5; 23:17; Alma 4:4,7;

5:3; 23:4). The Nephite king was regarded by the Nephites as representing God on earth. The king speaks for and on behalf of God.

“to stir them up in remembrance of the oath which they had made” In ancient Israel the king was considered to be the guardian or caretaker of the covenant between God and man.

4 And Mosiah began to reign in his father’s stead. And he began to reign in the thirtieth year of his age, making in the whole, about four hundred and seventy-six years from the time that Lehi left Jerusalem.

verse 4 We learned from the prophet Jacob that the Nephite kings, at their coronation, were given a new name. They “were called by the people second Nephi, third Nephi, and so forth, according to the reigns of the kings” (Jacob 1:10-11). Apparently, between the time Jacob made his record and Mosiah acceded to the throne, this practice of using Nephi as a royal name had been changed. Perhaps this change was made since the kingdom was no longer located in the land of Nephi. Mosiah is always referred to as simply “Mosiah.” Whether Mosiah is his given name or his royal name given at the time of his coronation is unknown. We learned previously that “Mosiah” may be a title meaning “savior” or “deliverer” (see the commentary for Omni 1:12). Mosiah will reign for thirty-three years from 124 BC to 91 BC. He will die in office at age sixty-three.

“making in the whole, *about* four hundred and seventy-six years from the time that Lehi left Jerusalem” (italics added) The word *about* in this phrase might give the impression that the Nephites had developed some uncertainty over their keeping track of the years. It is likely that Mosiah’s coronation took place very near the time of the 476th anniversary of Lehi’s departure from Jerusalem. Thus, the word *about* might be interpreted as “almost exactly” (Randall P. Spackman, “Introduction to Book of Mormon Chronology: The Principal Prophecies, Calendars, and Dates,” a FARMS reprint).

5 And king Benjamin lived three years and he died.

verse 5 It is interesting to note that Benjamin conferred the kingdom on his son Mosiah three years before Benjamin died. Apparently there was a precedent for this in ancient Israelite culture. “Both Solomon and Jotham became king while their fathers were still alive and ruling (1 Kings 1:32-40; 2:1-10; 2 Kings 15:5)” (Stephen D. Ricks, “The Ideology of Kingship in Mosiah 1-6” a FARMS reprint). Benjamin was probably about seventy years old or in his early seventies at his death.

6 And it came to pass that king Mosiah did walk in the ways of the Lord, and did observe his judgments and his statutes, and did keep his commandments in all things whatsoever he commanded him.

7 And king Mosiah did cause his people that they should till the earth. And he also, himself, did till the earth, that thereby he might not become burdensome to his people, that he might do according to that which his father had done in all things. And there was no contention among all his people for the space of three years.

verse 7 Just as his father before him (see Mosiah 2:14), Mosiah earned his bread by his own labor.

Mosiah Chapter 7

Scripture Mastery

Mosiah 7-8, 21-22 The rescue of the people of Limhi by Ammon and his men.

1 And now, it came to pass that after king Mosiah had had continual peace for the space of three years, he was desirous to know concerning the people who went up to dwell in the land of Lehi-Nephi, or in the city of Lehi-Nephi; for his people had heard nothing from them from the time they left the land of Zarahemla; therefore, they wearied him with their teasings.

verse 1 “the people who went up to dwell in the land of Lehi-Nephi” The only previous reference we have to these “people who went up to dwell” in this land in the Book of Mormon text is the prophet Amaleki’s mention of them in Omni 1:27-30. These people, the so-called Zeniffites, are the subject of the next eighteen chapters of the Book of Mormon—Mosiah 7 through 24.

We have developed a peculiar habit of assigning names to peoples in the Book of Mormon when those names are not actually contained in the Book of Mormon text. Zeniffite is an example. Can you think of any others? Mulekite and Lehite are two other examples.

If the history of the Zeniffites is not already familiar to you, then please take a few minutes and read the *Narrative Historical Summary of the book of Mosiah*.

“the land of Lehi-Nephi, or in the city of Lehi-Nephi” This is the first reference to the “land” and to the “city” of “Lehi-Nephi.” These locations are apparently identical with the land and city of Nephi first mentioned in 2 Nephi 5:8. The origin of these names is not clear. Perhaps they are simply later terms used to designate the land and city of Nephi. It is the same land and the same city to which the prophet Nephi led those that would follow him after separating from his older brothers Laman and Lemuel in the land of their “first inheritance” (see 2 Nephi 5). When or why or by whom the name was changed is not clear.

“the time they left the land of Zarahemla” The events of this verse occurred in about 121 BC. Zeniff had led his followers out of Zarahemla (“the time they left the land of Zarahemla”) almost eighty years previously, in about 200 BC.

2 And it came to pass that king Mosiah granted that sixteen of their strong men might go up to the land of Lehi-Nephi, to inquire concerning their brethren.

verse 2 Notice that the land of Lehi-Nephi is “up” in elevation from Zarahemla. I have often thought to myself that perhaps Zeniff and his followers, in their desire to return to “the land of their fathers,” had been less influenced by idealistic concerns and

more influenced by the cooler temperatures of the mountains that prevailed in the higher land of Lehi-Nephi (see the commentary for Mosiah 9:3).

3 And it came to pass that on the morrow they started to go up, having with them one Ammon, he being a strong and mighty man, and a descendant of Zarahemla; and he was also their leader.

verse 3 Ammon was a Mulekite—a “descendant of Zarahemla.” It is interesting to note that Ammon is the most common name in the Book of Mormon. We have discussed previously the considerable Egyptian influence that existed in ancient Judah at the time Lehi and Mulek departed that land. It is interesting to note that Ammon is also the most common name in the 26th Egyptian Dynasty from 664 to 525 BC (Hugh Nibley, *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, volume 1, “Book of Mormon Near Eastern Background”).

4 And now, they knew not the course they should travel in the wilderness to go up to the land of Lehi-Nephi; therefore they wandered many days in the wilderness, even forty days did they wander.

verse 4 It has been speculated that the distance from Zarahemla to the land of Lehi-Nephi was about 250 miles on land or more like 180 miles as the crow flies (see the commentary for Mosiah 24:25). The senior Alma and his followers will make this same trip in the reverse direction in about twenty-four or so days, traveling with families and flocks. Perhaps Alma had a better idea of where he was going or perhaps he was guided by the Lord.

5 And when they had wandered forty days they came to a hill, which is north of the land of Shilom, and there they pitched their tents.

verse 5 We learn here that within the greater land of Nephi there was a land of Shilom. We will later read of other smaller lands located within the land of Nephi. These include the land of Ishmael, the land of Shemlon, and the smaller land of Nephi or Lehi-Nephi. Apparently each smaller land had at its center a city with the same name. In modern parlance, we would be more likely to refer to these cities as “villages” or “towns,” and the smaller lands might correspond to “counties.” The Zeniffites occupied the land of Lehi-Nephi and the neighboring land of Shilom. The Lamanites occupied the other lands. It is, of course, not possible to know exactly how these lands were oriented with respect to one another. For a plausible model of the arrangement of these lands see the map, *Hypothetical Map of Book of Mormon Lands*.

6 And Ammon took three of his brethren, and their names were Amaleki, Helem, and Hem, and they went down into the land of Nephi.

verse 6 “they went down into the land of Nephi” To what specific land does the phrase “land of Nephi” refer here? As mentioned in the previous verse, within the greater land of Nephi there was apparently a smaller specific land of Nephi. This was likely the specific area surrounding the city of Nephi. It is probably this smaller land referred to here in this verse. Note that the terms “land of Lehi-Nephi” and “land of Nephi” are apparently being used interchangeably by the writer Mormon.

7 And behold, they met the king of the people who were in the land of Nephi, and in the land of Shilom; and they were surrounded by the king’s guard, and were taken, and were bound, and were committed to prison.

verse 7 “they met the king of the people who were in the land of Nephi” We will learn that this king is Limhi, the son of Noah and the grandson of Zeniff. The people are the Zeniffites, those Nephites who had descended from those who had originally come up from the land of Zarahemla with Zeniff.

Why did King Limhi and his guards not recognize Ammon and his men as Nephites who likely had come from Zarahemla. Shouldn’t the very appearance of Ammon and his men have alerted Limhi’s men as to the probable identity of their captives? Who else could they have been other than Nephites from Zarahemla? In verse 13, Ammon identifies himself as a “descendant of Zarahemla” or a Mulekite (see also verses 3, 13). Perhaps the descendants of the people of Zarahemla had an appearance unlike that of the other Nephites. Or perhaps, as we have argued previously, there were many other indigenous peoples in the land whose identity would have been difficult to sort out by their appearance alone (see the commentary for Jacob 7:6).

“they were . . . committed to prison” Perhaps Limhi and his men mistook Ammon and his three companions for some of the priests of Noah (see Mosiah 21:23). We will read about this interesting group later on.

8 And it came to pass when they had been in prison two days they were again brought before the king, and their bands were loosed; and they stood before the king, and were permitted, or rather commanded, that they should answer the questions which he should ask them.

9 And he said unto them: Behold, I am Limhi, the son of Noah, who was the son of Zeniff, who came up out of the land of Zarahemla to inherit this land, which was the land of their fathers, who was made a king by the voice of the people.

10 And now, I desire to know the cause whereby ye were so bold as to come near the walls of the city, when I, myself, was with my guards without the gate?

verse 10 “ye were so bold as to come near the walls of the city” The city of Nephi (Lehi-Nephi) has walls. Doubtless these were erected as defensive fortifications and probably patterned after those around Old World Jerusalem. These are the earliest

defensive fortifications mentioned in the Book of Mormon text. Mesoamerican archaeologists have discovered numerous examples of walls around ancient cities (Prudence M. Rice and Don S. Rice, "Topoxte, Macanche, and the Central Peten Post-Classic," in *The Lowland Maya Postclassic*, ed. A. F. Chase and Prudence M. Rice [Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985], 166-83, especially 176).

Without the gate, of course, means outside the gate.

11 And now, for this cause have I suffered that ye should be preserved, that I might inquire of you, or else I should have caused that my guards should have put you to death. Ye are permitted to speak.

12 And now, when Ammon saw that he was permitted to speak, he went forth and bowed himself before the king; and rising again he said: O king, I am very thankful before God this day that I am yet alive, and am permitted to speak; and I will endeavor to speak with boldness;

13 For I am assured that if ye had known me ye would not have suffered that I should have worn these bands. For I am Ammon, and am a descendant of Zarahemla, and have come up out of the land of Zarahemla to inquire concerning our brethren, whom Zeniff brought up out of that land.

14 And now, it came to pass that after Limhi had heard the words of Ammon, he was exceedingly glad, and said: Now, I know of a surety that my brethren who were in the land of Zarahemla are yet alive. And now, I will rejoice; and on the morrow I will cause that my people shall rejoice also.

verse 14 "Now, I know of a surety that my brethren who were in the land of Zarahemla are yet alive" What reason did Limhi have to think that those people in Zarahemla had been destroyed? We will soon learn the interesting answer to this question (see Mosiah 8:7-10; 21:25-28).

15 For behold, we are in bondage to the Lamanites, and are taxed with a tax which is grievous to be borne. And now, behold, our brethren will deliver us out of our bondage, or out of the hands of the Lamanites, and we will be their slaves; for it is better that we be slaves to the Nephites than to pay tribute to the king of the Lamanites.

verse 15 "we will be their slaves" It is interesting that Limhi is willing to accept a second-class status for his people once they are back among the Nephites. This causes one to wonder if there had been a socially stratified society among the Nephites when Limhi's grandfather Zeniff departed Zarahemla. Perhaps there had been, and Limhi assumed that such a dependent category still existed.

16 And now, king Limhi commanded his guards that they should no more bind Ammon nor his brethren, but caused that they should go to the hill which was

north of Shilom, and bring their brethren into the city, that thereby they might eat, and drink, and rest themselves from the labors of their journey; for they had suffered many things; they had suffered hunger, thirst, and fatigue.

verses 17-18 King Limhi here begins a sermon that will extend through the end of chapter 7. We will learn that the account given here of this sermon by the prophet Mormon is but a small part of Limhi's entire sermon (Mosiah 8:1).

17 And now, it came to pass on the morrow that king Limhi sent a proclamation among all his people, that thereby they might gather themselves together to the temple to hear the words which he should speak unto them.

verse 17 "on the morrow" We will later learn that one of the items Limhi included in this sermon to his people was a discussion of "all the things concerning their brethren who were in the land of Zarahemla (Mosiah 8:1). Perhaps he had learned much of this from his father and grandfather, but it is logical that he had also spent the previous evening with Ammon bringing himself up to date on the happenings in Zarahemla.

Note that the Zeniffites had a temple. Perhaps the Zeniffites restored the temple that Nephi had built centuries before in the same area (2 Nephi 5:16).

18 And it came to pass that when they had gathered themselves together that he spake unto them in this wise, saying: O ye, my people, lift up your heads and be comforted; for behold, the time is at hand, or is not far distant, when we shall no longer be in subjection to our enemies, notwithstanding our many strugglings, which have been in vain; yet I trust there remaineth an effectual struggle to be made.

verse 18 "notwithstanding our many strugglings, which have been in vain; yet I trust there remaineth an effectual struggle to be made" We have experienced many frustrations and hardships in the past in bondage to the Lamanites, but now there is real hope for the future. Read of the fulfillment of this prophecy in Mosiah 22:13-14.

Effectual means producing the desired or intended effect.

19 Therefore, lift up your heads, and rejoice, and put your trust in God, in that God who was the God of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob; and also, that God who brought the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt, and caused that they should walk through the Red Sea on dry ground, and fed them with manna that they might not perish in the wilderness; and many more things did he do for them.

verse 19 The story of Moses's parting the Red Sea is an important and appropriate motif in the Book of Mormon (see the commentary for 1 Nephi 4:2). Hence,

divine deliverance is also an important and recurring theme in the Book of Mormon. Lehi and his family were delivered from Jerusalem. Nephi and his followers were delivered from Nephi's brothers Laman and Lemuel in the land of their first inheritance (2 Nephi 5). Mosiah (the father of Benjamin) and the Nephites were delivered from the land of Nephi (Omni 1). Now Limhi is hoping for deliverance of his people from bondage.

20 And again, that same God has brought our fathers out of the land of Jerusalem, and has kept and preserved his people even until now; and behold, it is because of our iniquities and abominations that he has brought us into bondage.

21 And ye all are witnesses this day, that Zeniff, who was made king over this people, he being over-zealous to inherit the land of his fathers, therefore being deceived by the cunning and craftiness of king Laman, who having entered into a treaty with king Zeniff, and having yielded up into his hands the possessions of a part of the land, or even the city of Lehi-Nephi, and the city of Shilom; and the land round about—

verse 21 “he being over-zealous to inherit the land of his fathers” Limhi's grandfather, Zeniff, had himself admitted that he had been “over-zealous” to reclaim the land of his fathers. The implication is that the desire to return to the land of Nephi was his own and was not obtained in counsel with the Lord. He had been careless of the Lord's desires in the matter. Here is a reminder that there is a proper balance between lethargy with its inevitable idleness and overzealousness with its associated fanaticism. Either extreme tends to subject an individual or a people to those who would seek dominion or power over them and hold them in bondage.

“deceived by the cunning and craftiness of King Laman” The word *cunning* here means deceitful, designing, tricky.

“having yielded up into his hands” A careful reading of this verse indicates that it was the crafty King Laman who was doing the “yielding” here.

22 And all this he did, for the sole purpose of bringing this people into subjection or into bondage. And behold, we at this time do pay tribute to the king of the Lamanites, to the amount of one half of our corn, and our barley, and even all our grain of every kind, and one half of the increase of our flocks and our herds; and even one half of all we have or possess the king of the Lamanites doth exact of us, or our lives.

verse 22 “one half of our corn” The mention of “corn” in this verse is interesting. “Corn” is almost certainly maize, the native American plant that has been the mainstay of the native Americans' diet for centuries. Maize is so totally domesticated a plant that it will not reproduce without human care. It is therefore

impossible that they would have found it growing wild on their arrival. Also there is no possibility that Lehi's party would have brought this American crop with them since it does not exist in the land of Judah from whence they came. Zeniff's people could only be growing corn because people already familiar with the complex techniques had passed on the requisite knowledge and seed to him. Here, then, is further evidence that "others" passed on the knowledge to the descendants of Lehi (John L. Sorenson, "When Lehi's party Arrived in the Land, Did They Find Others There?" in the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, volume 1, number 1 [Fall 1992], 1-34).

"one half of . . . our barley" Prior to 1983 there was no evidence that pre-Colombian domesticated barley ever existed in the western hemisphere. In the December 1983 edition of the magazine *Science*, archaeologists reported the discovery of what appeared to be this type of barley in Phoenix, Arizona (see also Alma 11:7).

verses 21-22 Sentence structures in Hebrew differ from those in English. For example, long strings of subordinate clauses and verbal expressions, such as is found in these two verses are acceptable in Hebrew, though unorthodox and discouraged in English.

"or our lives" Obviously the people of Limhi were threatened by the Lamanites with death if they did not comply with all of the various taxations to which they were subject.

23 And now, is not this grievous to be borne? And is not this, our affliction, great? Now behold, how great reason we have to mourn.

24 Yea, I say unto you, great are the reasons which we have to mourn; for behold how many of our brethren have been slain, and their blood has been spilt in vain, and all because of iniquity.

25 For if this people had not fallen into transgression the Lord would not have suffered that this great evil should come upon them. But behold, they would not hearken unto his words; but there arose contentions among them, even so much that they did shed blood among themselves.

verse 25 "they did shed blood among themselves" What are these incidents of bloodshed? We do know of blood-shed during the incident involving the "austere and blood-thirsty man" who originally led Zeniff and the other Nephites up to the land of Nephi (Mosiah 9:2). We will read in the next verse of King Noah's ordering the execution of the prophet Abinadi. There may have been other unmentioned incidents of fratricide particularly during the reign of King Noah.

26 And a prophet of the Lord have they slain; yea, a chosen man of God, who told them of their wickedness and abominations, and prophesied of many things which are to come, yea, even the coming of Christ.

verse 26 Who is this “prophet of the Lord” who was slain? Of course it is the prophet Abinadi who was burned to death about 150 BC. We will read the complete story of the prophet Abinadi in Mosiah chapters 11 through 17. In the Book of Mormon, we will learn that Abinadi is a type of Christ as well as a messenger of him. Nothing is known of Abinadi’s parentage or place of origin or life, whether he was old or young, large or small. We will learn, however, that he was a man of great courage. We will read of his boldly confronting the priests of Noah and then baiting, challenging, and questioning them.

27 And because he said unto them that Christ was the God, the Father of all things, and said that he should take upon him the image of man, and it should be the image after which man was created in the beginning; or in other words, he said that man was created after the image of God, and that God should come down among the children of men, and take upon him flesh and blood, and go forth upon the face of the earth—

verse 27 In this verse Limhi summarizes the teachings of the great prophet Abinadi. We will encounter these teachings in detail in Mosiah 11 through 17.

Abinadi was the first Nephite in the Book of Mormon to die as a martyr. He was killed by fire—primarily for the clear testimony that he bore. That testimony was essentially that Christ was the God of the Old Testament, “the Father of all things,” and would eventually come to earth among men and take upon himself flesh and blood (see Mosiah 17:7-8).

“Christ was the God, the Father of all things” We have previously reviewed the four reasons why Jesus Christ is considered “the Father of all things.” First, he is the Father because of his central role in the creation of all things. Secondly, he is the Father because those sons of man who obey him and progress in his gospel become the “children” or “sons and daughters” of Christ. Third, he is the Father because in his role as Jehovah, God of the Old Testament, he became known as the God and Father of Heaven. Finally Christ may be considered the Father by the principle of the divine investiture of authority. The Father has invested in the Son his power and the right to act in his name.

“he said that man was created after the image of God” Note that Abinadi had taught that man was created, at least in part, in the image of Christ, the God who was to “come down among the children of men.” Christ was the Firstborn in the spirit. That is his intelligence was the first to be “begotten” by the Father and clothed with a body of spirit. Jesus was then tutored and tested, and he developed from “grace to grace” and eventually received a “fulness of truth” (D&C 93:11-14). The fulness of truth is defined in scripture as “a knowledge of things past, present, and future” (D&C 93:24). Then the Son became a God and was placed in charge of the creation or organization of all the rest of the Father’s kingdom (Moses 1:32-33). He even somehow assisted with the

creation of the spirit bodies of all men (D&C 93:10). This clarifies the Genesis account of “let us make man in our image” (1:26). The plural pronouns *us* and *our* in Genesis must refer to Christ being with his Father from the beginning and being involved in the plan to people the earth.

28 And now, because he said this, they did put him to death; and many more things did they do which brought down the wrath of God upon them. Therefore, who wondereth that they are in bondage, and that they are smitten with sore afflictions?

verse 28 “Therefore, who wondereth that they are in bondage” Limhi said of those people who murdered Abinadi, in effect, “No wonder our people are living in bondage.”

verses 29-31 John Gee has pointed out that in these three verses, Limhi finishes his speech by quoting three items of scripture, prefacing each with “the Lord hath said” (verse 29) or the equivalent “again he saith” (verses 30-31). But these items of scripture are unavailable to us outside of Limhi's quotations. These three items are:

1. “I will not succor my people in the day of their transgression; but I will hedge up their ways that they prosper not and their doings shall be as a stumbling block before them” (verse 29).

2. “If my people shall sow filthiness they shall reap the chaff thereof and the effect thereof is poison” (verse 30).

3. “If my people shall sow filthiness they shall reap the east wind which bringeth immediate destruction” (verse 31).

These passages are not found in any of the scriptures presently available to us. The closest parallel is Hosea 8:7: “For they have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind.” We might guess that Hosea relied on the same scripture that Limhi did, although what that source might be remains unknown. We are told that the biblical records were “not so many” as the brass plates of Laban (1 Nephi 13:23), so we should not be surprised that we cannot find these quotations in the Bible (“Limhi in the Library,” *FARMS Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, volume 1, number 1 [Fall 1992], 63).

Previously in verses 27 and 28, Limhi quoted from the prophet Abinadi. It seems possible that in verses 29 through 31, he is still quoting the words of Abinadi. Perhaps Abinadi simply found these metaphorical concepts on the plates of brass.

29 For behold, the Lord hath said: I will not succor my people in the day of their transgression; but I will hedge up their ways that they prosper not; and their doings shall be as a stumbling block before them.

verse 29 To “succor” means to help or nourish. To “hedge up their ways” means to obstruct or block their path (with a hedge) or impede their progress (Hosea 2:6; Ether 9:33; D&C 122:7).

30 And again, he saith: If my people shall sow filthiness they shall reap the chaff thereof in the whirlwind; and the effect thereof is poison.

verse 30 Here is a reference to the principle of the so-called “law of the harvest” which, simply stated, is that men are accountable for all of their acts, both spiritual and temporal. Alma the younger will later refer to this principle as the “law of restoration” in giving counsel to his son Corianton (see the introductory commentary for Alma 41). This law holds that man will be judged by his works and the intentions of his heart. If a man’s works and the desires of his heart in this life are good, then in the judgment the man will be restored to that which is good. If his works and desires are evil, then in that last day, evil will be restored to him.

“they shall reap the chaff thereof in the whirlwind” Another well-known scriptural verse contains the idea of the whirlwind’s being associated with Satanic influences (see Helaman 5:12).

31 And again he saith: If my people shall sow filthiness they shall reap the east wind, which bringeth immediate destruction.

verse 31 The “east wind” is a biblical concept that had its origins in Palestine. The term is used on one additional occasion in the Book of Mormon (see Mosiah 12:6). In Israel the prevailing winds are west winds that come off the Mediterranean. They are cooling and refreshing. When the winds change, however, and blow from the east off the desert, there is great heat, blown sand, and even pestilence in the form of plagues of grasshoppers and other insects. Thus, the east wind metaphorically represents the judgment and destruction from God (Genesis 41:23; Ezekiel 19:12; Hosea 13:15; Jonah 4:8).

It is interesting that we have a man in 120 BC in the western hemisphere using the concept of the “east wind.” How might we explain this? The first person or speaker in this verse is Limhi. As mentioned above, the concept of the “east wind” may have originated in the plates of brass. Or, perhaps Limhi was actually referring to the weather patterns in his own land. In Mesoamerica there were certainly destructive “east winds”—hurricanes that came in from the east. Thus the concept of destructive “east winds” might also have been a valid one among the people of Limhi.

32 And now, behold, the promise of the Lord is fulfilled, and ye are smitten and afflicted.

33 But if ye will turn to the Lord with full purpose of heart, and put your trust in him, and serve him with all diligence of mind, if ye do this, he will, according to his own will and pleasure, deliver you out of bondage.

verse 33 “with full purpose of heart” This expression is found exclusively in the Book of Mormon and in the Doctrine and Covenants (D&C 17:1; 18:27-28). Its meaning is evident. In contrast we often use the expression “halfhearted.”

Mosiah Chapter 8

1 And it came to pass that after king Limhi had made an end of speaking to his people, for he spake many things unto them and only a few of them have I written in this book, he told his people all the things concerning their brethren who were in the land of Zarahemla.

verse 1 Who is the first person in this verse, and what is “this book”? The “I” is Mormon, and “this book” is the plates of Mormon. See the supplementary article, *Those Confusing Book of Mormon Plates*. Mormon, here, makes reference to King Limhi’s sermon found in verses 18 through 33 of Mosiah 7.

“all the things concerning their brethren who were in the land of Zarahemla” As mentioned previously (see the commentary for Mosiah 7:17), it is likely that Limhi spent the evening prior to his sermon at the temple visiting with Ammon and brushing up on the current happenings in Zarahemla.

2 And he caused that Ammon should stand up before the multitude, and rehearse unto them all that had happened unto their brethren from the time that Zeniff went up out of the land even until the time that he himself came up out of the land.

verse 2 “from the time that Zeniff went up to the land even until the time that he [Ammon] himself came up out of the land” Zeniff had departed Zarahemla about 200 BC. The rescue of the Zeniffites by Ammon was about 121 BC. Ammon was asked not only to give a report on the current status of Zarahemla, but also to tell about the rescue party’s rather circuitous journey up to the land of Nephi from Zarahemla.

3 And he also rehearsed unto them the last words which king Benjamin had taught them, and explained them to the people of king Limhi, so that they might understand all the words which he spake.

verse 3 “the last words which king Benjamin had taught them” Keep in mind that the Zeniffites knew nothing of king Benjamin, as they had been in the land of Nephi (or Lehi-Nephi) at the time of Benjamin’s reign in Zarahemla. Benjamin began his reign about 160 BC (which, coincidentally, was about the same time that Noah became king) and ruled until 124 BC. Thus Benjamin’s sermon had been delivered only three years previously and was undoubtedly fresh on Ammon’s mind.

4 And it came to pass that after he had done all this, that king Limhi dismissed the multitude, and caused that they should return every one unto his own house.

5 And it came to pass that he caused that the plates which contained the record of his people from the time that they left the land of Zarahemla, should be brought before Ammon, that he might read them.

verse 5 This is the first mention of this set of plates, the record of the Zeniffites compiled by the Zeniffites themselves. The translation, and probable abridgement, of these plates comprises chapters 9 through 22 of the book of Mosiah.

There is no indication that Ammon had any difficulty communicating with the Zeniffites. They must have had a language in common.

6 Now, as soon as Ammon had read the record, the king inquired of him to know if he could interpret languages, and Ammon told him that he could not.

verse 6 Ammon had obviously been able to read the record of the Zeniffites. In this verse Limhi is asking Ammon if he can read languages other than that spoken by the Nephites and the Zeniffites.

7 And the king said unto him: Being grieved for the afflictions of my people, I caused that forty and three of my people should take a journey into the wilderness, that thereby they might find the land of Zarahemla, that we might appeal unto our brethren to deliver us out of bondage.

8 And they were lost in the wilderness for the space of many days, yet they were diligent, and found not the land of Zarahemla but returned to this land, having traveled in a land among many waters, having discovered a land which was covered with bones of men, and of beasts, and was also covered with ruins of buildings of every kind, having discovered a land which had been peopled with a people who were as numerous as the hosts of Israel.

verse 8 When these forty-three men happened on to the remains of the Jaredite culture, did they know where they were? Did they know the identity of the people whose remains they were viewing? We will learn later that the men feared they may have found the remains of Zarahemla with all of its inhabitants annihilated (For a more complete account of this experience see Mosiah 21:25-28 and its commentary).

9 And for a testimony that the things that they had said are true they have brought twenty-four plates which are filled with engravings, and they are of pure gold.

verse 9 “**twenty-four plates which are filled with engravings**” We will later learn that these are the plates of Ether, the record of the Jaredites. They will later be translated by king Mosiah, the son of king Benjamin. This translation is not available to us today. Also the prophet Moroni, the son of Mormon, will eventually translate this record, and, of course, we have this translation today as the book of Ether.

10 And behold, also, they have brought breastplates, which are large, and they are of brass and of copper, and are perfectly sound.

verse 10 “breastplates, which are large” The Jaredites are believed by several investigators in Book of Mormon geography to correlate with the ancient Olmec culture of Mesoamerica who lived some time between 2500 BC and 300 BC (Joseph L. Allen, *Exploring the Lands of the Book of Mormon*, 55-67). It is particularly interesting to note that these people were of unusually large boney structure. The 16th century historian Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl referred to them in his writings as “giants.”

11 And again, they have brought swords, the hilts thereof have perished, and the blades thereof were cankered with rust; and there is no one in the land that is able to interpret the language or the engravings that are on the plates. Therefore I said unto thee: Canst thou translate?

verse 11 The “hilt” of a sword is its handle.

12 And I say unto thee again: Knowest thou of any one that can translate? For I am desirous that these records should be translated into our language; for, perhaps, they will give us a knowledge of a remnant of the people who have been destroyed, from whence these records came; or, perhaps, they will give us a knowledge of this very people who have been destroyed; and I am desirous to know the cause of their destruction.

13 Now Ammon said unto him: I can assuredly tell thee, O king, of a man that can translate the records; for he has wherewith that he can look, and translate all records that are of ancient date; and it is a gift from God. And the things are called interpreters, and no man can look in them except he be commanded, lest he should look for that he ought not and he should perish. And whosoever is commanded to look in them, the same is called seer.

verse 13 Some have felt that Ammon was oddly silent when he was told about the twenty-four plates and other artifacts that had been recovered from the land Desolation. After all, he was a descendant of the people of Zarahemla (Mosiah 7:13), and might be expected to have known of the tradition that existed among his people of finding Coriantumr, the last survivor of the great Jaredite conflict (Omni 1:20-22). He gives no indication of having heard of the Jaredites who occupied the land of Desolation or of the war of extinction or of the wounded Jaredite ruler who lived among his ancestors for nine months. Ammon seemed to be as ignorant of Coriantumr as Limhi was. It could be that Ammon was simply carelessly ignorant of his people’s traditions. After all, Coriantumr was discovered some 400 years previously. Or, it could be that Mormon’s account of Ammon’s response in this instance is deficient. It has also been suggested that the “Mulekites” were a heterogeneous group and that all segments of their population did not share the same traditions (John L. Sorenson, “When Lehi’s Party Arrived in the Land, Did They Find Others There?” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, volume 1, number 1, 1992, 16).

“a man that can translate the records” Ammon, of course, is referring to king Mosiah, the son of king Benjamin.

“the things are called interpreters” This is the first mention in the Book of Mormon of this peculiar device intended by the Lord to be used for translating ancient records. For a detailed description of this device, see *The Process of Translating the Book of Mormon Plates*, in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, appendix A. We understand the “interpreters” to be the “Urim and Thummim,” two special stones prepared by God and used by prophets for receiving revelations and for translating scriptural records written in a language unknown to the prophet. God’s prophets who are allowed to use the Urim and Thummim have been referred to as “seers.” The term “interpreters” is unique to the Book of Mormon. The term “Urim and Thummim” is not found in the Book of Mormon text.

Is there more than one set of interpreters in ancient scripture? There are at least two and possibly three or more. The brother of Jared was the first to receive a set (Ether 3:22-28). He was commanded to seal them up with his record as a means of translating the same (Ether 3:23-24). Joseph Smith, of course, possessed the interpreters, and we are told that his were the same given to the brother of Jared (D&C 17:1). Where did King Mosiah get his? There is no mention of Lehi and his party’s bringing these stones with them. Some have suggested that Mosiah obtained his from his father and grandfather, Benjamin and Mosiah. This idea originates with the account of the older Mosiah’s translating the Mulekite’s large stone “by the gift and power of God” (Omni 1:20-21). Were King Mosiah’s interpreters the same as those given to the brother of Jared? It is possible, but it seems unlikely, unless the early Mulekites found them among the artifacts previously belonging to the Jaredites and handed them down to eventually be delivered by the people of Zarahemla to Mosiah.

Abraham received a set (Abraham 3:1). Either Abraham’s set was passed along or Moses received another (Exodus 28:30). The fate of this set or these sets is unknown. There are several other mentions of this type of device in the Old Testament. Apparently a Urim and Thummim was kept in the pocket of the breastplate worn by the high priest in Old Testament Israel (Exodus 28:30; Leviticus 8:8; Numbers 27:21; Deuteronomy 33:8; 1 Samuel 28:6; Ezra 2:63; Nehemiah 7:65). This Urim and Thummim was also apparently used for receiving revelation from the Lord (e.g., Numbers 27:21; 1 Samuel 28:6).

The name “Urim and Thummim” is the transliteration of two Hebrew words which mean “lights” and “perfections,” referring to the stones’ ability to bring to light hidden things of the past (Alma 37:23). The *-im* ending on both words apparently represents the Hebrew masculine plural suffix.

Joseph Smith first learned of the stones’ existence the night of September 21, 1823 from Moroni, then a resurrected being, who told him that when he should obtain them, he should show them only to those to whom he should be commanded to show

them (JS-H 1:42). Joseph first saw the Urim and Thummim the following day (JS-H 1:52), and obtained them and the plates four years later (JS-H 1:59).

“lest he should look for that he ought not and he should perish” Ammon suggests that the unauthorized use of the interpreters might lead to the death of the offender. It seems more likely that any unworthy individual who tries to use them would simply find them ineffectual (see 1 Samuel 28:6).

14 And behold, the king of the people who are in the land of Zarahemla is the man that is commanded to do these things, and who has this high gift from God.

15 And the king said that a seer is greater than a prophet.

verse 15 Mormon seems to attribute this verse to king Mosiah, the son of Benjamin. Are “prophets” different than “seers”? Apparently the term “seer” was used in the earliest of Old Testament times to designate a prophet. A prophet is essentially one who proclaims the word of God, especially the testimony of Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit. A seer has the gift to prophesy of future events and to interpret past events and records (see the commentary for the following verse). Most prophets are also seers, but apparently it is possible to be a prophet and not be a seer. We will learn in the next verse, however, that every seer is also a prophet.

16 And Ammon said that a seer is a revelator and a prophet also; and a gift which is greater can no man have, except he should possess the power of God, which no man can; yet a man may have great power given him from God.

verse 16 “a seer is a revelator and a prophet also” A seer is the most inspired of men, having visual revelations of things past, present, and future pertaining to both heaven and earth. These visions are not mere dreams; they may be experienced while in a waking state. Father Lehi, his son Nephi, and the brother of Jared are notable seers in the Book of Mormon. The translation of ancient records is another aspect of seership (see verse 13). A man who possesses the interpreters (Urim and Thummim) is a seer. He is allowed “by the gift and power of God” to look in the interpreters for the purpose of interpreting languages.

“except he should possess the power of God” The term “power of God” here might be interpreted as “all of the power of God.”

“yet a man may have great power given him from God” We know that under certain circumstances, God allows man to borrow some of his power. Such a man is said to hold the priesthood.

17 But a seer can know of things which are past, and also of things which are to come, and by them shall all things be revealed, or, rather, shall secret things be made manifest, and hidden things shall come to light, and things which are not

known shall be made known by them, and also things shall be made known by them which otherwise could not be known.

verse 17 “a seer” What is a seer? He is a priesthood leader who is empowered to see with spiritual eyes things which are not visible with the natural eyes. He can see “things which are past,” “things which are to come,” “secret things,” hidden things,” and “things which are not known.”

18 Thus God has provided a means that man, through faith, might work mighty miracles; therefore he becometh a great benefit to his fellow beings.

verse 18 “man, through faith, might work mighty miracles” Here is a reminder that miracles are not given by the Lord in order to produce faith in the receiver. Rather, miracles are given to mortals as a reward for their faith. See *Miracles in Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 3, chapter 20.

19 And now, when Ammon had made an end of speaking these words the king rejoiced exceedingly, and gave thanks to God, saying: Doubtless a great mystery is contained within these plates, and these interpreters were doubtless prepared for the purpose of unfolding all such mysteries to the children of men.

verse 19 “mystery” “mysteries” For a discussion of the two definitions of the concept of the “mysteries of God” see the commentary for 1 Nephi 1:1.

For further discussion of the “interpreters” see the commentary for Mosiah 8:13.

20 O how marvelous are the works of the Lord, and how long doth he suffer with his people; yea, and how blind and impenetrable are the understandings of the children of men; for they will not seek wisdom, neither do they desire that she should rule over them!

verse 20 “for they will not seek wisdom, neither do they desire that *she* should rule over them” (italics mine) It should be noted that in biblical scripture, the concept of wisdom is often referred to as “she” or “her” (see Proverbs 1:20; 2:4; 3:13; 4:5-9). By the way, if you have ever used Proverbs 8:22-31 as a passage of scripture which provides evidence of the pre-existence of man, notice that the first person in this passage is not man, but rather wisdom!:

The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was. When [there were] no depths, I was brought forth; when [there were] no fountains abounding with water. Before the mountains were settled, before the hills was I brought forth: While as yet he had not made the earth, nor the fields, nor the highest part of the dust of the world. When he prepared the heavens, I [was] there: when he set a compass upon the face of the depth: When he established the clouds above: when he strengthened the fountains of the deep: When he gave to the sea his decree, that the waters should not

pass his commandment: when he appointed the foundations of the earth: Then I was by him, [as] one brought up [with him]: and I was daily [his] delight, rejoicing always before him; Rejoicing in the habitable part of his earth; and my delights [were] with the sons of men (Proverbs 8:22-31).

21 Yea, they are as a wild flock which fleeth from the shepherd, and scattereth, and are driven, and are devoured by the beasts of the forest.

verse 21 King Limhi comments on a natural tendency of man and its consequences (see *The "Natural Self" and "Spiritual Self"* in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 5).

Mosiah Chapter 9

Scripture Mastery

Mosiah 9-22 The account of the people of Zeniff, Noah, and Limhi in the land of Nephi.

This chapter begins the record of the Zeniffites referred to in Mosiah 8:5. Mormon obviously chose to include this account on the plates of Mormon. It is likely that he abridged the original plates of the Zeniffites and engraved an abbreviated rather than a verbatim version onto his plates. The account extends through Mosiah chapter 22. This record began about 200 BC. The Zeniffites will be rescued and led back to the land of Zarahemla after some eighty years, in 121 BC. Before beginning your study of these chapters, be certain you are familiar with the *Narrative Historical Summary of the book of Mosiah*.

The Record of Zeniff—An account of his people, from the time they left the land of Zarahemla until the time that they were delivered out of the hands of the Lamanites. Comprising chapters 9 to 22 inclusive.

This heading was contained on the plates of Mormon except, of course, for the phrase “Comprising chapters 9 to 22 inclusive, which is a modern addition.

1 I, Zeniff, having been taught in all the language of the Nephites, and having had a knowledge of the land of Nephi, or of the land of our fathers’ first inheritance, and having been sent as a spy among the Lamanites that I might spy out their forces, that our army might come upon them and destroy them—but when I saw that which was good among them I was desirous that they should not be destroyed.

verse 1 Note that if Mormon did abridge this record, he left Zeniff as the first person. Zeniff will remain the first person through chapter 10 after which he died. Mormon then becomes the first person and remains so throughout the remainder of the record of the Zeniffites. Zeniff is obviously the author of the materials in chapters 9 and 10. Who is the author of the remainder of the Zeniffite record? We are not told. Perhaps it was a scribe in the king’s court.

“I, Zeniff, having been taught in all the language of the Nephites” Zeniff states how he is able to commence this record of his doings. In which language was his record engraved? We do not know. Was it the same “reformed Egyptian”—the glyptic form of Hebrew—in which the rest of the plates of the Book of Mormon were engraved? It seems improbable that it would be, as it would be a little surprising if the rescuer

Ammon, one of the “strong men” of Zarahemla (Mosiah 7:2) and a descendant of the Mulekites, would have been able to read a record so recorded (see Mosiah 8:5-6)?

“having been sent as a spy among the Lamanites that I might spy out their forces, that our army might come upon them and destroy them” It seems clear that this initial journey by Nephites from Zarahemla back up to the land of Nephi was a military excursion of armed men intended, at least in the eyes of its leader and some others, to win back the land of Nephi from the Lamanites by combat.

2 Therefore, I contended with my brethren in the wilderness, for I would that our ruler should make a treaty with them; but he being an austere and a blood-thirsty man commanded that I should be slain; but I was rescued by the shedding of much blood; for father fought against father, and brother against brother, until the greater number of our army was destroyed in the wilderness; and we returned, those of us that were spared, to the land of Zarahemla, to relate that tale to their wives and their children.

verse 2 “until the greater number of our army was destroyed in the wilderness” We are not told all of the reasons for the infighting that occurred among this Nephite army, though Omni 1:28 suggests that the leader of the excursion was responsible. Perhaps it was the same issue that was troubling Zeniff—whether to attack the Lamanites or enter into a treaty with them. Following the fighting, only fifty men remained alive (Omni 1:28).

By today’s military standards and if this military excursion was sent from a central military command in Zarahemla to spy on the enemy (the Lamanites), it would seem that Zeniff perhaps should be judged as guilty of sedition, as he seems to have objected to his commander’s orders. Perhaps he is fortunate that he was not tried by a military tribunal once he arrived back in Zarahemla.

3 And yet, I being over-zealous to inherit the land of our fathers, collected as many as were desirous to go up to possess the land, and started again on our journey into the wilderness to go up to the land; but we were smitten with famine and sore afflictions; for we were slow to remember the Lord our God.

verse 3 “I being over-zealous to inherit the land of our fathers” Apparently, by the time Zeniff wrote this account, he had had time to reflect on the appropriateness of the entire venture. There is no evidence in the text that the Lord ever inspired or even approved of this undertaking by Zeniff and his followers. The entire experience was the idea of Zeniff and perhaps some others. By his own admission, Zeniff and his adherents were “slow to remember the Lord our God.”

It is suggested that one reason why Zeniff and his associates might have wanted to return to the land of Nephi is that the Chiapas depression, the likely site of the city of Zarahemla, is at a low elevation and is characterized by tropical moist heat. Highland

Guatemala, the likely site of the land of Nephi, in contrast, has an almost perpetual spring-like climate.

4 Nevertheless, after many days' wandering in the wilderness we pitched our tents in the place where our brethren were slain, which was near to the land of our fathers.

5 And it came to pass that I went again with four of my men into the city, in unto the king, that I might know of the disposition of the king, and that I might know if I might go in with my people and possess the land in peace.

6 And I went in unto the king, and he covenanted with me that I might possess the land of Lehi-Nephi, and the land of Shilom.

verse 6 The lands of Lehi-Nephi and Shilom are the local lands surrounding the cities of the same name. We have already commented that the city of Nephi, founded originally by Nephi and his followers, now has a new name (see verse 8). It is the city of Lehi-Nephi. When was the name changed? We have commented previously that we are not told. It was sometime during the 400 years of Nephite control of that city.

7 And he also commanded that his people should depart out of the land, and I and my people went into the land that we might possess it.

8 And we began to build buildings, and to repair the walls of the city, yea, even the walls of the city of Lehi-Nephi, and the city of Shilom.

verse 8 John A. Tvedtnes observed: "By the time the Lamanite king returned the cities of [Lehi-Nephi] and Shilom to the Nephites led by Zeniff (with the intent of bringing them into bondage), the city seems to have fallen into disrepair. . . . It is possible that the Lamanites were anxious to absorb Nephite dissenters precisely because they could make use of their skills (cf. Alma 21:2)" (*Review of Books on the Book of Mormon*, 32). Apparently the Lamanites never did become as skilled as the Nephites in building.

9 And we began to till the ground, yea, even with all manner of seeds, with seeds of corn, and of wheat, and of barley, and with neas, and with sheum, and with seeds of all manner of fruits; and we did begin to multiply and prosper in the land.

verse 9 "seeds of corn" It would seem that the most staple food product throughout much of the Book of Mormon was corn. Corn, or maize, has been shown by archaeologists to be "native to the Americas; and evidence of corn appears as early as 500 BC" (Joseph L. Allen, *Exploring the Lands of the Book of Mormon*, 171). See also the commentary for Mosiah 7:22.

For additional notes on the agriculture of the Book of Mormon people, see the commentary for 1 Nephi 8:1.

“and of wheat” As of this writing, modern archaeologists have found no evidence of pre-Columbian wheat in the Americas. Undoubtedly they will eventually find such evidence.

“and of barley” Until recently, barley also had never been reported to exist in the Americas prior to Columbus. In the December 1983 issue of *Science* 83, professional archaeologists reported finding what is apparently pre-Columbian, domesticated barley among the ruins of the Hohokam civilization in Arizona.

“with neas and with sheum” “Neas” are possibly avocado.

“Sheum” may well be a type of grain related to barley. Just in the last forty years we have learned that the most important cereal grain among the Akkadians (Babylonians) of Mesopotamia was called she’um (see R. F. Smith, “Some ‘Neologisms’ from the Mormon Canon,” in *1973 Conference on the Language of the Mormons* [Provo, Utah: BYU Language Research Center, 1973], 66). In Akkadian the word *she’um* meant “barley.” In Old Assyrian, a neighbor tongue, the term signified “wheat.” Since both wheat and barley are separately listed in this verse, *she’um* did not mean either of those two grains, but it could have been transferred to another seed or even a non-seed plant. Regarding seven little-known grain crops from Mesoamerica to which the name she’um might have been applied, see John L. Sorenson, “Viva Zapato! Hurray for the Shoe!” *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6/1 [1994]:338-39). The Jaredites, who had originally lived in Mesopotamia, could have put the name on some cultivable plant they encountered in their new land. Some of their undocumented descendants may well have passed the name and whatever grain it labeled down to the Zeniffites.

10 Now it was the cunning and the craftiness of king Laman, to bring my people into bondage, that he yielded up the land that we might possess it.

11 Therefore it came to pass, that after we had dwelt in the land for the space of twelve years that king Laman began to grow uneasy, lest by any means my people should wax strong in the land, and that they could not overpower them and bring them into bondage.

verse 11 The pronoun “they” in this verse and in the following verse has no antecedent. It obviously refers to the Lamanites, however.

12 Now they were a lazy and an idolatrous people; therefore they were desirous to bring us into bondage, that they might glut themselves with the labors of our hands; yea, that they might feast themselves upon the flocks of our fields.

verse 12 “that they might glut themselves with the labors of our hands” *Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language* defines *glut*. “To swallow, or to swallow greedily; to gorge; to cloy; to fill beyond sufficiency; to sate; to disgust; to feast or delight even to satiety.”

13 Therefore it came to pass that king Laman began to stir up his people that they should contend with my people; therefore there began to be wars and contentions in the land.

14 For, in the thirteenth year of my reign in the land of Nephi, away on the south of the land of Shilom, when my people were watering and feeding their flocks, and tilling their lands, a numerous host of Lamanites came upon them and began to slay them, and to take off their flocks, and the corn of their fields.

15 Yea, and it came to pass that they fled, all that were not overtaken, even into the city of Nephi, and did call upon me for protection.

verse 15 Note, again, that the terms “city of Nephi” and “city of Lehi-Nephi” are used interchangeably (see verse 8).

16 And it came to pass that I did arm them with bows, and with arrows, with swords, and with cimeters, and with clubs, and with slings, and with all manner of weapons which we could invent, and I and my people did go forth against the Lamanites to battle.

verse 16 What is a “cimeter”? It is probably a curved sword or saber which has its cutting edge on the convex side. Today it is more likely to be referred to as a “scimitar” or “scimiter.” The primary distinction between a cimeter and a sword is that the former has a curved blade. This spelling of the word “cimeter” is unique to the Book of Mormon (see the commentary for Enos 1:20).

17 Yea, in the strength of the Lord did we go forth to battle against the Lamanites; for I and my people did cry mightily to the Lord that he would deliver us out of the hands of our enemies, for we were awakened to a remembrance of the deliverance of our fathers.

verse 17 “my people did cry mightily to the Lord that he would deliver us out of the hands of our enemies” Regarding the pre-battle prayers of the Nephites, Gary L. Sturgess has written:

We do not know what “cry[ing] mightily to the Lord” meant, but it occurs so often in this context that we must understand it to be some kind of pre-battle ritual. Alma’s son Helaman wrote to Moroni a decade or more after his father’s departure: “We trust God will deliver us, notwithstanding the weakness of our armies, yea, and deliver us out of the hands of our enemies” (Alma 58:37). There would also appear to have been a ritual thanksgiving after a victorious battle in which Jehovah was praised for delivering the people. Alma 45:1 records fasting and prayer, as well as a form of worship that involved great rejoicing, “because the Lord had again delivered them out of the hands of their enemies.” We find this same pattern of deliverance and rejoicing alluded to in Omni 1:6–7; Alma 49:28–30; 62:48–52; and 3 Nephi 4:28–33 (*Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, volume 4, Number 2, 126).

“we were awakened to a remembrance of the deliverance of our fathers”

This phrase should probably read “deliverances of our fathers” since Zeniff and his people had a few deliverances in their heritage. Lehi and his family were delivered from the impending destruction of Jerusalem. Nephi and others were delivered from the threats of Laman and Lemuel (2 Nephi 5). Mosiah, the father of Benjamin, had delivered the Nephites from the increasingly dangerous land of Nephi (Omni 1).

18 And God did hear our cries and did answer our prayers; and we did go forth in his might; yea, we did go forth against the Lamanites, and in one day and a night we did slay three thousand and forty-three; we did slay them even until we had driven them out of our land.

19 And I, myself, with mine own hands, did help to bury their dead. And behold, to our great sorrow and lamentation, two hundred and seventy-nine of our brethren were slain.

Mosiah Chapter 10

1 And it came to pass that we again began to establish the kingdom and we again began to possess the land in peace. And I caused that there should be weapons of war made of every kind, that thereby I might have weapons for my people against the time the Lamanites should come up again to war against my people.

verse 1 “we again began to establish the kingdom” This phrase does not have reference to the kingdom of God, but rather to the organization of the community of the Zeniffites under the leadership of Zeniff as their king.

2 And I set guards round about the land, that the Lamanites might not come upon us again unawares and destroy us; and thus I did guard my people and my flocks, and keep them from falling into the hands of our enemies.

3 And it came to pass that we did inherit the land of our fathers for many years, yea, for the space of twenty and two years.

verse 3 “we did inherit the land of our fathers for many years” We know that the Zeniffites lived in the land and city of Shilom and in the neighboring land and city of Nephi or Lehi-Nephi. At this early stage in their history, these two areas must not have been more than small settlements. We are not told the numbers of people that were involved. The Lamanites apparently lived in the neighboring land of Shemlon. Zeniff is likely a bit presumptuous when he writes that they did *inherit* the land. The word *inherit* implies divine intention which was probably lacking here (see the commentary for Mosiah 9:3).

4 And I did cause that the men should till the ground, and raise all manner of grain and all manner of fruit of every kind.

5 And I did cause that the women should spin, and toil, and work, and work all manner of fine linen, yea, and cloth of every kind, that we might clothe our nakedness; and thus we did prosper in the land—thus we did have continual peace in the land for the space of twenty and two years.

6 And it came to pass that king Laman died, and his son began to reign in his stead. And he began to stir his people up in rebellion against my people; therefore they began to prepare for war, and to come up to battle against my people.

7 But I had sent my spies out round about the land of Shemlon, that I might discover their preparations, that I might guard against them, that they might not come upon my people and destroy them.

8 And it came to pass that they came up upon the north of the land of Shilom, with their numerous hosts, men armed with bows, and with arrows, and with

swords, and with cimeters, and with stones, and with slings; and they had their heads shaved that they were naked; and they were girded with a leathern girdle about their loins.

9 And it came to pass that I caused that the women and children of my people should be hid in the wilderness; and I also caused that all my old men that could bear arms, and also all my young men that were able to bear arms, should gather themselves together to go to battle against the Lamanites; and I did place them in their ranks, every man according to his age.

verse 9 “all my young men that were able to bear arms” The term “young men” in the Book of Mormon almost always refers to soldiers. In Hebrew culture it appears that any male who had reached the age of twenty was responsible to render military service, though in a state of emergency perhaps those younger than twenty might be utilized (*Warfare in the Book of Mormon*, Edited by Stephen D. Ricks and William J. Hamblin, Deseret Book Company and FARMS, 66). Since Zeniff is mobilizing both the young men and the “old men,” he is obviously utilizing all available man power.

10 And it came to pass that we did go up to battle against the Lamanites; and I, even I, in my old age, did go up to battle against the Lamanites. And it came to pass that we did go up in the strength of the Lord to battle.

verse 10 “we did go up in the strength of the Lord to battle” Does the Lord really take sides in war? As we look back in history, it seems obvious that the Lord’s purposes might have been thwarted, but for a key victory, in battle, of a more righteous people. How might the Lord assist his people? It would seem that when two opposing forces collide in battle, providing one of the sides does not have an overwhelming technological or manpower edge, then the victory will go to the side that has genuine courage and a positive outlook about their chances for victory. Through the influence of the Spirit, the Lord can buoy up the fighting forces of a country.

11 Now, the Lamanites knew nothing concerning the Lord, nor the strength of the Lord, therefore they depended upon their own strength. Yet they were a strong people, as to the strength of men.

verses 12-17 “tradition of their fathers” In the Book of Mormon text we will often read of the Lamanites’ “tradition” or “traditions” of their fathers. These are the false oral traditions handed down by the Lamanites from generation to generation which formed the basis of the hatred which the Lamanites held toward the Nephites. All Lamanite children were doubtless indoctrinated with these traditions from the time they were able to understand. The central features of these traditions include:

1. Lehi was actually forced to leave Jerusalem because of his iniquities.

2. Lehi used unrighteous dominion in forcing his family to leave behind their choice possessions and their beloved home and land to travel into the wilderness.

3. Once in the wilderness, the family was unfairly dominated not only by their father Lehi, but also by their younger brother Nephi. The birthright or the right to govern, after all, rightfully belonged to the oldest son Laman and not to Nephi.

4. When Laman and Lemuel expressed fear of boarding a ship and sailing into the unknown sea, they received no understanding or sympathy. Rather they were forced to board the boat against their will.

5. Once in the New World in the land of their original settlement, the land of their “first inheritance,” Nephi continued to rule over them. When they tried to resist, Nephi stole their brass plates and departed into the wilderness.

The Nephites also had a set of unwritten traditions that were handed down. See the commentary for Enos 1:14.

12 They were a wild, and ferocious, and a blood-thirsty people, believing in the tradition of their fathers, which is this—Believing that they were driven out of the land of Jerusalem because of the iniquities of their fathers, and that they were wronged in the wilderness by their brethren, and they were also wronged while crossing the sea;

13 And again, that they were wronged while in the land of their first inheritance, after they had crossed the sea, and all this because that Nephi was more faithful in keeping the commandments of the Lord—therefore he was favored of the Lord, for the Lord heard his prayers and answered them, and he took the lead of their journey in the wilderness.

verses 12-13 In these two verses, the author Zeniff starts out his explanation of the traditions of the Lamanites’ fathers by speaking from the vantage point or perspective of the Lamanites. Then, he suddenly switches from the Lamanites’ perspective to his own more objective perspective between the words “sea” and “and” of verse 13. He maintains his own perspective through verse 17.

14 And his brethren were wroth with him because they understood not the dealings of the Lord; they were also wroth with him upon the waters because they hardened their hearts against the Lord.

verse 14 *Wroth* means very angry; exasperated.

“they hardened their hearts against the Lord” See the discussion of hard-heartedness in the commentary for Alma 10:6.

15 And again, they were wroth with him when they had arrived in the promised land, because they said that he had taken the ruling of the people out of their hands; and they sought to kill him.

verse 15 “he [Nephi] had taken the ruling of the people out of their hands”

The bitter resentment of Nephi’s older brothers may have had, in part, a cultural basis (see the commentary for 1 Nephi 16:37).

16 And again, they were wroth with him because he departed into the wilderness as the Lord had commanded him, and took the records which were engraven on the plates of brass, for they said that he robbed them.

verse 16 “they said that he had robbed them” This accusation against Nephi—that Nephi stole the plates of brass from the Lamanites—of course, is ludicrous. One has but to recall Laman’s and Lemuel’s ignorance of and indifference toward spiritual matters to appreciate this.

17 And thus they have taught their children that they should hate them, and that they should murder them, and that they should rob and plunder them, and do all they could to destroy them; therefore they have an eternal hatred towards the children of Nephi.

verse 17 “they have taught their children that they should hate them” The Lamanites had utilized these erroneous “traditions of their fathers” as propaganda to brainwash or mislead their children into hating the Nephites. It is peculiar that Zeniff refers to the Nephites as “them,” though he and his people were all of Nephite descent.

Truly, the Lamanites had “eaten a sour grape, and [their] children’s teeth [were] set on edge” (Jeremiah 31:29).

18 For this very cause has king Laman, by his cunning, and lying craftiness, and his fair promises, deceived me, that I have brought this my people up into this land, that they may destroy them; yea, and we have suffered these many years in the land.

verse 18 Zeniff is speaking. Certainly Zeniff is not implying that king Laman had anything to do with Zeniff’s leading his people from Zarahemla to the land of Nephi initially. The idea for that migration seemed to be largely Zeniff’s. Rather, Zeniff implies that King Laman’s strategy in allowing the Zeniffites to occupy the lands of Lehi-Nephi and Shilom was to place the Nephites in a disadvantageous military strategic position where they might well fall under bondage to the surrounding Lamanites.

“his fair promises” *Fair* is an English word that has several possible meanings. The meaning which is most applicable here is “apparently favorable but really false; specious” (*Webster’s New World Dictionary of the American Language*, second college edition, 1970).

19 And now I, Zeniff, after having told all these things unto my people concerning the Lamanites, I did stimulate them to go to battle with their might, putting their trust in the Lord; therefore, we did contend with them, face to face.

20 And it came to pass that we did drive them again out of our land; and we slew them with a great slaughter, even so many that we did not number them.

21 And it came to pass that we returned again to our own land, and my people again began to tend their flocks, and to till their ground.

verse 21 There was no rejoicing after their victory. They had fought because they were attacked and were forced to defend themselves.

22 And now I, being old, did confer the kingdom upon one of my sons; therefore, I say no more. And may the Lord bless my people. Amen.

verse 22 We have no information to indicate Zeniff's age. Zeniff was succeeded as king of the people by his son Noah.

Mosiah Chapter 11

Scripture Mastery

Mosiah 11-17 The preaching and martyrdom of Abinadi and the conversion of Alma.

A major subject in chapter 11 is the corruption of King Noah and the people in his kingdom. In the Book of Mormon, King Noah is the prototype of the wicked king just as Benjamin is the type of a righteous one. Whereas Benjamin brought great joy to his people as he taught them righteous principles, Noah brings sore afflictions and suffering to his people. This chapter documents and itemizes the sins of Noah's people which include: having many wives and concubines, doing all manner of wickedness, levying burdensome taxes which were used to support the extravagant lifestyle of Noah and his court, consecrating priests who were lazy and lifted up in pride, worshiping idols, enjoying whoredoms, speaking lying and vain words, placing their hearts upon riches, spending their time in riotous living, becoming wine bibbers, boasting of their own strength, and delighting in the shedding of blood.

At this time in the Book of Mormon, there are two parallel stories unfolding, one here in the Land of Lehi-Nephi and the other in the land of Zarahemla. So that the reader might maintain a reasonable orientation as to how one story relates temporarily to the other, let us briefly review the relative dates of the two locations.

First let's consider the land of Zarahemla. Recall that Mosiah led the Nephite peoples from the land of Nephi to the land of Zarahemla in about 210 BC. We are not given the date on which King Benjamin succeeded his father Mosiah on the throne but it was probably about 160 BC. Benjamin's farewell address and the succession of Benjamin's son Mosiah to the throne took place in about 124 BC.

Zeniff led a group of Nephite peoples from Zarahemla to the land of Lehi-Nephi in about 200 BC. Zeniff ruled over his people until he was succeeded by his son Noah in about 160 BC. Noah was killed and his son Limhi installed as puppet monarch in about 145 BC. Limhi and his people will be rescued and will return to the land of Zarahemla in about 121 BC. Alma will lead his people back to Zarahemla in about the same year.

Thus we learn that King Benjamin's speech was delivered only about three years before the return of King Limhi and his people and the return of Alma and his people to the land of Zarahemla.

1 And now it came to pass that Zeniff conferred the kingdom upon Noah, one of his sons; therefore Noah began to reign in his stead; and he did not walk in the ways of his father.

verse 1 Notice that between the final verse in chapter 10 and this first verse of chapter 11, the speaker or first person changes. In chapters 9 and 10, Zeniff is the first

person. Beginning in chapter 11 Mormon becomes the first person. This illustrates Mormon's technique of abridgment. At times he lifted direct quotations or first person accounts out of the collection of records we call the large plates of Nephi, and at other times he limited himself to a simple abridgment of them, functioning himself as the first person.

2 For behold, he did not keep the commandments of God, but he did walk after the desires of his own heart. And he had many wives and concubines. And he did cause his people to commit sin, and do that which was abominable in the sight of the Lord. Yea, and they did commit whoredoms and all manner of wickedness.

verse 2 It is interesting to note that by this time the population of the Zeniffites was sufficiently large, that Noah could have "many wives." Presumably the concubines were women of a different culture. Perhaps they were Lamanites or women of other peoples who lived in the area of the land of Lehi-Nephi.

"he did cause his people to commit sin" Apparently his example of leadership and personal conduct gave license to his people to conduct themselves similarly. This point is made repeatedly in this chapter (see also verses 6-7, 15, 19). People have a tendency to follow their leaders, and corrupt leaders bear some of the responsibility of the corruption of individuals under their influence.

3 And he laid a tax of one fifth part of all they possessed, a fifth part of their gold and of their silver, and a fifth part of their ziff, and of their copper, and of their brass and their iron; and a fifth part of their fatlings; and also a fifth part of all their grain.

verse 3 By today's standards this 20% tax may not seem overly burdensome!

"ziff" It is interesting that "zeev" or its transliteration "ziff" is a Hebrew word which means something like "shining" or "brightness." Here it refers to some type of shiny metal.

The term "fatlings" may refer to any young animal (calf, kid, lamb, or pig) which is being fattened before being slaughtered.

4 And all this did he take to support himself, and his wives and his concubines; and also his priests, and their wives and their concubines; thus he had changed the affairs of the kingdom.

verse 4 **"thus he had changed the affairs of the kingdom"** Mormon makes something of an understatement.

5 For he put down all the priests that had been consecrated by his father, and consecrated new ones in their stead, such as were lifted up in the pride of their hearts.

verse 5 To “put down” apparently means to dismiss.

It is not clearly stated in the Book of Mormon whether or not Zeniff or any of his priests were properly ordained to the Melchizedek priesthood. We would presume that the priesthood authority did reside with Zeniff and his priests. We will later learn that Alma, one of King Noah’s priests, did possess “authority from God” (Mosiah 18:18). Alma had to have received his authority from an angel, from Abinadi, or from some other person holding the authority. It seems unlikely that the prophet Abinadi had an opportunity to ordain Alma before Abinadi’s martyrdom. Thus it is likely that Alma and the other priests of King Noah did trace their authority back to Zeniff’s court.

6 Yea, and thus they were supported in their laziness, and in their idolatry, and in their whoredoms, by the taxes which king Noah had put upon his people; thus did the people labor exceedingly to support iniquity.

verse 6 “**they were supported . . . in their whoredoms**” Noah’s priests were guilty of more than just the unrighteous taking of many wives and concubines. Adultery was apparently among their several vices (see verse 14).

“**thus did the people labor exceedingly**” The record is unclear as to whether or not Noah’s people saw themselves as being oppressed. If this phrase was strictly Mormon’s editorial observation, then perhaps they did not. If, on the other hand, Mormon found in the record that the people described themselves as having to “labor exceedingly,” then it is likely that at least some of them viewed Noah’s leadership as oppressive.

We have already learned that the people themselves generally became wicked. This is an example of wicked leadership leading to a corrupt following (see also verse 20).

7 Yea, and they also became idolatrous, because they were deceived by the vain and flattering words of the king and priests; for they did speak flattering things unto them.

verse 7 “**they were deceived by the vain and flattering words of the king and priests**” Tyrannical governments throughout history have been able to maintain control of their people by appealing to their vanity. Two common ways to do this include: (1) building large and lavish buildings and monuments that ostensibly display the greatness and prestige of the land, and (2) seeking military conquests that supposedly demonstrate the superiority of the land over others. Note in the following verses how King Noah used these very techniques to flatter his people (see especially verses 8-10, 12-13, and 16-19).

For a discussion of the various forms of the word *flatter*, see the commentary for 2 Nephi 28:22.

8 And it came to pass that king Noah built many elegant and spacious buildings; and he ornamented them with fine work of wood, and of all manner of precious things, of gold, and of silver, and of iron, and of brass, and of ziff, and of copper;

verse 8 “and he ornamented them with . . . iron” Today we do not consider iron a decorative metal. John W. Welch has pointed out that in ancient Palestine iron was difficult to obtain and the product of a difficult production technique. It was therefore highly prized and utilized for decoration. Items were not of solid iron but were plated, veneered, or studded with the metal (see also 2 Nephi 5:15; Jarom 1:8; Ether 10:23) (“Decorative Iron in Early Israel,” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, 133-34).

9 And he also built him a spacious palace, and a throne in the midst thereof, all of which was of fine wood and was ornamented with gold and silver and with precious things.

verses 10-11 The description of Noah’s temple, which follows, leaves one with an empty feeling. It was obviously a worldly place wherein no true temple worship occurred. It was more the symbol of worldly success—on which the working classes might look with pride—than a place of honest worship.

10 And he also caused that his workmen should work all manner of fine work within the walls of the temple, of fine wood, and of copper, and of brass.

verse 10 It seems likely that Zeniff had previously restored the temple originally built by Nephi and his people over four-hundred years previously (2 Nephi 5:16).

11 And the seats which were set apart for the high priests, which were above all the other seats, he did ornament with pure gold; and he caused a breastwork to be built before them, that they might rest their bodies and their arms upon while they should speak lying and vain words to his people.

verse 11 It is interesting to note that in Noah’s court there were “high priests.” In its many other occurrences in the Book of Mormon text, the term “high priest” seems to refer to an office resembling the high priest in ancient Israel. Usually there was only one at a time. An example is the elder Alma (Mosiah 23:16; 26:7). Later on in the Book of Mormon, perhaps because of the size of the Church, it seems to have been necessary to have more than one high priest (Alma 30:20-21). Apparently these were regional high priests who functioned under the direction of the chief high priest in Zarahemla who was the younger Alma (Alma 30:29; 46:6, 38; Helaman 3:25; 3 Nephi 6:21-22, 27). Why is it that Noah apparently had more than one high priest? Perhaps

this was just another of the many apostate features of his court. The title *high priest* does not appear in the Nephite record after the coming of Christ.

12 And it came to pass that he built a tower near the temple; yea, a very high tower, even so high that he could stand upon the top thereof and overlook the land of Shilom, and also the land of Shemlon, which was possessed by the Lamanites; and he could even look over all the land round about.

verse 12 Keep in mind that the Nephites occupied the lands of Lehi-Nephi and Shilom, while the Lamanites occupied the neighboring land of Shemlon. See the *Hypothetical Map of Book of Mormon Lands*. See also the supplemental article, *Notes on the Hypothetical Map of the Book of Mormon Lands*.

13 And it came to pass that he caused many buildings to be built in the land Shilom; and he caused a great tower to be built on the hill north of the land Shilom, which had been a resort for the children of Nephi at the time they fled out of the land; and thus he did do with the riches which he obtained by the taxation of his people.

verse 13 “he caused a great tower to be built on the hill north of the land Shilom” Note that Noah built at least two towers, the one described in this verse and the one in the city of Lehi-Nephi near the temple.

“which had been a resort for the children of Nephi at the time they fled out of the land” Apparently a hill north of the land of Shilom was regarded as the traditional site where the Nephites, led by Mosiah, stopped to rest as they fled out of the land of Nephi a few decades previously.

14 And it came to pass that he placed his heart upon his riches, and he spent his time in riotous living with his wives and his concubines; and so did also his priests spend their time with harlots.

verse 14 One cannot help but contrast Noah’s “style” with that of King Benjamin who “labor[ed] with [his] own hands that [he] might serve [his people], and that [they] should not be laden with taxes” (Mosiah 2:14).

15 And it came to pass that he planted vineyards round about in the land; and he built wine-presses, and made wine in abundance; and therefore he became a wine-bibber, and also his people.

verse 15 “he built wine-presses, and made wine in abundance; and therefore he became a wine-bibber” Some scholars have faulted Joseph Smith for references in the Book of Mormon to wine in the New World. These scholars assure us that wine produced from grapes—which is the usual meaning of the word wine—was never made nor used in the Americas. However, the Book of Mormon makes no

reference to grapes, although it does, as in this verse, mention “vineyards.” Some other sort of wine could have been so labeled by the Nephites. When the Spaniards arrived in Mesoamerica, they spoke about several kinds of native “wines.” An intoxicating drink was commonly manufactured by fermenting a mixture of water, a certain tree bark, and honey. Other groups fermented juices drawn from the agave plant, bananas, pineapples, or the heart of certain palm trees. To all of these, the Europeans applied the term *wine* (see documentation in Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*, 186-87). Further, the Spaniards spoke of native plantings of the agave cactus (from which the drink balche was made) as “vineyards” (see J.E.S. Thompson, ed., Tomas Gage’s *Travels in the New World* [Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1958], 76). So Joseph Smith’s use of the terms *wine* and *vineyards* in the translation of the Book of Mormon has proved to be no mistake, whether some non-grape fruit was used or, as Joseph himself probably assumed, Nephite wine was made from grapes by a process like that used by European settlers in the early United States. The grape plant has now been identified from an archaeological site in the Mexican state of Chiapas that dates to the Nephite period. The archaeologist making the discovery presumed that the ancient people made wine from the fruit (see Alejandro Claudio Martinez Muriel, “Don Martin, Chiapas: inferencias economico-sociales de una comunidad arqueologica” [master’s theses, Escuela Nacional de Antropologia e Historia, and Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico, 1978], 105, 120, 125).

Joseph L. Allen has suggested that in Mesoamerica “the wine was probably made from the maguey plant or from other similar plants. The maguey plant is a relative of the century plant and has a large center with the appearance of a giant pineapple. The unfermented pulp juice is processed into tequila or mescal” (*Exploring the Lands of the Book of Mormon*, 174).

16 And it came to pass that the Lamanites began to come in upon his people, upon small numbers, and to slay them in their fields, and while they were tending their flocks.

17 And king Noah sent guards round about the land to keep them off; but he did not send a sufficient number, and the Lamanites came upon them and killed them, and drove many of their flocks out of the land; thus the Lamanites began to destroy them, and to exercise their hatred upon them.

18 And it came to pass that king Noah sent his armies against them, and they were driven back, or they drove them back for a time; therefore, they returned rejoicing in their spoil.

verse 18 King Noah sent his armies against the Lamanites. At times the Nephites were driven back by the Lamanites. On other occasions the Nephites were able to temporarily gain advantage over the Lamanites. On these occasions, the forces of Noah would return home exulting over their “victories”—albeit very temporary ones.

19 And now, because of this great victory they were lifted up in the pride of their hearts; they did boast in their own strength, saying that their fifty could stand against thousands of the Lamanites; and thus they did boast, and did delight in blood, and the shedding of the blood of their brethren, and this because of the wickedness of their king and priests.

verse 19 Mormon seems to use the expression “great victory” here with some sarcasm. He seems to be making a mockery out of the Nephites’ arrogance.

“Their fifty could stand against thousands of the Lamanites” There are some suggestions in the Book of Mormon that the Nephite military structure was based on the “decimal system,” that is, the size of the military units were multiples of one hundred. In this case one-half of one hundred. This system was found in Palestine at the time Lehi and his family left there.

There are references to units of . . . thousands (see Alma 43:5; 60:22; 3 Nephi 3:22), and ten thousand (see Mormon 6:10-15). In only Israelite-sized units, not specifically mentioned in Nephite-Lamanite organizations, are formations of tens and hundreds. Possibly these also existed among Book of Mormon people but were not mentioned because of their relative unimportance and because they comprised part of other units, like fifties and thousands. Units of ten thousand are most frequently mentioned in the Book of Mormon, at least after the time of the judges (ca. 91 BC). Use of the larger units may have resulted from increasing population and hence the increased ability or need to support larger armies. The earlier battles speak of units of fifty and thousands (see Mosiah 11:19; Alma 43:5), while later battles speak more of thousands and tens of thousands (see 3 Nephi 4:21) (A. Brent Merrill, “Nephite Captains and Armies” in *Warfare in the Book of Mormon*, edited by Stephen D. Ricks and William J. Hamblin, 268-69).

20 And it came to pass that there was a man among them whose name was Abinadi; and he went forth among them, and began to prophesy, saying: Behold, thus saith the Lord, and thus hath he commanded me, saying, Go forth, and say unto this people, thus saith the Lord—Wo be unto this people, for I have seen their abominations, and their wickedness, and their whoredoms; and except they repent I will visit them in mine anger.

verse 20 Here is a new character, who has not previously appeared in the Book of Mormon. He is Abinadi. We have no information as to his origin, though it is interesting to speculate. Did he come up to the land of Nephi with Zeniff? Or did he come up from Zarahemla on his own? Was he born in the land of Nephi? Obviously we don’t know. He knew the scriptures and therefore must have encountered the plates of brass in Zarahemla. He is a vital figure in the Book of Mormon and a great prophet. He will eventually give his life for the gospel. His doctrinal teachings as contained in

Mosiah chapters 12 through 16 are invaluable. He apparently operated alone, and we know for certain of only one convert that resulted from his teachings, the man Alma. Abinadi thus set the stage for most of the remainder of the Book of Mormon story which consists of Alma's establishing the church or kingdom on the American continent.

In our mind's eye we usually picture Abinadi as an old man, thin and weather-beaten, and he may well have been. This bias has probably resulted largely from the well-known depiction of him by the artist Arnold Friberg. It is notable, however, that there is nothing in the text of the Book of Mormon that tells us anything about his age or physical characteristics.

One author has compared him to John the Baptist (Rodney Turner, *Studies in Scripture, volume seven, 1 Nephi to Alma 29*, Deseret Book: Salt Lake City, 240- 41). The similarities between Abinadi and John the Baptist are interesting. Abinadi, like John, preached to a people whose religious orientation was toward the law of Moses. He (Abinadi) preached of the Messiah to come, although he actually knew little about that Messiah. He preached repentance and warned of the impending judgments of God. Both Abinadi and the Baptist were opposed by the religious and secular leaders of their day, and both died violent deaths at their hands. Both served as "transitional" prophets who provided the link between the old covenant and the new covenant—the law of Moses and the Gospel of Christ. Thus they both served as "Eliases," preparing the way for the mortal advent of the Messiah.

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland has pointed out that Abinadi is also one of the most extensively developed types or shadows or prophetic prefigurations of the Savior in the Book of Mormon (*Christ and the New Covenant*, chapter 8). Consider the following foreshadowing links and parallel possibilities between Abinadi, the first Book of Mormon martyr and Christ, the last and great sacrifice:

1. Both were called to preach repentance to those sinning, and both were rejected.
2. They were bound and taken before religious priests and political rulers.
3. They were cross-examined.
4. Both were dismissed as being mad.
5. They spoke with power and authority.
6. Neither could be slain until their message or mission was completed.
7. Abinadi was imprisoned for three days, while Christ was "entombed" for three days.
8. They were both condemned for blasphemy, and they would not recall their words.
9. In their deaths, innocent blood was shed.
10. In both cases a leader was tempted to release them, but both leaders yielded to detractors and delivered them to be slain.

11. Yet another conspicuous irony is that both died lamenting that those who claimed a belief in the law of Moses could not recognize the messianic teachings contained therein, let alone discern the Messiah himself, toward which that law, in its purity, had always been directed.

21 And except they repent and turn to the Lord their God, behold, I will deliver them into the hands of their enemies; yea, and they shall be brought into bondage; and they shall be afflicted by the hand of their enemies.

verse 21 In this verse, Abinadi is still speaking for the Lord (see verse 20). Here is the essence of Abinadi's warning to the people: Repent or be taken into bondage by your enemies. Perhaps this bondage is both temporal and spiritual. As one considers the history of the house of Israel, it becomes apparent that no segment of Israel has ever been placed in bondage to their enemies (1) without being warned by prophets whom the Lord has raised up for that express purpose, and (2) without "earning" and deserving their captivity by virtue of their disobedience and wickedness.

22 And it shall come to pass that they shall know that I am the Lord their God, and am a jealous God, visiting the iniquities of my people.

verse 22 "I am . . . a jealous God" Abinadi continues speaking the words of the Lord, and he will continue to do so through verse 25. This phrase means that the Lord is not willing to share a person's devotion. He asks that we direct all our allegiance to him and to no other.

"visiting the iniquities of my people" When the Lord "visits" an individual's iniquities upon him, he punishes that person for his evil doings. This expression is found elsewhere in the scriptures (Jeremiah 23:2; Exodus 20:5; 34:7; Deuteronomy 5:9; Numbers 14:18; Exodus 34:7; see also Mosiah 13:3).

23 And it shall come to pass that except this people repent and turn unto the Lord their God, they shall be brought into bondage; and none shall deliver them, except it be the Lord the Almighty God.

24 Yea, and it shall come to pass that when they shall cry unto me I will be slow to hear their cries; yea, and I will suffer them that they be smitten by their enemies.

25 And except they repent in sackcloth and ashes, and cry mightily to the Lord their God, I will not hear their prayers, neither will I deliver them out of their afflictions; and thus saith the Lord, and thus hath he commanded me.

verses 23-25 These prophecies were, of course, fulfilled. The Nephites under King Limhi, Noah's son and successor, will live in virtually complete captivity to the Lamanites.

verse 25 “sackcloth and ashes” This expression is symbolic of true contrition and repentance. Sackcloth is a coarse, dark-colored cloth traditionally worn, in Hebrew culture, by those in mourning. Such a person would also often scatter ashes upon himself as another gesture of humility (Isaiah 58:5; Daniel 9:3; Matthew 11:21).

26 Now it came to pass that when Abinadi had spoken these words unto them they were wroth with him, and sought to take away his life; but the Lord delivered him out of their hands.

verse 26 The people were wroth or angry with Abinadi. Abinadi’s message had thrown a damper on the celebratory mood of the Nephites who were celebrating the shedding of Lamanite blood just prior to his arrival. His message obviously angered his listeners, who by now were blood thirsty. Note that it was not just Noah and his priests who rejected Abinadi and his teachings, but the people of Noah as well.

27 Now when king Noah had heard of the words which Abinadi had spoken unto the people, he was also wroth; and he said: Who is Abinadi, that I and my people should be judged of him, or who is the Lord, that shall bring upon my people such great affliction?

verse 27 “who is the Lord” King Noah was not the first to ask this question. It was also asked by Cain the notorious son of Adam (Genesis 5:4) and by Pharaoh, the captor of Hebrews in Egypt (Exodus 5:2). It is a most heretical and blasphemous question, as its meaning is something like: “Who does he think he is, anyway?”

28 I command you to bring Abinadi hither, that I may slay him, for he has said these things that he might stir up my people to anger one with another, and to raise contentions among my people; therefore I will slay him.

29 Now the eyes of the people were blinded; therefore they hardened their hearts against the words of Abinadi, and they sought from that time forward to take him. And king Noah hardened his heart against the word of the Lord, and he did not repent of his evil doings.

verse 29 Though Noah and his people sought the life of Abinadi, the Lord allowed him to escape. He will return two years later in disguise. Where he went during these two years is not stated. Perhaps he returned to Zarahemla.

“they hardened their hearts against the words of Abinadi” See the discussion of hard-heartedness in the commentary for Alma 10:6.

Mosiah Chapter 12

Chapters 12 through 16 contain the eloquent warnings and preachings of Abinadi to King Noah's people and to his court. One might wonder how we happen to have a record of these preachings since Abinadi was preaching in a hostile environment in which very few believed his words, and he was martyred immediately after delivering his message. Who recorded his words? We will later learn that Alma made the record (see Mosiah 17:4).

verses 1-7 Notice that the nature of Abinadi's warning has changed. No longer is he saying, "Repent or be taken into bondage." It is too late for Noah's people to avoid captivity. The time for repentance is past. Abinadi is no longer issuing warnings of consequences that can be avoided. He was now delivering unconditional pronouncements of impending destruction: "You shall be visited by the Lord in his anger."

In these verses we learn the fiery quality of Abinadi's speech. He uses colorful and descriptive phrases and metaphors that are unique to the Book of Mormon and unique to the prophet Abinadi. Examples include: "king Noah shall be valued even as a garment in a hot furnace" (verse 3), "I will cause that they shall howl all the day long" (verse 4), and "they shall have burdens lashed upon their backs; and they shall be driven before like a dumb ass" (verse 5).

1 And it came to pass that after the space of two years that Abinadi came among them in disguise, that they knew him not, and began to prophesy among them, saying: Thus has the Lord commanded me, saying—Abinadi, go and prophesy unto this my people, for they have hardened their hearts against my words; they have repented not of their evil doings; therefore, I will visit them in my anger, yea, in my fierce anger will I visit them in their iniquities and abominations.

verse 1 It would be a shame if we could not maintain a twinkle in our eye as we read the scriptures. There is a bit of slap-stick comedy in this verse which should not be missed. Enter Abinadi in a clever disguise—perhaps false mustache and wig—feeling smug because no one recognizes him. Then his C.I.A. training lets him down when he announces to King Noah's people, "Thus has the Lord commanded me, saying, *Abinadi*, go and prophesy . . ." oops!

verses 2-12 In these verses, the Lord, speaking through his prophet Abinadi, curses king Noah because of his great wickedness. Following the Lord's command, Abinadi stretches forth his hand, introduces his words with the phrase "Thus saith the Lord," and pronounces three curses upon Noah's head. These three curses are given

in a form characteristic of Hebrew cultural tradition. They are “simile curses.” A simile curse combines the elements of a simile (a comparison of two things or a resemblance, marked with *like* or *as*) with a curse. An example of an Old Testament simile curse appears in 1 Kings 14, which registers Jeroboam’s evil deeds and idolatries in verses 7-8: “Therefore, behold, I [the Lord] will bring evil upon the house of Jeroboam . . . and will take away the remnant of the house of Jeroboam, as a man taketh away dung, till it be all gone.” Note the simile marker *as*, which connects the two points of comparison (house of Jeroboam and dung) to graphically portray the manner whereby the remnant of Jeroboam’s family will be exiled. In another example, in 2 Kings 21:12-13, the Lord curses Judah’s king Manasseh, members of the tribe of Judah, and Jerusalem for their considerable iniquities. The curse compares the destruction of Jerusalem and Judah to the cleaning of a dirty dish: “Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Behold, I am bringing such evil upon Jerusalem and Judah, that whosoever heareth of it, both his ears shall tingle. . . . I will wipe Jerusalem as a man wipeth a dish, wiping it, and turning it upside down.”

Given the Hebrew roots of the Book of Mormon, the presence of simile curses should not be surprising to those of us who believe in the book as an authentic ancient record. For those who believe otherwise, the presence of simile curses is difficult to explain, since not many examples of simile curses appear in the Old Testament, and it is doubtful that Joseph Smith was aware of their form or setting in scripture. The simile curses in the Book of Mormon provide additional indication that the Book of Mormon was indeed framed in antiquity (see the supplemental article, *Evidences of the Book of Mormon*).

2 Yea, wo be unto this generation! And the Lord said unto me: Stretch forth thy hand and prophesy, saying: Thus saith the Lord, it shall come to pass that this generation, because of their iniquities, shall be brought into bondage, and shall be smitten on the cheek; yea, and shall be driven by men, and shall be slain; and the vultures of the air, and the dogs, yea, and the wild beasts, shall devour their flesh.

verse 2 As we will learn, Noah and his adherents will eventually be driven and smitten and brought into captivity by the Lamanites and also by some of their own people (see Mosiah 19:20).

If, indeed, the Book of Mormon story did take place in Central America, then what might be the “wild beasts” spoken of in this verse? One carnivorous wild beast indigenous to that area is the jaguar.

3 And it shall come to pass that the life of king Noah shall be valued even as a garment in a hot furnace; for he shall know that I am the Lord.

verse 3 “**the life of king Noah shall be valued even as a garment in a hot furnace**” (*italics added*) Note the form of the simile curse here. See the commentary for verses 2-12 above. See also a reiteration of this simile curse in verse 10

“**for he shall know that I am the Lord**” Here is the Lord’s rejoinder to Noah’s blasphemous question in Mosiah 11:27: “Who is the Lord, that shall bring upon my people such great affliction.”

4 And it shall come to pass that I will smite this my people with sore afflictions, yea, with famine and with pestilence; and I will cause that they shall howl all the day long.

5 Yea, and I will cause that they shall have burdens lashed upon their backs; and they shall be driven before like a dumb ass.

verse 5 “**they shall be driven before *like a dumb ass***” (*italics mine*) Again, the form of a simile curse.

6 And it shall come to pass that I will send forth hail among them, and it shall smite them; and they shall also be smitten with the east wind; and insects shall pester their land also, and devour their grain.

7 And they shall be smitten with a great pestilence—and all this will I do because of their iniquities and abominations.

verses 6-7 See the discussion on the concept of the “east wind” in the commentary for Mosiah 7:31.

8 And it shall come to pass that except they repent I will utterly destroy them from off the face of the earth; yet they shall leave a record behind them, and I will preserve them for other nations which shall possess the land; yea, even this will I do that I may discover the abominations of this people to other nations. And many things did Abinadi prophesy against this people.

verse 8 “**except they repent I will utterly destroy them from off the face of the earth**” Abinadi was addressing the people of King Noah yet this prophecy seems to apply to a broader group of Book of Mormon people. The fulfillment of this prophecy will occur in the early fifth century when the Nephite people were annihilated, or nearly so, by the Lamanites. The people of Noah were never actually destroyed “from off the face of the earth.”

“**they shall leave a record behind them**” This record is, of course, the Book of Mormon.

“**I will preserve them for other nations**” The construction here is unusual. The antecedent for the plural pronoun “them” is the singular noun “record.”

“that I may discover the abominations of this people to other nations” The meaning intended for the verb “discover” here is an archaic one—to uncover, reveal, or disclose.

9 And it came to pass that they were angry with him; and they took him and carried him bound before the king, and said unto the king: Behold, we have brought a man before thee who has prophesied evil concerning thy people, and saith that God will destroy them.

10 And he also prophesieth evil concerning thy life, and saith that thy life shall be as a garment in a furnace of fire.

11 And again, he saith that thou shalt be as a stalk, even as a dry stalk of the field, which is run over by the beasts and trodden under foot [emphasis added].

verse 11 Here is the third of the four simile curses (see the commentary for verses 2-12 above). Don’t fail to notice the delicious imagery present in this verse.

12 And again, he saith thou shalt be as the blossoms of a thistle, which, when it is fully ripe, if the wind bloweth, it is driven forth upon the face of the land. And he pretendeth the Lord hath spoken it. And he saith all this shall come upon thee except thou repent, and this because of thine iniquities.

verses 10-12 “he saith thou shalt be as the blossoms of a thistle, which, when it is fully ripe, if the wind bloweth, it is driven forth upon the face of the land” (emphasis mine) Here is the last of the four simile curses pronounced by Abinadi. The wind drives away the blossom or the down of a thistle flower.

In these verses, Noah’s people report to their king a few unflattering metaphors that Abinadi has been using in accusing and condemning King Noah. These include “a garment in a furnace of fire,” “a dumb ass,” “a dry stalk of the field,” and “blossoms of a thistle.” We have record, here in Mosiah 12, of Abinadi’s using only the first two of these four (see verses 3, 5). Alma, in recording his record of this event and in later summarizing the preaching of Abinadi (or perhaps the prophet editor himself, Mormon) omitted the latter two, but there is no reason to doubt that Abinadi utilized these latter two in his fiery rhetoric.

13 And now, O king, what great evil hast thou done, or what great sins have thy people committed, that we should be condemned of God or judged of this man?

verse 13 What great sins indeed! Review the rather long list contained in the introduction to Mosiah chapter 11.

14 And now, O king, behold, we are guiltless, and thou, O king, hast not sinned; therefore, this man has lied concerning you, and he has prophesied in vain.

verse 14 “he has prophesied in vain” Abinadi is accused of being a false prophet. According to Hebrew law, a false prophet is guilty of a capital crime and deserves execution.

15 And behold, we are strong, we shall not come into bondage, or be taken captive by our enemies; yea, and thou hast prospered in the land, and thou shalt also prosper.

verse 15 “thou shalt also prosper” This phrase means thou shalt yet prosper in the future.

16 Behold, here is the man, we deliver him into thy hands; thou mayest do with him as seemeth thee good.

17 And it came to pass that king Noah caused that Abinadi should be cast into prison; and he commanded that the priests should gather themselves together that he might hold a council with them what he should do with him.

18 And it came to pass that they said unto the king: Bring him hither that we may question him; and the king commanded that he should be brought before them.

19 And they began to question him, that they might cross him, that thereby they might have wherewith to accuse him; but he answered them boldly, and withstood all their questions, yea, to their astonishment; for he did withstand them in all their questions, and did confound them in all their words.

verse 19 “that they might cross him” That they might ensnare him by causing him to contradict himself.

“for he did withstand them in all their questions” Although this phrase says that Abinadi did answer all their questions, in our Book of Mormon text we have record of only one question which a priest of Noah asked and which Abinadi answered. This question is found in the next five verses—20 through 24. What were the other questions? The fact that we do not have an account of others is evidence that either the prophet Mormon did not include Alma’s entire account (Mosiah 17:4) of the prophet Abinadi when he engraved his abridgment upon the plates of Mormon, or perhaps that Alma himself omitted parts of the story of Abinadi.

20 And it came to pass that one of them said unto him: What meaneth the words which are written, and which have been taught by our fathers, saying:

verse 20 “one of them said unto him” Do you suppose this questioning priest could have been Alma? Whoever he was, he asked Abinadi to explain the meaning of four verses from chapter 52 of Isaiah, verses 7-10. These verses contain prophetic material that deals with a time period in the last days just prior to the Millennium. They foretell the gathering of the house of Israel. By what line of reasoning do you suppose this questioning priest might have been seeking to “cross” or ensnare Abinadi (see

verse 19)? The priest might have been saying: “The message of gloom and doom which you have just delivered is inappropriate and incompatible with the scripture. Look here at this inspired message by Isaiah in which he foretells a bright future wherein the Lord’s servants will proclaim the good tidings. How do you explain this?” Perhaps he hoped to catch Abinadi in conflict with the scripture and thereby convict him of false prophecy, a capital offense under the law of Moses. The priest might also have been motivated by the fact that he did not understand the passage, and he likely assumed that Abinadi would not understand it either. Perhaps he hoped to place Abinadi in an embarrassing situation.

We will learn that Abinadi’s answer to the priest is a brilliant explanation of the true essence of redemption and how it brings a bright outlook to those who accept Christ.

If you have not recently reviewed the salient features of the scattering and gathering of Israel, you might want to do so by reading the introductory commentary for 1 Nephi 20.

21 How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings; that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good; that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth;

verse 21 This verse speaks of the Lord’s messengers, especially his prophets and missionaries, taking the gospel to scattered Israel. To an individual held captive, what can be more beautiful than the sight of someone coming to rescue them?

“Good tidings,” “peace,” “good tidings of good,” and “salvation” are all terms that refer to the good news of the everlasting gospel. To “publish” is to announce, proclaim, or promulgate.

“Thy God reigneth.” Behold, it is thy God that is the true God.

22 Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice; with the voice together shall they sing; for they shall see eye to eye when the Lord shall bring again Zion;

verse 22 A watchman is a prophet who is commissioned to watch over God’s people. In this case the “watchmen” are the prophets of scattered Israel.

“they shall see eye to eye” They shall see clearly the coming gathering of Israel and shall lift up their voices and proclaim (“sing”) it.

“when the Lord shall bring again Zion” When the Lord restores Zion.

23 Break forth into joy; sing together ye waste places of Jerusalem; for the Lord hath comforted his people, he hath redeemed Jerusalem;

verse 23 **“ye waste places of Jerusalem”** This expression refers to the ancient ruins of Jerusalem about to come alive again as the saints gather there.

24 The Lord hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God?

verse 24 “The Lord hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations” The Father has prepared for battle and has shown his strength. The expression has its origin in the Hebrew practice of throwing back the cloak from his right arm so that it does not produce an impediment.

Abinadi’s response to this priest’s question is not a brief one. It will extend through the rest of chapter 12 and the entirety of Mosiah chapters 13 through 16.

25 And now Abinadi said unto them: Are you priests, and pretend to teach this people, and to understand the spirit of prophesying, and yet desire to know of me what these things mean?

26 I say unto you, wo be unto you for perverting the ways of the Lord! For if ye understand these things ye have not taught them; therefore, ye have perverted the ways of the Lord.

verses 25-26 It is ironic that the priest had quoted a verse which spoke of the concept of the “watchmen,” those servants of the Lord charged with the responsibility of warning his children of the vicissitudes of life. In a sense Noah’s priests had assumed the role of the watchmen of their people. They had perverted the ways of the Lord by not only failing to warn their people, but also by contributing to the people’s wickedness with their evil examples.

27 Ye have not applied your hearts to understanding; therefore, ye have not been wise. Therefore, what teach ye this people?

verses 25-27 Abinadi eventually does answer the priest’s question and gives them the interpretation of these verses (see Mosiah 15:28 through 16:1). First, however, he scolds him and the other priests for not knowing the answers themselves.

verse 27 The concept of “applying one’s heart to understanding” is contained elsewhere in the scriptures (Psalm 90:12; Proverbs 2:2, 22:17, 23:12), and carries the meaning of taking mere knowledge and turning it into real wisdom.

28 And they said: We teach the law of Moses.

verse 28 One can just picture the confidence with which this answer was given. Could there be anything as safe as that? Again, we should be reminded that even though the Nephites were taught and intended to live the law of Moses, it was a somewhat modified version of the law of Moses. They did not, for example, observe the Levitical regulations concerning rites of purification and dietary codes. Their concern was mainly with the moral and ethical restrictions (see Bruce R. McConkie’s *Promised Messiah*, 427).

29 And again he said unto them: If ye teach the law of Moses why do ye not keep it? Why do ye set your hearts upon riches? Why do ye commit whoredoms and spend your strength with harlots, yea, and cause this people to commit sin, that the Lord has cause to send me to prophesy against this people, yea, even a great evil against this people?

verse 29 “If ye teach the law of Moses why do ye not keep it?” Abinadi throws them off balance.

“**spend your strength**” Why do you waste the vital fluid of your manhood?

“**and cause this people to commit sin**” Again, we are reminded that the Lord holds responsible those leaders who lead their people away from truth and righteousness.

The “great evil” that Abinadi prophesies “against this people” is their eventual destruction by the Lord because of their unrighteousness.

30 Know ye not that I speak the truth? Yea, ye know that I speak the truth; and you ought to tremble before God.

verse 30 Abinadi perceives that Noah’s priests actually believed or at least suspected that Abinadi was teaching the truth. This probably explains their aggressive and angry reaction to him. They could not rest until they had put him to death.

31 And it shall come to pass that ye shall be smitten for your iniquities, for ye have said that ye teach the law of Moses. And what know ye concerning the law of Moses? Doth salvation come by the law of Moses? What say ye?

verse 31 “Doth salvation come by the law of Moses?” Abinadi will answer his own question in Mosiah 13:28. The answer is that salvation, actually exaltation, comes only through Christ and not through the law.

32 And they answered and said that salvation did come by the law of Moses.

verses 33 through chapter 13 verse 24 Here Abinadi quotes the Ten Commandments. He obviously had had prior access to the account of the giving of the Ten Commandments contained on the brass plates. This account contains verbatim renderings from the King James Bible’s book of Exodus (see Exodus 20:1-17).

The context in which Abinadi quotes the Ten Commandments seems to be this: After Noah’s priests stated in verse 32 that they did believe that salvation came by living the law of Moses, Abinadi intended to correct their misconception. Before doing so in Mosiah 13:28, however, he decided first to point out that they were not even living the Ten Commandments which were a fundamental part of the law of Moses which they allegedly espoused. Abinadi will then teach that salvation cannot come through these commandments or even through keeping all of the laws of Moses. It may come only

through Jesus Christ. Joseph Fielding McConkie and Robert L. Millet compared the law of Moses to “ethics without doctrine.” They wrote:

[The law of Moses] is like the body without the spirit—it may have the same appearance but is void of the power of life. The Ten Commandments, independent of the fulness of the gospel, are little more than an anemic theology in the hands of social reformers, being bereft of the laws and ordinances of the gospel. Similarly, Jesus’s Sermon on the Mount, detached from the testimony of Christ’s divine sonship, is but a curriculum for a civics class, rather than a testament of those verities by which one obtains [eternal] life (*Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon, volume II—Jacob through Mosiah, 215-16*).

The Ten Commandments were not only an integral part of the law of Moses, but they are also a vital component of the higher law, the complete gospel (see D&C 59:5-12). In the New Testament Jesus acknowledged them as the foundation of the law when he recited them to the rich man seeking eternal life (Matthew 19:17-19; Mark 10:19; Luke 18:20), and in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5) wherein he made reference to murder, adultery, and forswearing or bearing false witness.

In Moses’s day the Ten Commandments constituted a covenant between God and the house of Israel. They are a list of imperatives applicable to every individual Israelite. They represent a summary of the basic demands made by the God of Israel upon all those covenanted to him. Hence the chest in which the tablets were housed was the “Ark of the *Covenant*.” Moses eventually told the Israelites that breaking this covenant would result in their dispersion and destruction (Deuteronomy 28:64).

The first five commandments deal with the relationship between God and man, and the second five with the relationship between man and man. The exception to this scheme might seem to be number five: “Honor thy father and thy mother” because this is clearly a commandment dealing with the relationship of man to man. This has been explained by Bible commentators by noting that commandment number five is the transition from those between “man and God” and those between “man and man.” After all, parents are in a position of unique authority, as is God. When Jesus was asked, “Master, which is the great commandment in the law?” he answered, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (Matthew 22:36-40). Some have felt that the first great commandment, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God” refers to the first five of the Ten Commandments, and that the second great commandment, “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” refers to the latter five. Perhaps Jesus was summarizing the Ten Commandments into two commandments.

In pointing out to King Noah and his people that they had broken this covenant, Abinadi taught them that had forfeited their right to heavenly protection.

33 But now Abinadi said unto them: I know if ye keep the commandments of God ye shall be saved; yea, if ye keep the commandments which the Lord delivered unto Moses in the mount of Sinai, saying:

verse 33 “if ye keep the commandments of God ye shall be saved” The salvation spoken of here may be just as much temporal as eternal. A similar juxtaposition between salvation and obedience is found in Alma’s counsel to his son Helaman: “for he has brought our fathers out of Egypt, and he has swallowed up the Egyptians in the Red Sea; and he led them by his power into the promised land; yea, and he has delivered them out of bondage and captivity from time to time. Yea, and he has also brought our fathers out of the land of Jerusalem; . . . But behold, my son, this is not all; for ye ought to know as I do know, that inasmuch as ye shall keep the commandments of God, ye shall prosper in the land” (Alma 36:28-30). The survival in the land of the Lehighes depended on their strict adherence to the laws of God.

34 I am the Lord thy God, who hath brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

35 Thou shalt have no other God before me.

verse 35 Note that this commandment differs slightly from the version in Exodus 20:3. Abinadi quotes, “thou shalt have no other God [rather than gods] before me.”

36 Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing in heaven above, or things which are in the earth beneath.

37 Now Abinadi said unto them, Have ye done all this? I say unto you, Nay, ye have not. And have ye taught this people that they should do all these things? I say unto you, Nay, ye have not.

verse 37 “Have ye done all this?” Have you been careful not to worship the temporal gods instead of the true God?

Mosiah Chapter 13

1 And now when the king had heard these words, he said unto his priests: Away with this fellow, and slay him; for what have we to do with him, for he is mad.

verse 1 Notice how King Noah can no longer endure the truths of Abinadi's preaching, and he interrupts the prophet before he finishes his message.

"for he is mad" By pronouncing Abinadi "mad," Noah provided his priests with a legal excuse to condemn him to death, since a madman posed a threat to the community. It is interesting to note that other righteous men were accused by the people of being "mad," including Enoch (Moses 6:38), Christ (John 10:20), Paul (Acts 26:24), and Joseph Smith (JS-H 1:24-25).

2 And they stood forth and attempted to lay their hands on him; but he withstood them, and said unto them:

verse 2 Abinadi refuses to be interrupted.

3 Touch me not, for God shall smite you if ye lay your hands upon me, for I have not delivered the message which the Lord sent me to deliver; neither have I told you that which ye requested that I should tell; therefore, God will not suffer that I shall be destroyed at this time.

verse 3 **"neither have I told you that which ye requested that I should tell"** Remember that one of Noah's priests had asked Abinadi a question (see Mosiah 12:20-24), and Abinadi has not as yet answered the question. For Abinadi's answer to this question see Mosiah 15:28 through Mosiah 16:1.

4 But I must fulfil the commandments wherewith God has commanded me; and because I have told you the truth ye are angry with me. And again, because I have spoken the word of God ye have judged me that I am mad.

5 Now it came to pass after Abinadi had spoken these words that the people of king Noah durst not lay their hands on him, for the Spirit of the Lord was upon him; and his face shone with exceeding luster, even as Moses' did while in the mount of Sinai, while speaking with the Lord.

verse 5 Abinadi was "transfigured" by the Holy Ghost. It would seem that our knowledge of this special state is limited. It seems to involve a change from the mortal telestial state to a higher or more exalted condition and appearance. The change in appearance is visible to the mortal eyes of others, and this transformation enables the individual so favored to stand in the presence of God and view the things of God. The scripture refers to these individuals as having "spiritual eyes" (Moses 1:11). The scriptures report the "transfiguration" of several prophets and even the Lord himself (see

Matthew 17:1-13; Mark 9:2-13; 2 Peter 1:16-19; Luke 9:28-36; Moses 1:11; D&C 67:11; Exodus 34:29-35; 3 Nephi 28:13-17; 2 Corinthians 12:1-4). Even the earth itself will be transfigured during the Millennium (D&C 63:20-21).

For a broader application of the phenomenon of transfiguration, see the commentary for D&C 67:10. For a more complete discussion of the phenomenon of transfiguration, see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 3, chapter 14, *Transfiguration*.

It has been suggested that Abinadi may have carefully chosen the time of his second entry into the city of Nephi to coincide with the Zeniffites' celebration of the ancient Israelite festival of Pentecost (*Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, John W. Welch, Gordon C. Thomasson, and Robert F. Smith, Deseret Book Company and FARMS, 1992, 135-138). The law of Moses required the children to annually observe this three-day festival (see Exodus 23:16) which is also known as the Festival of the First Fruits. It came fifty days after Passover (thus its name—Pentecost—which means fiftieth day) and marked the time of the harvesting of the first crops. It also apparently celebrated the Lord's giving of the Ten Commandments to Moses, since it was this time of the year when Moses ascended Mount Sinai to receive these commandments (see Exodus 19:1). Accordingly, it was a time of stern admonition.

Consider the following observations regarding the validity of this suggestion: (1) Abinadi's reentry into the city of Nephi at the time of a pilgrimage festival would have given him a ready audience. (2) At the time when King Noah's people were celebrating the harvest, Abinadi cursed the crops. He prophesied that insects, hail, and dry winds would ruin their "grain" (Mosiah 12:6). (3) At the very time when Noah's priests were pledging allegiance to the Ten Commandments, Abinadi critically rehearsed them on those very commandments. (4) How appropriate that Abinadi's "face shone with exceeding luster, even as Moses' did while on the mount of Sinai, while speaking with the Lord" (see also Exodus 34:29-30). This divine manifestation was quintessentially pentecostal. (5) Abinadi's trial was postponed for "three days" (Mosiah 17:6), perhaps to coincide with the conclusion of the festival. (6) Psalm 50, which has been identified as a psalm of Pentecost, asks what a person must do to teach the law (Psalm 50:16). The answer is that one must keep the law, and Abinadi previously made this point (Mosiah 12:29).

6 And he spake with power and authority from God; and he continued his words, saying:

7 Ye see that ye have not power to slay me, therefore I finish my message. Yea, and I perceive that it cuts you to your hearts because I tell you the truth concerning your iniquities.

verse 7 Brigham Young articulated a divine principle: "The Lord never let a prophet fall on the earth until he had accomplished his work" (*HC*, 7:302). On several

occasions, people sought to kill Jesus. On two of these occasions, he simply went “through the midst of them” and escaped unharmed (Luke 4:30; compare John 8:58-59). On two other occasions, we read that “no man laid hands on him, because his hour was not yet come” (John 7:30; 8:20; 2:4; 7:6, 8). Only when he had completed his mortal ministry did he declare that “the hour is come; [and] the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners” (Mark 14:41; compare John 12:23; 13:1; 17:1).

8 Yea, and my words fill you with wonder and amazement, and with anger.

9 But I finish my message; and then it matters not whither I go, if it so be that I am saved.

verse 9 “then it matters not whither I go, if it so be that I am saved” Abinadi says, “After I have delivered my message, it really doesn’t matter what you do to me, so long as I am ultimately allowed to return to God’s presence.”

10 But this much I tell you, what you do with me, after this, shall be as a type and a shadow of things which are to come.

verse 10 “a type and a shadow of things which are to come” The allusion here seems to be to the future execution of the Savior. Abinadi apparently knows of his own impending death, and he views it as a “type and shadow” of the Savior’s crucifixion (see the commentary for verse 31 below).

11 And now I read unto you the remainder of the commandments of God, for I perceive that they are not written in your hearts; I perceive that ye have studied and taught iniquity the most part of your lives.

verse 11 The “commandments of God” are those commandments we know as the Ten Commandments. It seems likely that Abinadi could have quoted from memory the remaining commandments, but he chose to read them—probably to make a point: These commandments are written into your own law of Moses, and I am going to read them to you. Are you teaching them to your people? Are you obeying them yourselves? At this point Abinadi likely turned to a scroll, plates, or book of some kind containing Exodus. The brass plates contained this material.

12 And now, ye remember that I said unto you: Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of things which are in heaven above, or which are in the earth beneath, or which are in the water under the earth.

13 And again: Thou shalt not bow down thyself unto them, nor serve them; for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children, unto the third and fourth generations of them that hate me;

verse 13 “Thou shalt not bow down thyself unto them, nor serve them” See the discussion of idolatry in the commentary for Omni 1:20.

“visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children, unto the third and fourth generations of them that hate me” Again, as we discussed in the commentary for Mosiah 11:22, when the Lord “visits” an individual’s iniquities upon him, he punishes that person for his evil doings. The question may be asked: Is it fair for the Lord to punish a child for the sins of his father? Is a child responsible for his parents’ sins? The answer is “no” to both questions. There can be no question, however, that the child of a sinner may have significant disadvantages in this mortal life. First, the child suffers from having had an unfavorable example set for him. He is naturally inclined to emulate his sinful parent. Secondly, the parents’ evil acts may create for the child a less favorable spiritual environment. For example, because of the rejection of the gospel by Laman and Lemuel, several generations of Lamanites lived without the priesthood and without much of a chance to learn the gospel principles. It is clear, however, that a child is not culpable for the evil misdeeds of a parent. Reason indicates that he will not be punished for them. Rather, he will be judged by an all-knowing Lord, based upon what he does with what he received and the circumstances into which he is born. Will he be true to that eternal spark within him, the so-called spirit of Christ, or will he give himself over to the world and to the unrighteous example provided by his parents?

14 And showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me and keep my commandments.

verse 14 Here the Lord contrasts the way he deals with those who love him and keep his commandments with the way he treats “them that hate me” (verse 13 above).

15 Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.

verse 15 What does it really mean to take the name of the Lord “in vain”? Today we refer to this unholy practice as “swearing” or “profaning.” Solemn oaths in the Old Testament were sworn by invoking the name of the Lord. Such an oath made falsely without intent would be categorized as “taking the name of the Lord in vain.” When a person today uses “profanity,” he is speaking the remnants of a solemn oath and doing so obviously without any sincere intent or with evil intent.

16 Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.

verse 16 Other than this verse, there are only two references to this commandment in the Book of Mormon. Jarom, in speaking about the Nephites, said, “they observed to keep the law of Moses and the sabbath day holy unto the Lord” (Jarom 1:5). Also Alma, at the waters of Mormon, instructed the new members of the church, “that they should observe the sabbath day, and keep it holy, and also every day they should give thanks to the Lord their God” (Mosiah 18:25).

17 Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work;

18 But the seventh day, the sabbath of the Lord thy God, thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy man-servant, nor thy maid-servant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates;

verse 18 “nor thy stranger that is within thy gates” The word “stranger” might be alternatively translated traveler or sojourner.

19 For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is; wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.

20 Honor thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.

verse 20 The only other reference to this commandment in the Book of Mormon is in 1 Nephi 17:55. Nephi was speaking to his older brothers Laman and Lemuel: “Wherefore, worship the Lord thy God, and honor thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long in the land which the Lord thy God shall give thee.” Here Nephi was undoubtedly referring to the promised land in the western hemisphere which was promised to the posterity of Lehi.

21 Thou shalt not kill.

22 Thou shalt not commit adultery. Thou shalt not steal.

verse 22 In the Book of Mormon, the phrase “commit adultery” occurs only five other times (Mosiah 2:13; Alma 23:3; Helaman 7:5; and 3 Nephi 12:27, 32). The word “adultery” is not found on the small plates. On the small plates the word used to mean adultery is most commonly “whoredoms” (David Rolph Seely, “The Ten Commandments in the Book of Mormon,” a FARMS reprint, 14).

In the Book of Mormon text, there are words from four different roots used to mean stealing. These include “steal,” “thieve,” “rob,” and “plunder.” Are all of these word roots synonymous? It has been suggested that in the Book of Mormon there might be a difference between stealing (or theft) and robbery (or plunder). Stealing (also theft) is a crime committed by an individual against his neighbor and is dealt with by the civil law. Robbery (or plunder) usually involves outsiders who attack in groups and is most often dealt with militarily (John W. Welch, “Theft and Robbery in the Book of Mormon and in Ancient Near Eastern Law,” a FARMS reprint). See also the commentary for 3 Nephi 3:12.

23 Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.

verse 23 This command likely refers to any untruth told which would injure one’s fellow beings.

24 Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife, nor his man-servant, nor his maid-servant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that is thy neighbor's.

verse 24 The word “covet” is seldom used in the Book of Mormon text, the only other instance being in Mosiah 4:25. The Book of Mormon word for covet is “envy” (2 Nephi 26:32). To “covet” seems to mean more than lusting after someone or some thing that one does not possess. It also applies to an attitude toward one's own possessions (D&C 1; 9:26). To covet one's own possessions is to have an unhealthy fixation on them and on all material things.

25 And it came to pass that after Abinadi had made an end of these sayings that he said unto them: Have ye taught this people that they should observe to do all these things for to keep these commandments?

26 I say unto you, Nay; for if ye had, the Lord would not have caused me to come forth and to prophesy evil concerning this people.

27 And now ye have said that salvation cometh by the law of Moses. I say unto you that it is expedient that ye should keep the law of Moses as yet; but I say unto you, that the time shall come when it shall no more be expedient to keep the law of Moses.

28 And moreover, I say unto you, that salvation doth not come by the law alone; and were it not for the atonement, which God himself shall make for the sins and iniquities of his people, that they must unavoidably perish, notwithstanding the law of Moses.

verse 28 “salvation doth not come by the law alone” For a discussion of why it does not, see the commentary for Mosiah 14:11. You will learn in that commentary that it is impossible for a man to be justified and exalted without the benefits of the atonement of Christ which the Savior doles out to us sinners in his mercy (see also Alma 34:9). Salvation is found only in Christ and not in the law.

“the atonement, which God himself shall make” Abinadi in his teachings leaves no doubt that the God of Israel himself will be the Redeemer who will come to earth as the Son of God (see also 1 Nephi 19:7-10; 2 Nephi 9:5; 10:3; Mosiah 3:5-10). Abinadi will yet give this teaching repeated emphasis (see Mosiah 13:32, 33, 34-35; 15:1, 2-4, 5-7, 8, 23; 16:4, 15). Apparently he made his point well, since it was this very teaching that resulted in his being charged with the crime of blasphemy and condemned to death (see Mosiah 17:7-8).

“they must unavoidably perish” What would eventually become of mankind were it not for the atonement? They would all become sons of perdition and live with Satan forever (2 Nephi 9:8-9).

29 And now I say unto you that it was expedient that there should be a law given to the children of Israel, yea, even a very strict law; for they were a stiffnecked people, quick to do iniquity, and slow to remember the Lord their God;

verse 29 “it was expedient that there should be a law given to the children of Israel” In their weakness, the Israelites were given a lesser law of carnal commandments, the law of Moses (D&C 84:27; JST, Exodus 34:2).

“even a very strict law” The Mosaic law evolved to become a comprehensive law which covered almost every aspect of daily life. For a more complete discussion of the law of Moses, see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 3, chapter 16, *The Law of Moses*.

30 Therefore there was a law given them, yea, a law of performances and of ordinances, a law which they were to observe strictly from day to day, to keep them in remembrance of God and their duty towards him.

31 But behold, I say unto you, that all these things were types of things to come.

verse 31 “types of things to come” We have discussed previously the fact that the law of Moses is replete with “types” or symbols of Christ (see the commentary for 2 Nephi 11:4). Especially obvious is the ritual of animal sacrifice which is a type of the atoning sacrifice of the Savior. The Mosaic Law was a temporary expedient that pointed to a greater reality to come, its “fulfillment.” In a way, the law of Moses was a prophecy of which Jesus Christ was the fulfillment. Redemption could never come through the sacrifices of the Law of Moses. Rather, the higher law or the atonement is essential.

32 And now, did they understand the law? I say unto you, Nay, they did not all understand the law; and this because of the hardness of their hearts; for they understood not that there could not any man be saved except it were through the redemption of God.

verse 32 In general, the Israelites failed to understand the law of Moses in its proper perspective, and they tried to make it an end in itself. They did not comprehend that the law was completely unable to save anyone without the “redemption” and the “atonement, which God himself shall make for the sins and iniquities of his people.”

It is not only ancient Israel that has failed to understand the law. Even today there is a great deal of misunderstanding about what the law was and why it was given. This misunderstanding may be found among Christians, Jews, and even among those within the Church today.

verses 33-35 These verses are profound and state clearly what has been taught by “all the prophets who have prophesied ever since the world began.”

33 For behold, did not Moses prophesy unto them concerning the coming of the Messiah, and that God should redeem his people? Yea, and even all the prophets who have prophesied ever since the world began—have they not spoken more or less concerning these things?

verse 33 Do we actually have a prophecy of Moses wherein he prophesies of the birth of the Savior? Where is it found in the scripture? It is found in Deuteronomy 18:15-19:

The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken; according to all that thou desiredst of the LORD thy God in Horeb in the day of the assembly, saying, Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God, neither let me see this great fire any more, that I die not. And the LORD said unto me, they have well spoken that which they have spoken. I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him.

This remarkable passage is perhaps the most often quoted messianic prophecy in all the scripture. Lehi quoted it to his children (1 Nephi 10:4). Nephi quoted it to his brothers (1 Nephi 22:20-21). Peter quoted it while preaching in the temple (Acts 3:22-23). Christ quoted it during his appearance to the Nephites (3 Nephi 21:11). Stephen quoted it before the Jewish Sanhedrin (Acts 7:37). Moroni quoted it to Joseph Smith (JS-H 1:40). And it is found in the Doctrine and Covenants (D&C 1:14; 133:63).

We don't really have any scripture that plainly states that Moses clearly understood the concept of the atonement and knew precisely of its necessity. Do you think it is likely he did? Of course he did!

“have they not spoken more or less concerning these things?” What is the significance of the phrase “more or less” here? It probably refers to the fact that not all prophets are equal in their ability to prophesy.

34 Have they not said that God himself should come down among the children of men, and take upon him the form of man, and go forth in mighty power upon the face of the earth?

verse 34 **“God himself should come down among the children of men”** This is the very teaching that was responsible for Abinadi's being condemned to death (see also Mosiah 15:1 and its commentary and Mosiah 17:7-8).

35 Yea, and have they not said also that he should bring to pass the resurrection of the dead, and that he, himself, should be oppressed and afflicted?

Mosiah Chapter 14

Scripture Mastery

Mosiah 14 Abinadi quotes Isaiah 53 in preaching to the court of King Noah.

Here Abinadi quotes in its entirety the material contained in Isaiah 53. This chapter is considered by many Christians to be the most sublime messianic prophecy in all the scriptures. The verses from this chapter have formed the text of countless sermons. In a very few verses, Isaiah provides an overview of the Savior's life and mission. It is likely that Abinadi is not the first Book of Mormon prophet to utilize the materials in Isaiah 53. Many of the concepts contained herein were also taught previously by Book of Mormon prophets such as Nephi and his brother Jacob.

Isaiah 53 is often called the "Song of the Suffering Servant."

The Jews, of course, do not consider Isaiah 53 to be a prophecy of Jesus Christ and his suffering. The Jews were looking for an invincible millennial Messiah to come in power and glory. The Messiah described by Isaiah in this chapter would come from humble and obscure beginnings, would look like an ordinary man, and he would suffer and die. In his first coming to earth he came as a suffering servant. In his second coming he will come as a reigning King. In his first coming he would not overthrow earthly kingdoms and governments but rather conquer something far greater, even sin and death.

The Jews interpretation is that Isaiah is not describing the suffering of a particular individual, but rather the future travails of the entire nation of Israel. Obviously the priests of Noah also did not consider Isaiah 53 to be a prophecy of Jesus's coming. Matthew, John (John 12:37-38), Peter, Paul, and Philip understood that at least parts of this chapter referred to Jesus. Abinadi's commentary on these verses in Mosiah 15-16 will corroborate the Christian view and furnish details not found in the writings of any Christian scholar.

John W. Welch said of this chapter:

In this poem, Isaiah speaks in short, powerful phrases. His compact expressions project strong bursts of imagery; he does not dwell long on each painful scene in the travail of the Redeemer. Each of these flashes evokes sober reflection. Isaiah has seen the suffering of the servant, but it is almost as if he cannot stand to look (*Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, edited by Donald W. Parry and John W. Welch, a FARMS publication, 293).

verses 1-3 Here Isaiah describes Christ's mortal life.

1 Yea, even doth not Isaiah say: Who hath believed our report, and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?

verse 1 In this verse, Isaiah asks two questions. The first is: “Who hath believed our report?” The word “report” may be interpreted as *words*. Here Isaiah alludes to the fact that he (Isaiah) and all other prophets since the world began had prophesied and testified of the Messiah, yet few had believed them. The second question is: “To whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?” This rhetorical question might be rephrased: “Who will witness and who will directly benefit from the Lord’s using his power to bring about salvation for his people? Isaiah will partly answer his own question in Mosiah 15:31 (Isaiah 52:10). There he says that *all* will have the opportunity to witness the Lord’s power and the Lord’s salvation (see Mosiah 16:1 and its commentary).

2 For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of dry ground; he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him there is no beauty that we should desire him.

verse 2 “For he [the servant, or Jesus Christ] shall grow up before him [Elohim] as a tender plant [a helpless newborn of humble beginnings] and as a root out of dry ground [Jesus will come forth out of the dry sterile and nearly impenetrable ground of apostate Judaism].” In other words, the servant shall grow up in the caring and watchful presence of Elohim, but in most humble circumstances and among a spiritually impoverished people.

“he hath no form nor comeliness” “there is no beauty that we should desire him” These phrases do not necessarily imply that the mortal Jesus will be unattractive physically. Rather they suggest that he will not be distinguishable from other Jewish boys or Jewish men. He will have no distinctive features, no glorious affect, to make him identifiable as the son of God or to draw attention to himself. He will not come as an exalted and glorified being. He will not come as the bigger-than-life political deliverer that many expected.

It is, of course, also possible that his physical appearance was not unusually attractive. Your author, being not particularly physically “comely” himself, will admit to the secret, silent hope that the Savior’s physical features were not especially handsome.

3 He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

verse 3 No one on earth has ever loved with the intensity and the sensitivity of Jesus, yet he experienced bitter sorrow, disappointment, and rejection throughout his life. Isaiah eloquently prophesies that he will be “despised and rejected of men; a man

of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.” Surely no one who has ever sojourned on this earth has ever been more “acquainted with grief.”

Even some of his family members rejected him at first (John 7:5). People in his hometown tried to kill him (John 8:16-30). His own countrymen rejected him (John 1:11). One of his closest associates betrayed him (Luke 22:48). In the end “all the disciples forsook him, and fled” (Matthew 26:56), and his enemies demanded his execution (Matthew 27:22-23).

“we hid . . . our faces from him” Keep in mind the common practice of prophets’ writing in the past tense of events yet in the future (the so-called “prophetic perfect” verb tense). Here, stated in the past tense, Isaiah perceives that people, particularly the nation of Israel, will in the future, ignore him or look the other way as though he were of no worth. This expression is used in describing the people’s reaction to lepers. In other words the people will shun him.

“he was despised” Moreover, they will hate him and seek to kill him, eventually succeeding in their efforts.

“and we esteemed him not” The past verb tense is still being used for events yet to occur in the future. Isaiah uses the word *we* here as a rhetorical device to draw us, the readers, in. We are participants with those who were there. Our “esteem” of Christ is measured by our willingness to obey his commandments. People living in Christ’s day or in the present day are preoccupied by wickedness. They resent and despise Christ for intruding into their selfish and lustful way of living.

verses 4-6 In these verses Isaiah describes the terrible ordeal of Christ’s Atonement.

4 Surely he has borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows; yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.

verse 4 It is a classic irony that even though Christ was suffering for the sins of all mankind and suffering the pains and sufferings of all humankind—so that he might become their Savior—including those who were actual witnesses of Christ’s crucifixion, the onlookers thought he was being justly punished for the crime of blasphemy. The reality is that he suffered willingly in order to overcome the effects of our sins as is made clear in the next verse: “he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities.” To qualify to become our Savior, the Lord had to suffer to the extent that he “descended below [us] all” (D&C 122:7-8; see also Alma 7:11-12).

“stricken” It is interesting that the word “stricken” is used some sixty times in Leviticus 13 and 14, always with the same meaning—that of suffering the emotional pain of having leprosy. Jesus will be viewed with the same disdain as the Jews viewed a leper.

“smitten of God, and afflicted” It has been common in many ages for people to assume that someone who suffers justly (for their sins) is being punished by God. Those who see the Christ suffer consider that he is being punished for sin. Ironically, they are correct. It is the Father who orchestrated his terrible ordeal (see Matthew 26:39; 3 Nephi 11:11; D&C 76:107). But it is not his own sin for which he suffers; rather, it is for ours.

5 But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.

verse 5 **“wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities”** “Wounded” (Hebrew *chala*) is better translated as “pierced fatally.” “Bruised” (Hebrew *daka*) is more correctly “crushed.”

“the chastisement of our peace was upon him” The suffering necessary for our healing and peace of mind (“our peace”) was borne by him. It is notable that the Hebrew word *shalom*, meaning “peace,” derives from the verb *shillem*, meaning “to reconcile” or “to make whole.” Thus the peace of Christ is far more than a friendly greeting—shalom. It is instead a gift of the Spirit, a wholeness of being, a oneness with God (Keith Meservy, “Isaiah 53: The Richest Prophecy on Christ’s Atonement in the Old Testament,” *A Witness of Jesus Christ: The 1989 Sperry Symposium on the Old Testament*. Edited by Richard D. Draper [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1990] 155-77).

“with his stripes we are healed” The marks they left in his skin (palms, wrists, side) are a symbol of his atoning sacrifice by which we are made whole.

6 All we, like sheep, have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquities of us all.

verse 6 Like a herd of sheep, every one of us has followed together the wrong road and committed sin (see also Romans 3:23). Each of us has given in to our “natural” human frailties, our “own way.” Yet his atonement applies to us all.

“the Lord hath laid on him the iniquities of us all” The Lord (the Father) hath laid on him (the Son) the iniquities of us all.

7 He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb so he opened not his mouth.

verse 7 While Jesus was oppressed and afflicted throughout his ministry, this passage seems to refer particularly to the legal trials he suffered immediately before his crucifixion which he suffered without speaking (Matthew 26:67-68; 27:29-30; Mark 15:3-5; Luke 23:9; John 19:9). “Dumb” means silent. He was persecuted harshly, yet he never complained, nor did he offer any excuses or apologies for his teachings. He was

tormented, yet he endured it quietly and submissively like “a sheep before her shearers.”

8 He was taken from prison and from judgment; and who shall declare his generation? For he was cut off out of the land of the living; for the transgressions of my people was he stricken.

verse 8 “He was taken from prison and from judgment” is better rendered “He was taken by force (Hebrew *‘utser*) and without justice (Hebrew *mish’pat*).

“who shall declare his generation” Among scholars there is considerable difference of opinion as to how the Hebrew word, here rendered “generation,” should be translated. Some would prefer to translate it as “fate.” Thus one possible meaning of this phrase might be, “Who cares about his fate?” or “Who cares about him?” or “Who will pay attention to him and obey him?” The phrase, when thus interpreted, seems to emphasize his aloneness and his rejection.

Another proposed meaning of “his generation” is his genealogy, his genesis, his roots, his origin. Who will tell the source whence he sprang? What of his mother and Father? The idea is that the only ones who can testify of Christ’s true origin are those who have an understanding of his mortal and immortal attributes, derived from his mortal mother and immortal Father.

The New International Version renders this phrase as “who can speak of his descendants?” implying that because he was “cut off from the land of the living” he had none. But Jesus did indeed have descendants, those who become his children through righteousness. He shall see his seed.

“he was cut off out of the land of the living; for the transgressions of my people was he stricken” Not only will Jesus suffer, but he will also die. He will be put to death to atone for the sins of all people.

9 And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no evil, neither was any deceit in his mouth.

verse 9 The word “because” here is better rendered *though*. Jesus died between two thieves *though* he had never committed a crime or told a lie. He was buried in a rich man’s tomb (that of Joseph of Arimathaea—see Matthew 27:57-60),

10 Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him; he hath put him to grief; when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.

verse 10 **“it pleased the Lord to bruise him; he hath put him to grief”** This phrase has at least two possible interpretations: (1) “Lord” is likely a reference to Elohim, the Father, thus teaching that it was the Father’s will that Christ suffer the agony of the atonement—“he hath put him to grief.” The Father had in mind a purpose for the

suffering of the Son, thus he did not intervene and spare the Son (3 Nephi 11:11; D&C 76:107; John 3:16). (2) Isaiah may be differentiating between the two roles of the Savior: it pleased Jehovah, the God of the Old Testament, to bruise Jesus, pointing to the fact that the great Jehovah would come in the person of Jesus, and that they are, indeed, one God (cf. Mosiah 14:2-4).

“when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin he shall see his seed”

When thou (the Father) shalt make his (Christ’s) soul an offering for sin, he (Christ) shall see his seed. That is, when one is forgiven of sins through the atonement, one is spiritually begotten of Christ and becomes “his seed,” or child (cf. Mosiah 15:2-4). Jesus’s “offspring” will include those who become his spiritually begotten sons and daughters—those who take upon themselves his name and his covenants and abide in them (see Mosiah 15:2-4, 10-13; D&C 84:36-38).

“he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand” Christ is promised the blessing of eternal life. He will be resurrected and become immortal. Also because of Christ, the will and the purposes of the Father (“the pleasure of the Lord”) will succeed.

11 He shall see the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied; by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities.

verse 11 “He shall see the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied” “He” (the Father) will see the travail of “his” (the Son’s) soul, and the Father will be satisfied.

“by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many” “His knowledge” may refer to the knowledge the gospel brings, or to the knowledge and ability Jesus has, as a result of the atonement, to save and exalt us. The use of “many” rather than “all” suggests that some, the unrepentant, will not be justified (cf. D&C 19:16-19).

“My righteous servant” is the Savior. Who is the speaker or first person (to whom does “my” refer?) in this phrase? It is likely the Father (see verse 12).

Christ shall “justify” many. The word “justify” is a rich word. To be justified is to be regarded as righteous by God—free of sin, legally innocent. Man cannot be exalted if he is not justified. For a thorough discussion of the process of justification, see *Justification and Sanctification in Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 17.

Justification requires three essential ingredients:

1. An individual must strive mightily to keep the commandments, including participation in the required saving ordinances and covenants. Also he must repent often whenever he falls short.

2. The Holy Spirit must then assess the intention of the man’s heart. If the laws and ordinances have been kept with an honest heart and with sincere intent, then the Spirit of God, the Holy Ghost, will ratify the act of repentance. This is often referred to as being “sealed by the Holy Spirit of Promise.” The “Holy Spirit of Promise,” of course, is one of the names for the Holy Ghost.

3. It should be recognized that as hard as a man tries to live the commandments and maintain a pure heart, he invariably falls short of perfection, and “the Lord cannot look upon sin with the least degree of allowance” (Alma 45:16). Thus, man cannot be justified on his own merit. He needs help. The needed help comes because of the grace of God.

The term *grace* refers to the love God has for man. Particularly, it refers to that aspect of God’s love that inclines him to extend to man blessings the man does not actually merit or deserve. Blessings may be extended to man by God, according to the concept of grace, even when that man is lacking in merit. Thus, in the case of justification, the Holy Ghost may justify an individual when proper effort and progress has been made, even though that individual falls somewhat short of the mark. The Spirit extends to the deserving individual the blessings of the Savior’s atonement. Thus, it may be said that “by the law no flesh is justified” (2 Nephi 2:5)—the commandments, in and of themselves, do not save anyone. While it is vital to live the commandments, it is not enough. Without the grace, or leniency, of God, no man could be justified. This grace or leniency is available from the Savior because of his atoning sacrifice, and, as we have noted, it is extended to an individual only on conditions of personal effort and personal righteousness.

By this process, then, an individual may become justified or free of sin. The absolute necessity of complying with the laws of the gospel may be referred to as the “law of justification.” There are no unearned blessings. Some Protestant sects have misinterpreted Paul’s teachings (Acts 13:38-39; Romans 3:19-28; 4:5; 5:1-10; Galatians 2:15-21), and have taught that man is justified by faith alone, without works. For an explanation of Paul’s teachings and for a more complete discussion of historical Christianity’s apostate doctrine of salvation, see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 4, chapter 10, *The Afterlife*, chapter 11, *Grace and Works*, and chapter 12, *The Fate of the Unevangelized*.

A concept related to justification is *sanctification*. When an individual is in a state of justification, the Holy Ghost can then begin the process of sanctifying that individual. Sanctification consists of two separate phenomena. The first is that an increment of the natural self of the individual is purged from him. Second, he is granted an increment of an attribute of Christ. Again, for a more complete explanation of sanctification, see *Justification and Sanctification* in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 17. This is an ongoing and incremental process and is also afforded to an individual by the principle of grace and not by his own merit. Personal righteousness implies more than simply being free of sin. It also includes the incremental spiritual growth resulting from the process of sanctification.

“bear their iniquities” Metaphorically, Christ carries the sins of the people upon his shoulders.

12 Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death; and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bore the sins of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

verse 12 “will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong” Again the speaker or first person in this verse is the Father. Christ and his celestial spiritual offspring (“the great” and “the strong”) will become joint heirs of everything the Father has: possessions, glory, power, knowledge, and godhood. Christ’s portion, among the great and strong, will be the first and greatest. He will share his inheritance with all of *his* “children.”

“he hath poured out his soul unto death” He went the whole way and willingly gave his life.

“he was numbered with the transgressors” He lived among and was mistaken by some as a sinner. He was hung on the cross between two thieves.

“Intercession” is an act done on behalf of someone else.

Mosiah Chapter 15

Chapters 15 and 16 constitute Abinadi's commentary on Isaiah's messianic prophecy contained in chapter 14 (Isaiah 53).

verses 1-5 God the Father, his son Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost are three separate individuals. However, these truths about the Godhead might seem difficult, for the inexperienced student of the gospel, to pull out of these five verses. It is clear that all of the prophets including Isaiah and Abinadi understood the exact nature of the Godhead. In chapter 14 we read several verses from Isaiah 53 which referred to the Father and the Son as two separate beings (see verses 2, 6, 10, 11, 12). Let us take these first five verses in chapter 15 one at a time and see if we might ascertain Abinadi's specific meanings.

1 And now Abinadi said unto them: I would that ye should understand that God himself shall come down among the children of men, and shall redeem his people.

verse 1 This verse contains the essence of Abinadi's message, that God himself, the great Jehovah, shall come to earth as a man in the flesh, even Jesus Christ, to redeem his people. See a discussion of the concept of the condescension of God in the commentary for 1 Nephi 11:16.

2 And because he dwelleth in flesh he shall be called the Son of God, and having subjected the flesh to the will of the Father, being the Father and the Son—

verse 2 We know that Elohim is called Father because he is the father of the spirits of all men including that of Jesus Christ.

Christ is the Son:

1. He was sired, both in the premortal realm as a spirit child and here on earth by the Father.

2. Christ is also the "Son" by virtue of his dwelling here on earth in the flesh, yet submitting his will completely to the will of the Father.

Jesus is the Father:

1. Jesus is the Father by virtue of his role as creator of the heavens and the earth.

2. In his role as Jehovah, the God of the Old Testament, he became known as the God or Father of heaven.

3. Those on earth who are "born again" and changed from a fallen state to a state of righteousness, are received into a new family relationship. They become the sons and daughters of Christ (Mosiah 5:7). Thus, Christ becomes their Father.

4. Finally, Christ is the Father by the divine investiture of authority. Speaking of the divine investiture of authority, Elder Bruce R. McConkie wrote, “The Father Elohim has placed his name upon the Son, has given him his own power and authority, and has authorized him to speak in the first person as though he were the original or primal Father” (*Promised Messiah*, 63).

3 The Father, because he was conceived by the power of God; and the Son, because of the flesh; thus becoming the Father and Son—

verse 3 This verse continues to consider reasons Jesus Christ is “the Father.”

“**The Father, because he was conceived by the power of God**” This phrase seems to have reference to the principle of the divine investiture of authority. Because he was conceived on the earth by the Father, he possessed the power of the Father, or the authorization to speak for him. In D&C 93:4, the Savior teaches that he is “the Father because he [Elohim] gave me of his fulness [fulness of power and authority], and the Son because I was in the world and made flesh my tabernacle, and dwelt among the sons of men.”

“**and the Son, because of the flesh**” Again, the Savior is the Only Begotten of the Father in the flesh, therefore he is known as “the Son.”

4 And they are one God, yea, the very Eternal Father of heaven and of earth.

verse 4 “**And they are one God**” The key to understanding this phrase is to understand the antecedent of the pronoun *they*. In this context, it seems less likely to be referring to God the Father and God the Son. Rather, it appears to be referring to the two roles of Jesus Christ—his role as Father and his role as Son. Hence, the “one God” is Jesus Christ.

Abinadi seems to be teaching here what Elder Bruce R. McConkie has referred to as “the pronouncement of pronouncements, the doctrine of doctrines, the message of messages, which is that Christ is God. And if it were not so, he could not save us” (*Promised Messiah*, 98).

verses 5-7 These verses contain a rather specific description of the ministry, sufferings, rejections, trial, and crucifixion of Jesus.

Thus far in our reading of the Book of Mormon, the prophets often have spoken of Christ, and as we read subsequent chapters and verses of the book, prophets will yet speak of Jesus Christ, long before his birth into mortality. Lehi and his sons Nephi and Jacob knew of Christ’s name and title, his baptism by John, his teachings, his selection of twelve apostles, his miraculous healings and casting out of devils, and his death on the cross (see 1 Nephi 10:7-10; 11:27-33; 2 Nephi 10:3; 25:19). King Benjamin knew the name of Christ’s mother, along with other details of the Savior’s life, such as the kinds of miracles he would perform, his temptation and suffering, his crucifixion, and his

resurrection on the third day (see Mosiah 3:5-10). Alma also will write of the name of Christ's mother, Mary, and of Christ's suffering and death (see Alma 7:10-12). Samuel the Lamanite will speak of the heavenly signs that will accompany the birth and death of the Savior (Helaman 14:3-6, 20-27).

The Book of Mormon will also suggest that various other Old World prophets knew details of Christ's life long before he was born. Nephi noted that Zenock and Neum had written of the Messiah's crucifixion, while Zenos wrote of his burial and the three days of darkness that would be a sign of his death (1 Nephi 19:10). Nephi, the son of Helaman, will declare that "many prophets" of old had testified of Christ, including Moses, Abraham, Zenock, Ezias, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and "all the holy prophets" between the time of Abraham and the time of Moses (Helaman 8:13-20). Father Lehi's son Jacob will simply say, "*all the holy prophets*" knew of Christ (Jacob 4:4, italics added).

Here is a summary of the other major passages in the Book of Mormon where specific prophecies are given pertaining to the future life and ministry of Jesus:

1. 1 Nephi 11:3-33. This is the magnificent vision given to Nephi in the sixth century BC.

2. 1 Nephi 19:8-13. This is another messianic prophecy by Nephi in which he quotes Old Testament prophets, presumably taken from the plates of brass. These prophets were Zenock, Neum, and Zenos.

3. 2 Nephi 10:3-6. The prophet Jacob prophesies specifically of Christ's crucifixion in Jerusalem.

4. 2 Nephi 25:19-26. Again, Nephi, now toward the end of his mortal life, prophesies of the Savior to come.

5. Mosiah 3:5-10. These are the words of the angel to King Benjamin which he reported in his speech from the tower. As an aside, when was King Benjamin's speech relative to the time of Abinadi's speech to King Noah's court? You may be surprised to learn that King Benjamin's was some twenty-six years later!

6. Mosiah 14. This is the splendid messianic prophecy Abinadi quoted from the book of Isaiah, chapter 53.

7. Alma 7:10-12. As Alma taught the people in Gideon, he taught some specifics of Jesus's birth and ministry.

Critics of the Book of Mormon claim that such details of Christ's life could not have been known before he was born. But early Christians readily accepted the idea. Ignatius, bishop of Antioch (died AD 107), wrote to the Magnesians: "The divine prophets lived according to Christ Jesus. On this account also they were persecuted, being inspired by His grace to fully convince the unbelieving that there is one God, who has manifested Himself by Jesus Christ His Son" (see the discussion in John A. Tvedtnes, "That Which Is to Come," in his *Most Correct Book*, 235-41; see also Budge, *Book of the Mysteries*, 159). The Epistle of Barnabas, which was widely read in Christian congregations of the second century AD, indicates in its twelfth chapter that

Moses knew that the Messiah would be called Jesus. Chapter 32 of the *Book of the Bee*, a thirteenth-century text first published fifty-six years after the Book of Mormon, preserves a number of early Christian traditions about prophecies of Christ uttered by various Old Testament prophets. According to this account, (1) The prophet Hosea “prophesied mystically about our Lord Jesus Christ who was to come; saying that when He should be born, the oak in Shiloh should be divided into twelve parts; and that He should take twelve disciples of Israel” (Sir Ernest A. Wallis Budge, trans., *Book of the Bee* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1886], 69). (2) The prophet Nahum “prophesied that when the Messiah should be slain, the veil of the temple should be rent in twain, and that the Holy Spirit should depart from it” (*Ibid.*, 71). (3) The prophet Habakkuk “prophesied concerning the Messiah, that He should come, and abrogate [do away with] the laws of the Jews” (*Ibid.*). (4) The prophet Zephaniah “prophesied concerning the Messiah, that He should suffer, and that the sun should become dark, and the moon be hidden” (*Ibid.*, 71-72). Even though the *Book of the Bee* is a relatively late document (thirteenth century AD), there is evidence that the stories contained in it are very old. One piece of evidence is that the fourth-century Christian Father Epiphanius commented on one of the prophecies attributed to the prophet Nahum which is related in the book (see *Ibid.*, 71, n. 2).

Two second-century church fathers, Justin Martyr and Irenaeus, writing of Christ’s preaching to the dead while his body lay in the tomb, attributed to Jeremiah a prophecy (one not found in the Bible) in which the prophet wrote that the Lord would descend to preach salvation to the dead. In *Dialogue with Trypho* 72, Justin Martyr wrote, “And again, from the sayings of the same Jeremiah these have been cut out [by the Jews]: ‘The Lord God remembered His dead people of Israel who lay in the graves; and He descended to preach to them His own salvation’” (Roberts and Donaldson, eds., *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 1:235. Many early Christian texts refer to Christ’s preaching in the spirit world, an event additionally recorded in 1 Peter 3:18-19; 4:6; and D&C 138). Irenaeus cited the same passage in *Against Heresies* 4.22 (*Ibid.*, 1:493-94).

The *Book of the Bee* also preserves an earlier tradition of another nonbiblical prophecy of Jeremiah, declaring that “this (prophet) during his life said to the Egyptians, ‘a child shall be born—that is the Messiah—of a virgin, and He shall be laid in a crib, and He will shake and cast down the idols.’ From that time and until Christ was born, the Egyptians used to set a virgin and a baby in a crib, and to worship him, because of what Jeremiah said to them, that He should be born in a crib” (Budge, trans., *Book of the Bee*, 72. Compare Isaiah 19:1).

Another Christian document known from medieval manuscripts in various languages is 4 Baruch, which is subtitled “The Things Omitted from Jeremiah the Prophet.” The Ethiopic version attributes the book to Jeremiah’s scribe Baruch, but the Greek says it was written by Jeremiah himself. Chapter 9 has Jeremiah prophesying of the coming of Jesus Christ, the Son of God; of his selection of twelve apostles; of his

death and resurrection after three days; and of his return in glory to the Mount of Olives. According to the account, Jeremiah was stoned for this declaration (for an English translation of the Jeremiah passage, see James H. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* [Garden City: Doubleday, 1985], 2:387-88).

The New Testament suggests in passing that Abraham knew of Christ's coming (see John 8:56; Galatians 3:8), though the Old Testament story of Abraham itself does not demonstrate this. The Book of Mormon prophet Jacob noted that Abraham's offering of Isaac was "a similitude of God and his Only Begotten Son" (Jacob 4:5)—something that is confirmed in several early Christian sources, such as *Epistle of Barnabas* 7:3, Irenaeus's *Against Heresies* 4.4, 5, and Augustine's *City of God* 16.32.

From the Book of Abraham that Joseph Smith restored, we learn that the ancient patriarch actually saw Christ in the premortal council (Abraham 3:22-28). This kind of intimate knowledge of the Savior on the part of Abraham is suggested in a centuries-old Ethiopic text that derives from a Coptic text dated by the translator to the sixth century but not published until 1922. In *Kebrā Nagast 14*, we read: "And God held converse with Abram, and He said unto him, 'Fear thou not. From this day thou art My servant, and I will establish My Covenant with thee and with thy seed after thee . . . and afterwards I will send My Word for the salvation of Adam and his sons forever'" (Sir Ernest A. Wallis Budge, *The Queen of Sheba and Her Only Son Menyelek* [London: Medici Society, 1922], 10. *Kebrā Nagast* means "glory of the kings" of Ethiopia and is one of the most highly praised traditional stories among Ethiopian Christians). Chapter 104 of the same work says, "And thou dost not understand that they were justified by faith—Abraham, and David and all the Prophets, one after the other, who prophesied concerning the coming of the Son of God. And Abraham said, 'Wilt Thou in my days, O Lord, cast Thy word upon the ground?' and God said unto him, 'By no means. His time hath not yet come, but I will shew thee a similitude of His coming.'" God then has Abraham meet with Melchizedek, who "gave him the mystery of the bread and wine, that same which is celebrated in our Passover for our salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ" (*Ibid.*, 200).

Isn't it fascinating to learn how much "plain and precious" information was taught by the Old Testament prophets concerning the coming of the Savior? We find little, if any, of this in our Bible today. It is no wonder that both Christians and Jews struggle in their attempts to interpret the Bible!

5 And thus the flesh becoming subject to the Spirit, or the Son to the Father, being one God, suffereth temptation, and yieldeth not to the temptation, but suffereth himself to be mocked, and scourged, and cast out, and disowned by his people.

verse 5 "the flesh becoming subject to the Spirit" As the son, Jesus was less than, and subject to his father. The atonement process required that the will of the

Son be subjected to the will of the Father. The Son asked to have the cup pass from him. The Father willed that it be drunk to its dregs. The “flesh” is Jesus Christ, and the “Spirit” is the Father.

“being one God” This time the phrase “one God” refers to the intimate unity between God the Father and God the Son. The phrase refers to the separate members of the godhead being “one God” or “one Eternal God” (see also 2 Nephi 31:21; Alma 11:44; Mormon 7:7). It would seem that the nature of the relationship of the three members of the godhead to one another leads to these statements. The three are so closely aligned and allied that they function as a single unit. Their powers, their influences, their intentions, their goals, their responses are indistinguishable and identical. The three, indeed, function as one God. It seems likely to me, as a student of the doctrine, that we mortals are not given as yet to understand this oneness that exists in the Godhead.

An alternate explanation is that this particular statement, “being one God,” refers only to Jesus Christ. The powers and authorities of the Father, the spirit of the Son, and mortal flesh are all combined to become “one God,” even Jesus Christ.

“suffereth temptation, and yieldeth not to the temptation” Another essential ingredient of the atonement was that it was necessary that Jesus be unmarred by sin. He had to be the unblemished sacrificial lamb.

“suffereth himself to be mocked, and scourged, and cast out, and disowned by his people” The Son’s participation was purely voluntary. He descended in suffering below what any man can tolerate. Yet, he did have the power to abort the process and save himself from going through the ordeal. He must have been tempted to do so, but he obviously did not.

6 And after all this, after working many mighty miracles among the children of men, he shall be led, yea, even as Isaiah said, as a sheep before the shearer is dumb, so he opened not his mouth.

verse 6 “even as Isaiah said” See Mosiah 14:7 (Isaiah 53:7) and its commentary.

7 Yea, even so he shall be led, crucified, and slain, the flesh becoming subject even unto death, the will of the Son being swallowed up in the will of the Father.

verse 7 “the flesh becoming subject even unto death” This phrase and the one which follows—“the will of the Son being swallowed up in the will of the Father”—are parallel statements having the same meaning. Thus, we learn that Christ’s submitting “even unto death” meant that he submitted to the will of the Father. Paul wrote, in referring to Christ’s atonement: “he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:8).

8 And thus God breaketh the bands of death, having gained the victory over death; giving the Son power to make intercession for the children of men—

verse 8 On reading this verse for the first time, it is tempting to interpret “God” as being the Father. In context (see verse 9 and verse 23), however, it is obvious that “God” is the Son who is portrayed as giving himself, through his personal atoning death, the power to intercede for men with the law of justice.

“the bands of death” The concept of breaking the “bands of death” is unique to the Book of Mormon and is found nowhere else in the scriptures (see also Mosiah 15:9,20,23; 16:7; 23:12; Alma 4:14; 5:7,9,10; 7:12; 11:41-42; 22:14). The concept of gaining a “victory over death” is found in one other place in the scriptures, in 1 Corinthians 15:54-57. Here Paul is quoting from previous scriptures—he refers to this concept as the “saying that is written” (1 Corinthians 15:54). Some have suggested that Paul was quoting from Hosea 13:14, but this supposition requires quite a stretching of the imagination. Paul could not have been quoting Abinadi. It therefore seems likely that both Paul and Abinadi were quoting from an earlier scriptural text that has subsequently been lost.

“having gained the victory over death” Each and every descendant of Adam and Eve will be resurrected and thus enjoy the victory over physical death. Those who accept and live the gospel will be exalted and thus gain victory over spiritual death.

9 Having ascended into heaven, having the bowels of mercy; being filled with compassion towards the children of men; standing betwixt them and justice; having broken the bands of death, taken upon himself their iniquity and their transgressions, having redeemed them, and satisfied the demands of justice.

verse 9 All events in this verse are spoken of as having occurred in the past. They do, of course, still lie in Abinadi’s future.

“Having ascended into heaven” After the Atonement, the Savior will ascend into heaven.

There are two phrases in this verse that are stated in parallel—that is, they are identical in their meaning. They are: “having the bowels of mercy” and “being filled with compassion towards the children of men.” These phrases do, of course, describe the Savior.

Here is a little known yet most profound doctrine: Jesus suffered the agony of the atonement, not only that he may ultimately intercede for all humankind and stand “betwixt them and justice,” but also in order that his own empathy and compassion for his brothers and sisters might be perfected—in order that he might become the perfect judge of us all (see *The Essence of the Lord’s Atonement* in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 19). It is because he became the perfect judge, through acquiring perfect empathy through his atoning sacrifice, that he is allowed by the demands of justice to plead our case before the law of justice. Alma will later write, in

referring to the atonement: “And he will take upon him death, that he may loose the bands of death which bind his people; and he will take upon him their infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh, that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities” (Alma 7:12).

“standing betwixt them and justice” If the law of justice were to mete out to every man and woman their just deserts without anyone’s being available to rescue or protect them, then no one would be saved in God’s eternal kingdom. None of us is able to satisfy the demands of the law of justice on our own without help. We all must be redeemed or rescued from the natural consequences of this law. Thus, is Christ “standing betwixt [us] and [the law of] justice.”

10 And now I say unto you, who shall declare his generation? Behold, I say unto you, that when his soul has been made an offering for sin he shall see his seed. And now what say ye? And who shall be his seed?

verse 10 “who shall declare his generation” We discussed, in the commentary for Mosiah 14:8, the few possible meanings of this phrase. Here, it likely means something like, “Who are his people?” “Who shall become the Savior’s seed?” Abinadi will answer his own question in the next verse.

“when his soul has been made an offering for sin he shall see his seed” When Christ has made himself an offering for sin, he shall be blessed by the Father. His blessings will include “seed” or “offspring.” Each person who inherits the celestial kingdom will become his eternal “seed” or “offspring.” In addition, Jesus’s “seed” will include those in mortality who become his spiritually begotten sons and daughters—those who take upon themselves his name and his covenants and abide in them (see verse 11).

11 Behold I say unto you, that whosoever has heard the words of the prophets, yea, all the holy prophets who have prophesied concerning the coming of the Lord—I say unto you, that all those who have hearkened unto their words, and believed that the Lord would redeem his people, and have looked forward to that day for a remission of their sins, I say unto you, that these are his seed, or they are the heirs of the kingdom of God.

12 For these are they whose sins he has borne; these are they for whom he has died, to redeem them from their transgressions. And now, are they not his seed?

verse 12 “these are they whose sins he has borne” We know that Christ suffered for the sins of all men and not just for those who qualify to be his “seed” as in verse 11. All mankind on earth will receive the unconditional gift of resurrection which resulted from his atonement. The “offspring” of Christ, however, will be only those who qualify for the conditional gift of eternal life in his presence.

Notice the verb tenses in this verse: “whose sins he *has borne*; these are they for whom he *has died*, to redeem them from their transgressions.” Abinadi uses the past tense to refer to events yet in the future. Again, as we have previously discussed, we see the use of the “prophetic perfect” verb form.

13 Yea, and are not the prophets, every one that has opened his mouth to prophesy, that has not fallen into transgression, I mean all the holy prophets ever since the world began? I say unto you that they are his seed.

verse 13 Christ’s “seed” will include his valiant prophets and missionaries.

14 And these are they who have published peace, who have brought good tidings of good, who have published salvation; and said unto Zion: Thy God reigneth!

verse 14 As we have learned previously (see the commentary for Mosiah 12:21), “peace,” “good tidings of good,” and “salvation” are all terms that refer to the good news of the everlasting gospel. To “publish peace” is to announce, proclaim, or promulgate that gospel.

15 And O how beautiful upon the mountains were their feet!

verse 15 The prophet Abinadi clearly identifies those in Isaiah’s prophecy (Isaiah 52:7: “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!”) who have and will yet “publish peace.” They are all of the holy prophets since the world began who have prophesied and will yet prophesy of Jesus Christ. This includes the Lord Jesus Christ himself.

There is an ancient document that agrees with Abinadi’s interpretation of Isaiah 52:7. It is one of the Dead Sea Scrolls, *11Q Melchizedek* (also known as 11Q13), which cites the Isaiah passage, then explains that “the mountains are the prophets . . . And the messenger is the anointed of the spirit [the Messiah or Jesus Christ]” (“The Imagery of Isaiah 52:7-10,” in *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry and John W. Welch [Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1998], 261-65; see also John A. Tvedtnes, “How Beautiful upon the Mountains,” in his *Most Correct Book*, 172-75).

16 And again, how beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of those that are still publishing peace!

17 And again, how beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of those who shall hereafter publish peace, yea, from this time henceforth and forever!

18 And behold, I say unto you, this is not all. For O how beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that is the founder of peace, yea, even the Lord, who has redeemed his people; yea, him who has granted salvation unto his people;

verses 15-18 “how beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings” This phrase, which has its origins in Isaiah 52:7, whenever it is encountered in the scriptures, speaks of the Lord’s latter-day messengers, especially his prophets and missionaries, taking the gospel to scattered Israel. In verse 18, Abinadi, however, applies it directly to the Lord himself.

Note in these four verses Abinadi’s fourfold use of the phrase as he speaks of past, present, and future messengers and especially the Lord himself, the very “founder” or “prince” of peace. True peace comes only from the gospel.

This phrase is an example of a figure of speech called a synecdoche (sin ek’ da kee) in which a part stands for the whole (i.e., the feet represent the entire person). For additional discussion of synecdoche, see the introductory commentary for Jacob 5.

19 For were it not for the redemption which he hath made for his people, which was prepared from the foundation of the world, I say unto you, were it not for this, all mankind must have perished.

verse 19 Abinadi continues to speak in the past tense as he prophesies of future events.

“Were it not for the redemption . . . all mankind must have perished.” This doctrine is stressed repeatedly in the Book of Mormon (see also 1 Nephi 10:6; 2 Nephi 9:8-9; Mosiah 16:4; Alma 34:9; and Alma 42:6). Simply stated, were it not for the atonement, all mankind would live eternally with Satan as sons of perdition.

20 But behold, the bands of death shall be broken, and the Son reigneth, and hath power over the dead; therefore, he bringeth to pass the resurrection of the dead.

verse 20 Abinadi now uses both future and present tense verbs to describe Christ’s victory over physical death (see the commentary for verse 8 of this chapter).

21 And there cometh a resurrection, even a first resurrection; yea, even a resurrection of those that have been, and who are, and who shall be, even until the resurrection of Christ—for so shall he be called.

verse 21 “even a first resurrection” Earlier prophets had taught of the resurrection, but Abinadi was the first in the Book of Mormon to describe and use the phrase “first resurrection.” His discourse on the subject begins in Mosiah 15:20 and extends through Mosiah 16:11, a total of two complete pages. Prior to reading this discussion of Abinadi’s, please review carefully the sequence of the resurrections as discussed in the commentary for 2 Nephi 9:15. Abinadi’s reference to the “first resurrection” applies to what we now understand as “the morning of the first resurrection,” or that resurrection wherein the righteous come forth with celestial bodies to inherit the eternal presence of God. Abinadi’s teachings are generally in harmony with the expanded knowledge about the resurrection that the prophet Joseph Smith

gained through revelation. However, Abinadi's record is incomplete and does not tell it all. What he does not say, at least in what we have of his record, is that those who die after the time of Christ, who are righteous, will also be part of the first resurrection (see the commentary for the following verse).

“until the resurrection of Christ—for so he shall be called” The earliest reference to the specific name “Christ” in the Book of Mormon text is in the teachings of Jacob in 2 Nephi 10:3. The name means the “Messiah” or the “anointed one.”

22 And now, the resurrection of all the prophets, and all those that have believed in their words, or all those that have kept the commandments of God, shall come forth in the first resurrection; therefore, they are the first resurrection.

verses 21-22 “first resurrection” Again, for a discussion and explanation of the two resurrections, see the commentary for 2 Nephi 9:15. If you have not done so, it is important that you take a few moments to review that discussion now. An alternate source for learning about the sequence of the resurrections is the section titled “When Are We Resurrected?” in volume 2, chapter 13 of *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine, The Spirit World*. The “first resurrection” (actually the morning of the first resurrection) will begin at the time of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

23 They are raised to dwell with God who has redeemed them; thus they have eternal life through Christ, who has broken the bands of death.

verse 23 This verse refers to all who qualify to be “raised” or resurrected in the morning of the first resurrection and inherit the celestial kingdom. The titles “God” and “Christ” here are certainly synonymous and refer to the Lord Jesus Christ.

24 And these are those who have part in the first resurrection; and these are they that have died before Christ came, in their ignorance, not having salvation declared unto them. And thus the Lord bringeth about the restoration of these; and they have a part in the first resurrection, or have eternal life, being redeemed by the Lord.

verse 24 This verse might be a bit confusing. The initial phrase, “And these are those who have part in the first resurrection,” refers to all those who will come forth in the morning of the first resurrection. These include “all the prophets and all those that have believed in their words, or all those that have kept the commandments of God.”

The next phrase causes the confusion. If we were to remove the phrase “and these are they that have” and replace it with “and these will be accompanied by those who,” then the meaning is clearer. But even with this adjustment in the wording, some additional explanation is required. More details are needed: Those who lived upon the earth without having the opportunity to hear the gospel of Christ who, in the judgment of the Savior, would have accepted with all their hearts if they had heard it, will also be

heirs of the celestial kingdom (D&C 137:5-9). These individuals may have lived before the mortal advent of Jesus or at any time in the history of the world.

25 And little children also have eternal life.

verse 25 Also, all children who die before the age of accountability who would have received the gospel had they been allowed to tarry, will be exalted in the celestial kingdom (D&C 137:5-10).

26 But behold, and fear, and tremble before God, for ye ought to tremble; for the Lord redeemeth none such that rebel against him and die in their sins; yea, even all those that have perished in their sins ever since the world began, that have wilfully rebelled against God, that have known the commandments of God, and would not keep them; these are they that have no part in the first resurrection.

27 Therefore ought ye not to tremble? For salvation cometh to none such; for the Lord hath redeemed none such; yea, neither can the Lord redeem such; for he cannot deny himself; for he cannot deny justice when it has its claim.

verses 26-27 Abinadi continues in his warnings to the wicked Nephites of Noah's kingdom. These verses likely have reference to all those who do not come forth in the first resurrection. They apply to those who will inherit a lesser kingdom of Glory and to those assigned to the kingdom without glory—outer darkness.

To be redeemed or saved, in these verses, means the same as receiving a celestial resurrection. These individuals will not be resurrected in (the morning of) the first resurrection. They “have known the commandments of God, and would not keep them.” By rebelling against God these individuals cut themselves off from his atoning sacrifice. The law of justice, untempered by Christ's mercy, lays claim to them, and they suffer the wrath of God in the spirit world or “hell” before being resurrected to a lesser kingdom or becoming sons of perdition (D&C 76:82-85).

“for the Lord hath redeemed none such; yea, neither can the Lord redeem such” The word *redeem*, as it is used in the scriptures, has a few different meanings:

1. The first and ultimate meaning is that Christ redeems us when he grants us the opportunity for salvation or exaltation. This redemption is, of course, conditional as is made clear in this particular verse and is based on an individual's accepting Christ and obeying his gospel.

2. The second meaning is that all of mankind is redeemed in that they will all be resurrected. “Now, verily I say unto you, that through the redemption which is made for you is brought to pass the resurrection from the dead. And the spirit and the body are the soul of man. And the resurrection from the dead is the redemption of the soul” (D&C 88:14-16; see also Mormon 9:12-13; Helaman 14:17). The scriptures teach that Christ came into the world to “redeem the children of men from the fall” (2 Nephi 2:26). This redemption includes definitions 1. and 2.

3. It is also possible to be redeemed in this life. Forgiveness of sin constitutes redemption from sin. By virtue of Christ's atoning blood, a man may be redeemed from sin as he repents and comes to Christ (2 Nephi 1:15; Alma 5:21; 9:27; Mosiah 27:24). Father Lehi rejoiced: "The Lord hath redeemed my soul from hell; I have beheld his glory, and I am encircled about eternally in the arms of his love" (2 Nephi 1:15).

"for he cannot deny justice when it has its claim" "Justice" here refers to the law of justice. The law of justice in essence states that for every violation of God's law, a penalty must be paid. No man can be exalted in the celestial kingdom without being "justified." A man is said to be justified when all penalties are paid. Then the man is "reconciled to God" or brought into perfect harmony with God to the point where he can be exalted. Even God himself cannot redeem a man when the man has not satisfied the demands of justice. God cannot break the law of justice. For a review of the concepts of the law of justice, the fall, and the atonement, see *The Essence of the Lord's Atonement (Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine, volume 1, chapter 19)* and *Consequences of the Savior's Atonement (Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine, volume 2, chapter 2)*.

verses 28-31 Abinadi now quotes from Isaiah 52:8-10 which verses prophesy of the latter days when Israel will be gathered for the final time just prior to the Millennium.

28 And now I say unto you that the time shall come that the salvation of the Lord shall be declared to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people.

29 Yea, Lord, thy watchmen shall lift up their voice; with the voice together shall they sing; for they shall see eye to eye, when the Lord shall bring again Zion.

verse 29 "thy watchmen" It was traditional in Palestine to place watchers or guards on the walls of the cities to observe those who approached.

"thy watchmen shall lift up their voice" Symbolically, the watchmen are priesthood leaders who keep watch over the Church and call out the good news of redemption.

"with the voice together shall they sing [a new millennial song entitled] when the Lord shall bring again Zion" The words of this song are given by the Lord in D&C 84:99-102:

The Lord hath brought again Zion;
The Lord hath redeemed his people, Israel,
According to the election of grace,
Which was brought to pass by the faith
And covenant of their fathers.
The Lord hath redeemed his people;
And Satan is bound and time is no longer.
The Lord hath gathered all things in one.

The Lord hath brought down Zion from above.
 The Lord hath brought up Zion from beneath.
 The earth hath travailed and brought forth her strength;
 And truth is established in her bowels;
 And the heavens have smiled upon her;
 And she is clothed with the glory of her God;
 For he stands in the midst of his people.
 Glory, and honor, and power, and might,
 Be ascribed to our God; for he is full of mercy,
 Justice, grace and truth, and peace,
 Forever and ever, Amen.

“they shall see eye to eye” Unity is one of the key characteristics of Zion. Moses recorded: “The Lord called his people Zion, because they were of one heart and one mind” (Moses 7:18). Through the Prophet Joseph, the Lord said, “I say unto you be one; and if ye are not one, ye are not mine” (D&C 38:27). Joseph Smith wrote, “What if all the world should embrace this gospel? They would then see eye to eye, and the blessings of God would be poured out upon the people, which is the desire of my whole soul” (HC, 5:259).

30 Break forth into joy, sing together, ye waste places of Jerusalem; for the Lord hath comforted his people, he hath redeemed Jerusalem.

verse 30 “Break forth into joy, sing together” All the righteous will join in chorus.

“ye waste places of Jerusalem” This expression refers to the ancient ruins of Jerusalem about to come alive again as Israel gathers there.

“for the Lord hath comforted his people” The comfort comes in the form of redemption and a restoration to the Lord’s promises.

“he hath redeemed Jerusalem” Jerusalem will be set free from captivity, both physical and spiritual.

31 The Lord hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.

verse 31 “The Lord hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations” The expression has its origin in the Hebrew practice of throwing back the cloak from his right arm so that it does not produce an impediment in combat. At his second coming, Christ will “make bare his holy arm” when he shows forth his power for all to see.

“in the eyes of all the nations” Here Isaiah answers the question which he asked in Mosiah 14:1: “To whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?” All the world will know of his salvation, meaning the victory of our Lord over the forces of evil and

corruption. The same idea is then repeated: “and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.”

Mosiah Chapter 16

1 And now, it came to pass that after Abinadi had spoken these words he stretched forth his hand and said: The time shall come when all shall see the salvation of the Lord; when every nation, kindred, tongue, and people shall see eye to eye and shall confess before God that his judgments are just.

verse 1 “The time shall come when all shall see the salvation of the Lord”

The expression “to see the salvation of the Lord” means simply to come to an understanding and to acknowledge that salvation, or redemption from sin and from the fall, can come only through Jesus Christ. This expression is used elsewhere in scripture. Moses used it, for example, in addressing the Israelites as they were being pursued by the Egyptian army (Exodus 14:13-14). Isaiah used the expression in speaking of the latter days when all Israel will be gathered just prior to the Millennium (Isaiah 52:10). We know that there will eventually come a time when “every knee shall bow and every tongue confess” that Jesus is the Christ (Mosiah 27:31; D&C 88:104). Each and every person who has ever inhabited this earth will finally know that Jesus Christ and his gospel—his commandments—are the only standards against which we will all be measured.

To what time period is Abinadi referring here? When is it that *all* shall see the salvation of the Lord? It has been suggested by authority that there are at least two times when every knee will bow and every tongue confess. Brigham Young suggested that this will occur during the Millennium when Christ will reign personally upon the earth as head of the political kingdom of God (*Discourses of Brigham Young*, 115). Though all will acknowledge the Christ, not all will belong to his Church. Indeed, there may be more religious sects upon the earth then than there are now (*Ibid.*, 439). Bruce R. McConkie has also suggested a post-millennial time when all have been resurrected and the earth is about to be celestialized (*Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 3:531-32; D&C 88:103-04). It would seem that there may yet be a third moment in time when all shall see the salvation of the Lord. This is the time, just prior to the resurrection, when the purposes of the spirit-world experience have all been fulfilled—when all have had a chance to hear and understand the gospel plan. Then “As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God [that Jesus is Lord]” (Romans 14:11), except for those few who remains filthy still. These latter unfortunate souls will spend eternity in outer darkness. All of the rest will be then resurrected with bodies of celestial, terrestrial, and telestial glory.

“every nation, kindred, tongue, and people shall see eye to eye and shall confess before God that his judgments are just” It has been pointed out by Joseph Fielding Smith, Jr. that even though every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Christ’s judgments are just, not all who so confess will receive forgiveness of sin or

exaltation. Some will likely confess grudgingly (*Doctrines of Salvation*, 2:30). All of those who inherit the telestial kingdom, for example, will confess that Jesus is the Christ, yet their rewards are far less than eternal life in the celestial realm. What of those destined to become sons of Perdition? Will they confess Christ? It is unlikely they will, though they all will certainly understand in their private thoughts the exact role of Christ in the salvation of mankind. It seems likely that they will stubbornly and steadfastly refuse to publicly confess Christ and will remain “filthy still” (D&C 29:44; 88:35).

2 And then shall the wicked be cast out, and they shall have cause to howl, and weep, and wail, and gnash their teeth; and this because they would not hearken unto the voice of the Lord; therefore the Lord redeemeth them not.

verse 2 “the Lord redeemeth them not” Which people are referred to in this verse? Those who require no redemption are those who go with Satan to outer darkness. For those who are redeemed, there are various degrees of redemption. Those who inherit the telestial and terrestrial kingdoms require redemption from their sins, as they lack the ability to pay the price for their sins themselves. Only those who are exalted in the celestial kingdom are fully redeemed in the highest spiritual sense.

It would seem that this verse likely refers to those few unfortunate souls to spend eternity in outer darkness, though we have previously made the point that the Book of Mormon teaches an incomplete and simplistic version of our post-mortal life (see “Post-Mortal Life and the Book of Mormon” in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, chapter 13, *The Spirit World*).

3 For they are carnal and devilish, and the devil has power over them; yea, even that old serpent that did beguile our first parents, which was the cause of their fall; which was the cause of all mankind becoming carnal, sensual, devilish, knowing evil from good, subjecting themselves to the devil.

verse 3 “they are carnal and devilish, and the devil has power over them” The pronoun “they” refers back to the “wicked” who are “cast out” in verse 2. As in verse 2, this verse seems to have reference also to those who will ultimately go with Satan and become the sons of Perdition.

4 Thus all mankind were lost; and behold, they would have been endlessly lost were it not that God redeemed his people from their lost and fallen state.

verse 4 Abinadi now suddenly shifts his reference away from the sons of Perdition to all mankind who have been subject to the fall. We have read this doctrine before. It is an important doctrine that is stressed repeatedly in the Book of Mormon (see also 1 Nephi 10:6; 2 Nephi 9:8-9; Mosiah 15:19; 16:4; Alma 34:9; and Alma 42:6). Simply stated, were it not for the atonement, all mankind would live eternally with Satan

as sons of Perdition. Again, Abinadi is speaking of the atonement of Christ as if it were in the past, though it is yet to occur in Abinadi's future.

5 But remember that he that persists in his own carnal nature, and goes on in the ways of sin and rebellion against God, remaineth in his fallen state and the devil hath all power over him. Therefore, he is as though there was no redemption made, being an enemy to God; and also is the devil an enemy to God.

verse 5 Just who is this rebellious “enemy to God” who “persists in his own carnal nature” and “goes on in the ways of sin”? He is the “natural man” whom we have discussed previously in the commentary for Mosiah 3:19. It is important to have firmly in mind the definition of this natural man. Hence, let us review that commentary:

The term “natural man” applies to all men and women born into this world. This label does not refer to a man's moral character but rather to his relationship to God. A natural man is one who has not been touched by the influence of the Holy Ghost. He has not been born again. He has not become transformed into a new creature. Indeed, he is not a saint. The natural man is an “enemy to God” because his nature is alien to things of a spiritual or eternal nature. His perspective is limited to the carnal and worldly, and he is incapable of understanding spiritual things. “[Spiritual truths] are foolishness unto him” (1 Corinthians 2:14). He is blind and deaf to matters of the Spirit. He is independent rather than submissive and humble, though, ironically, he usually ends up conforming to the worldly trends of the day. He is proud, overly-competitive, and driven by rewards of the world. His behavior is likely to be influenced by his animal passions.

Every man is a natural man and in bondage to the flesh until 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” (Mosiah 3:19). Once sanctified by the Holy Spirit, man is fundamentally and profoundly changed. He transforms from a state of carnality to being “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” (*Ibid.*). He cannot look upon sin “save it be with abhorrence.” He receives Christ's “image” in his “countenance.” He experiences a “mighty change” of heart. He enjoys the “fruits of the Spirit” which, according to the Apostle Paul, are “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, faith, meekness, temperance” (Galatians 5:22-23). He is then said to possess the “divine nature” rather than a “natural” nature. His perspective is not confined to this earthly sojourn but is rather an eternal one. He knows that this earth life is not the real life. Ultimately he may be endowed with the most transcendent fruit of the Spirit—charity. He will be enabled to love as Christ loved.

Only when thus transformed does a man realize how totally dependent is humanity upon the Lord. This true humility comes only with revealed divine knowledge to the sanctified individual. The proud, on the other hand, are never humble. They are

ignorant of man's dependence upon the Lord, and they are unaware of their ignorance. Pride is the very father of ignorance.

For a more complete discussion of this subject, see *The "Natural Self" and "Spiritual Self"* in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 5.

6 And now if Christ had not come into the world, speaking of things to come as though they had already come, there could have been no redemption.

verse 6 "if Christ had not come into the world . . . there could have been no redemption" The redemption that resulted from Christ's atoning sacrifice consists of two major parts: (1) the unconditional overcoming of physical death and (2) the conditional overcoming of spiritual death—in other words, giving man the opportunity, based on the degree of his repentance, of returning to live with God in the celestial kingdom, or at least escaping the clutches of Satan by inheriting either the terrestrial or the telestial kingdom.

"speaking of things to come as though they had already come" We have spoken previously of the so-called "prophetic perfect" verb tense. It is that a prophet may prophesy of things yet in the future, but speak of them as though they had occurred in the past or as if they were occurring in the present. It is interesting to see this very principle explained by the editorial comment that is inserted into the middle of this verse. After stating a future event but placing it in the past perfect tense ("if Christ had not come into the world"), the text then explains the use of the seemingly illogical verb tenses ("speaking of things to come as though they had already come"). Do we know for certain who inserted this editorial comment? It certainly could have been Abinadi himself or perhaps it was Alma or even the prophet Mormon (Mosiah 17:4).

7 And if Christ had not risen from the dead, or have broken the bands of death that the grave should have no victory, and that death should have no sting, there could have been no resurrection.

8 But there is a resurrection, therefore the grave hath no victory, and the sting of death is swallowed up in Christ.

verses 7-8 These verses simply restate the fact that through Christ's atonement, physical death, the "last enemy" (JST 1 Corinthians 15:26), has been eliminated as a permanent condition.

9 He is the light and the life of the world; yea, a light that is endless, that can never be darkened; yea, and also a life which is endless, that there can be no more death.

verse 9 "He is the light and the life of the world" What does this expression really mean? Perhaps man is not given, as yet, to fully understand it. In reviewing what has been said by authority about this phrase, it seems there are two general meanings.

The first was given by Elder Bruce R. McConkie. He suggested that the phrase means that in some mysterious physical way, Christ is the very source of life, light, and truth (*Mormon Doctrine*, 448). Unfortunately, this explanation does not add to our understanding. It is possible that the light which emanates from God actually brings life and energy to all things in the universe (D&C 88:13). See *The Concept of Light in Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 15.

The second meaning is suggested by 3 Nephi 11:11. The atoning sacrifice qualified the Savior to be the “light”—the beacon or signal which man must navigate toward his eternal destiny—and the “life”—the giver of eternal life.

10 Even this mortal shall put on immortality, and this corruption shall put on incorruption, and shall be brought to stand before the bar of God, to be judged of him according to their works whether they be good or whether they be evil—

verse 10 “this mortal shall put on immortality, and this corruption shall put on incorruption” For a discussion of the terms *corruption* and *incorruption*, see the commentary for 2 Nephi 2:11. “This mortal” refers to our mortal bodies. They shall be changed into immortal ones at our resurrection. “This corruption” also refers to our mortal bodies which are subject to physical change, disease, decay, aging, and death. They shall be changed into “incorruptible” eternal bodies.

We have commented previously that the sequence contained in this verse and in other scripture is a little confusing. This verse suggests that first we will be resurrected, and then we will stand before the judgment bar of God. We know, however, that at the moment of our resurrection, our eternal judgment and reward will already be evident and obvious since the type of body in which we come forth will betray that judgment. That is, we will come forth with celestial bodies, terrestrial bodies, or telestial bodies. Perhaps we will stand before the judgment bar of God after our resurrection, but that is likely to be more of a ritual or symbolic experience rather than the actual judgment.

There is another possible explanation for this enigma. Please see subtitle “What is the role of the resurrection in the final judgment of us all—two views of resurrection?” under “The Great Final Judgment” in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 3, chapter 9, *The Judgments*.

11 If they be good, to the resurrection of endless life and happiness; and if they be evil, to the resurrection of endless damnation, being delivered up to the devil, who hath subjected them, which is damnation—

verses 10-11 In these verses we again encounter the Book of Mormon’s simplified doctrine of eternity—the “good” will enjoy “endless life and happiness” and the “evil” will suffer “endless damnation” in subjection to Satan. For a brief discussion of what it means to be damned, see the commentary for 2 Nephi 9:24. See also “Post-

Mortal Life and the Book of Mormon” in *The Spirit World in Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, chapter 13.

We now are privileged to have further light on this subject as revealed to Joseph Smith in D&C 76. We know that salvation is divided into “many mansions.”

verse 11 While studying Mosiah 15, it was suggested that you review the understanding now available to us of the sequence of the two resurrections in the commentary for 2 Nephi 9:15. You may want to review those important concepts yet again. There we learned that there are two resurrections—the “first” and the “second.” The first resurrection has a “morning” and an “afternoon.” Those resurrected during the morning of the first resurrection (beginning at the moment of Christ's resurrection) will come forth with celestial bodies. Those who come forth with terrestrial bodies (during the Millennium) will come forth in the “afternoon” of the first resurrection. The second resurrection will occur following the millennial thousand years and will involve those bound for the telestial kingdom. And then, also as part of the second resurrection, those who have earned no kingdom of glory will come forth with resurrected bodies. These will spend eternity with Satan. They are the sons of Perdition.

The doctrine of the resurrection taught in the Book of Mormon is a more simple version. Abinadi teaches that the first resurrection involves the just and is a resurrection unto eternal life. The second resurrection includes the unjust and is unto damnation. Armed with the more complete understanding provided by modern revelation and summarized in the commentary for 2 Nephi 9:15, each of us must interpret for ourselves Abinadi’s teachings. Apparently he had not been given all of the details of the two resurrections that we have today. You might want to assume, in Book of Mormon terms, that the first resurrection includes only those who have earned the celestial glory or eternal life, and the second resurrection includes everyone else.

12 Having gone according to their own carnal wills and desires; having never called upon the Lord while the arms of mercy were extended towards them; for the arms of mercy were extended towards them, and they would not; they being warned of their iniquities and yet they would not depart from them; and they were commanded to repent and yet they would not repent.

verse 12 This verse describes the “natural man” who never yields to the offer of the “arms of mercy,” which might be interpreted here as the “enticings of the Holy Spirit.” See the commentary for verse 5 above.

13 And now, ought ye not to tremble and repent of your sins, and remember that only in and through Christ ye can be saved?

14 Therefore, if ye teach the law of Moses, also teach that it is a shadow of those things which are to come—

verse 14 Abinadi summarizes and scolds Noah's priests. He says, "If you are going to teach the law of Moses, then at least teach it in its proper context. Teach that it is a 'shadow' [type or symbol or foreshadowing] of the Savior who is to come."

15 Teach them that redemption cometh through Christ the Lord, who is the very Eternal Father. Amen.

verse 15 "Christ the Lord, who is the very Eternal Father" We have previously discussed the reasons why Christ may be referred to as the Father. See, for example, the commentary for Mosiah 15:2.

Mosiah Chapter 17

1 And now it came to pass that when Abinadi had finished these sayings, that the king commanded that the priests should take him and cause that he should be put to death.

2 But there was one among them whose name was Alma, he also being a descendant of Nephi. And he was a young man, and he believed the words which Abinadi had spoken, for he knew concerning the iniquity which Abinadi had testified against them; therefore he began to plead with the king that he would not be angry with Abinadi, but suffer that he might depart in peace.

verse 2 “there was one among them whose name was Alma” Alma was one of Noah’s priests.

The Book of Mormon’s use of Alma as a man’s name has occasioned considerable amusement among uninformed critics of the book. If Joseph Smith knew the name Alma at all from his environment, it is highly likely that he would have known it as a Latinate woman’s name rather than as a masculine one (many will recognize the Latin phrase *alma mater*, which means “beneficent mother”). Recent documentary finds demonstrate, however, that Alma also occurs as a Semitic masculine personal name in the ancient Near East—just as it does in the Book of Mormon (see Paul Y. Hoskisson, “Alma as a Hebrew Name,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 7/1 [1998]: 72-73; Terrence L. Szink, “Further Evidence of a Semitic Alma,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 8/1 [1999]: 70; and Terrence L. Szink, “The Personal Name ‘Alma’ at Ebla,” *The Religious Educator* 1/1 [2000]: 53-56).

Brother Hugh Nibley has pointed out: “The name Alma has long been derided for its usage in the Book of Mormon as a man’s name. It is interesting to note that the name Alma has now been found in the Bar Kokhba letters as “Alma, son of Judah” (*Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, volume 1, “Book of Mormon Near Eastern Background”). See the supplemental article, *Names in the Book of Mormon*.

Joseph, of course, could not have known about Alma as a man’s name from any source existing in his frontier American environment.

“he was a young man” We can calculate that Alma was about twenty-five years old at this time, his having been born about 173 BC. Abinadi’s death was about 148 BC. We will later learn that Alma will die in 91 BC at the age of 82.

“he knew concerning the iniquity which Abinadi had testified against them” This phrase suggests that Alma had been troubled over the iniquity of his people, even before Abinadi’s appearance among them.

3 But the king was more wroth, and caused that Alma should be cast out from among them, and sent his servants after him that they might slay him.

verse 3 “But the king was more wroth” Alma's pleading caused the king to be even more angry. Undoubtedly Noah harbored the nagging feeling, though mostly suppressed, that Abinadi had been teaching the truth. Noah's psychological defense against this ambivalence and feeling of guilt was to become violently angry and seek to strike out against Alma also.

4 But he fled from before them and hid himself that they found him not. And he being concealed for many days did write all the words which Abinadi had spoken.

verse 4 “he being concealed for many days did write all the words which Abinadi had spoken” This period of “many days” must have been for this young priest a period of profound anguish and soul searching as he “repented of his sins and iniquities” (Mosiah 18:1; 23:10) and sought for the Lord's forgiveness.

We learn that the senior Alma was the author of that part of the record of the Zeniffites which gives the account of Abinadi's ministry among them. Even though this phrase states that Alma wrote all the words which Abinadi spoke, we need not assume that our present-day book of Mosiah contains *all* of Abinadi's teachings. There is evidence that the prophet Mormon may have abridged this record of Alma before he placed it upon the plates of Mormon. If you are interested in reviewing this evidence then see the commentaries for Mosiah 7:27, Mosiah 12:19, and Mormon 1:19.

In the Book of Mormon text there is no evidence that Alma ever had a private conversation with Abinadi or that he was ordained to the Melchizedek priesthood by him. One wonders if Alma had heard Abinadi's initial testimony when Abinadi preached two years earlier. Perhaps that testimony prepared him for this final witness.

5 And it came to pass that the king caused that his guards should surround Abinadi and take him; and they bound him and cast him into prison.

6 And after three days, having counseled with his priests, he caused that he should again be brought before him.

verse 6 Abinadi was retained in prison for three days before being formally accused and condemned to death. Why the delay? Perhaps Noah and his priests had difficulty in deciding on a plausible capital charge to level against him. Or perhaps they were using a psychological maneuver to break his spirit through fear and intimidation. It was suggested previously that these events might have occurred at the feast of Pentecost, and that perhaps Abinadi was imprisoned until the festival was concluded (see the commentary for Mosiah 13:5).

7 And he said unto him: Abinadi, we have found an accusation against thee, and thou art worthy of death.

8 For thou hast said that God himself should come down among the children of men; and now, for this cause thou shalt be put to death unless thou wilt recall all the words which thou hast spoken evil concerning me and my people.

verse 8 Abinadi was not charged with a crime against the state. Rather he was charged with the crime of blasphemy. He had indeed said what he was accused of saying (see the commentary for Mosiah 13:28).

9 Now Abinadi said unto him: I say unto you, I will not recall the words which I have spoken unto you concerning this people, for they are true; and that ye may know of their surety I have suffered myself that I have fallen into your hands.

verse 9 “that ye may know of their surety I have suffered myself that I have fallen into your hands” Somehow Noah’s ordering and carrying out the execution of Abinadi will cause Noah to know in his heart that Abinadi’s preachings had all been true. We will learn in verse 11 that Noah already suspected their truth and was frightened by them. In verse 20 we will read that Abinadi’s death will also “seal the truth of his words.” For a discussion of the meaning of this provocative phrase, see the commentary for that verse.

10 Yea, and I will suffer even until death, and I will not recall my words, and they shall stand as a testimony against you. And if ye slay me ye will shed innocent blood, and this shall also stand as a testimony against you at the last day.

verse 10 “if ye slay me ye will shed innocent blood” What does it mean to shed innocent blood? How serious a sin is this? To shed innocent blood is simply to take life without justification, to kill unjustly. The premeditated shedding of innocent blood is said to be a “sin unto death” (1 John 5:16-17), meaning a sin for which there is “no forgiveness” (D&C 42:79). Does this mean that the shedding of innocent blood is the unpardonable sin? Can a man not repent and be cleansed of this sin?

The ultimate and unpardonable sin is to figuratively shed the only completely innocent blood, the blood of Jesus Christ. Once an individual has been converted to the divinity of Jesus Christ by the Spirit of the Holy Ghost and has come to know God and have an absolute witness, then that individual has a most serious and binding obligation. If he should ever turn altogether against the Church and come out in open rebellion against it, then he is guilty of the unpardonable sin. It is as though he “crucifies [Christ] afresh or assent[s] unto [his] death” (D&C 76:35; 132:27). Such an individual will be resurrected but will not inherit a kingdom of glory. Rather he will become a son of Perdition and spend eternity with Satan and his angels.

The unjustified shedding of human life is second only to the unpardonable sin in its gravity. Murder is said to be the *unforgivable* (rather than *unpardonable*) sin. A murderer may repent and be cleansed in the post-mortal life, and he may be admitted to a kingdom of glory—the telestial kingdom. He cannot, however be forgiven to the point

of being worthy for the celestial kingdom, or even the terrestrial kingdom. He may become a “servant of the Most High; but where God and Christ dwell they cannot come” (D&C 76:112). For a more complete discussion of the *Three Most Abominable Sins*, see *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 3, chapter 18.

“this shall also stand as a testimony against you at the last day” Does the Lord allow the shedding of innocent blood in order that actions of the murderer may eventually serve as a witness against him? It is true that many unjust and dreadful things happen here on earth. Though the Lord certainly has the ability to intervene in such happenings, generally he does not. Usually he is inclined to allow man to use his agency as he wishes—for good or for ill (see Alma 14:10-11 and Alma 60:13).

11 And now king Noah was about to release him, for he feared his word; for he feared that the judgments of God would come upon him.

verse 11 “for he feared his words” Though he likely remained somewhat ambivalent, it is clear that Noah strongly suspected and feared the truth of Abinadi’s teachings.

12 But the priests lifted up their voices against him, and began to accuse him, saying: He has reviled the king. Therefore the king was stirred up in anger against him, and he delivered him up that he might be slain.

verse 12 “the priests lifted up their voices against him” The priests, seeing that the king was beginning to waver, knew just how to appeal to the king’s vanity. They said, “He has reviled the king.” Apparently reviling the king was a crime against the state, a type of sedition.

“he delivered him up that he might be slain” At the encouragement of his priests, Noah regained his depraved courage and delivered Abinadi to be slain.

13 And it came to pass that they took him and bound him, and scourged his skin with faggots, yea, even unto death.

verse 13 “scourged his skin with faggots, yea, even unto death” How exactly was Abinadi executed? We will later learn that he “suffered death by fire” (verse 20). In our minds eye we intuitively think that he was burned at the stake, yet nowhere in the scripture do we read that he burned at the stake. Referring to this quotation from Mosiah 17:13, Robert J. Matthews wrote: “Three words in the foregoing sentence should be noted. The first is that they bound him. That seems self-explanatory. The second is that they scourged him. To scourge means to whip, flail, or beat. The third term is faggots. . . . A faggot is a bundle of sticks or twigs, used for fuel. This passage seems to say that Abinadi’s tormentors took burning torches and poked him with these, burning his skin until he died” (“Abinadi: The Prophet and Martyr,” *The Book of Mormon: Mosiah, Salvation Only Through Christ*, Provo, Utah, 102-03). Then Abinadi “fell,

having suffered death by fire” (verse 20). Brother Matthews further speculates: “In my mind I see Abinadi bound, possibly supported by something, and his fiendish executioners (probably the priests) gathered about him with burning torches (faggots) in their hands, jabbing him and rubbing him with these until they caused him to die. They actively, eagerly, and physically caused his death; they were not merely passive, interested bystanders watching a bonfire. I can imagine them dancing and cavorting about Abinadi, and hear them shouting, exulting, and gloating over what they were doing. And during it all, Abinadi was pronouncing prophecies of God’s vengeance upon them—prophecies that were literally fulfilled. The noise, the din, the stench would be awful! Wickedness and righteousness, life and death, are real, and Abinadi’s martyrdom really did happen” (*Ibid.*, 103).

Brant Gardner has described an ancient Aztec practice of punitive beatings with “firebrands” or flaming sticks. In the Codex Mendoza, a richly illustrated ethnographic record of Aztec daily life that was produced in Mexico City around AD 1541, he discovered a painting which depicts two men beating a youth with burning firebrands. Although this Aztec practice of beating transgressors with firewood followed more than one thousand years after the death of Abinadi, it provides an interesting parallel to the method of Abinadi’s execution (*FARMS Insights*, volume 21, 2001, 3).

Royal Skousen has suggested that the word *scourged* in this verse probably represents a scribal error, and should rather have read *scorched* (*FARMS Update*, number 154, volume 22, 2002). The word *scourged* is found in the printer’s manuscript, but unfortunately the original manuscript is not extant for this passage. Elsewhere in the Book of Mormon, Abinadi is consistently referred to as having been burned to death (Mosiah 17:18, 20; Alma 25:9, 11). The reader should note that the following verse refers to the flames scorching Abinadi (for other uses of the word *scorch*, see Alma 15:3; 32:38). This scribal error might have occurred during the dictation of the text, or perhaps in creating the printer’s manuscript from the original. Dr. Skousen concludes: This “reasonable emendation permits the text to read consistently and plausibly—and without [having to hunt] for evidence that people can be scourged to death with faggots” (*Ibid.*)

14 And now when the flames began to scorch him, he cried unto them, saying:
15 Behold, even as ye have done unto me, so shall it come to pass that thy seed shall cause that many shall suffer the pains that I do suffer, even the pains of death by fire; and this because they believe in the salvation of the Lord their God.
16 And it will come to pass that ye shall be afflicted with all manner of diseases because of your iniquities.
17 Yea, and ye shall be smitten on every hand, and shall be driven and scattered to and fro, even as a wild flock is driven by wild and ferocious beasts.

18 And in that day ye shall be hunted, and ye shall be taken by the hand of your enemies, and then ye shall suffer, as I suffer, the pains of death by fire.

verses 15-18 Even as Abinadi was suffering death by fire, he prophesied: (1) that the descendants of his tormentors will yet execute others by fire for their beliefs. This occurrence is documented in Alma 25:5 when the seed or descendants of Noah's priests exercised unrighteous dominion over a group of Lamanites and burned some of them because of their beliefs. (2) Abinadi also prophesied that Noah and his priests would be afflicted with diseases, smitten, driven, scattered, hunted, and suffer death by fire. Noah himself will eventually be executed by fire at the hands of his own people (Mosiah 19:20). Many of the priests of Noah will be hunted and put to death by Nephites (Alma 25:3-4) and by the Lamanites (Alma 25:7-12).

19 Thus God executeth vengeance upon those that destroy his people. O God, receive my soul.

20 And now, when Abinadi had said these words, he fell, having suffered death by fire; yea, having been put to death because he would not deny the commandments of God, having sealed the truth of his words by his death.

verse 20 “having sealed the truth of his words by his death” Abinadi's death would serve as a witness or testimony against those who did not accept his teachings. Also it is likely that Abinadi's martyrdom planted or “sealed,” in the hearts of those who heard him, an abiding suspicion or fear that Abinadi was in fact speaking the truth.

Mosiah Chapter 18

Scripture Mastery

Mosiah 18:8-10 The senior Alma's exhortation to his people at the waters of Mormon: As ye are desirous to come into the fold of God, and to be called his people, and are willing to bear one another's burdens, that they may be light; Yea, and are willing to mourn with those that mourn; yea, and comfort those that stand in need of comfort, and to stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all things, and in all places that ye may be in, even until death, that ye may be redeemed of God, and be numbered with those of the first resurrection, that ye may have eternal life. If this be the desire of your hearts, what have you against being baptized?

The author or first person now becomes the prophet Mormon. Alma is referred to in the third person.

1 And now, it came to pass that Alma, who had fled from the servants of king Noah, repented of his sins and iniquities, and went about privately among the people, and began to teach the words of Abinadi—

verse 1 It seems likely, living as one of Noah's priests, that Alma had much of which to repent (see Mosiah 23:9). His story is certainly one of true and complete repentance.

2 Yea, concerning that which was to come, and also concerning the resurrection of the dead, and the redemption of the people, which was to be brought to pass through the power, and sufferings, and death of Christ, and his resurrection and ascension into heaven.

verse 2 "concerning that which was to come" Undoubtedly this phrase includes the essential doctrine—the mortal advent and atonement of Jesus Christ.

3 And as many as would hear his word he did teach. And he taught them privately, that it might not come to the knowledge of the king. And many did believe his words.

4 And it came to pass that as many as did believe him did go forth to a place which was called Mormon, having received its name from the king, being in the borders of the land having been infested, by times or at seasons, by wild beasts.

verse 4 This verse suggests that the place called Mormon was named after a previous Nephite king named Mormon of which we have no account. We will later learn that the prophet/compiler of the Book of Mormon—the prophet Mormon himself—was named after this land to which Alma has now fled (3 Nephi 5:12).

“being in the borders of the land” This phrase suggests that the land of Mormon was just outside the borders of the smaller land of Nephi. We gain the impression that it was quite near the city of Nephi—perhaps not more than a two or three day journey.

In 1 Nephi, we interpreted the word “borders” as mountains, though there seems little reason for that interpretation here.

“by times or at seasons” The use of this phrase in this verse is unique in all the scriptures. It seems to mean from time to time at certain seasons of the year.

5 Now, there was in Mormon a fountain of pure water, and Alma resorted thither, there being near the water a thicket of small trees, where he did hide himself in the daytime from the searches of the king.

verse 5 “a fountain of pure water” A *fountain* is most commonly interpreted as a spring or source of water from the earth. It may also include a reservoir or lake wherein the water collects.

6 And it came to pass that as many as believed him went thither to hear his words.

7 And it came to pass after many days there were a goodly number gathered together at the place of Mormon, to hear the words of Alma. Yea, all were gathered together that believed on his word, to hear him. And he did teach them, and did preach unto them repentance, and redemption, and faith on the Lord.

verse 7 “after many days there were a goodly number gathered” We will learn in verse 16 that there were just over two hundred people gathered there.

verse 8-10 These verses contain five promises a person desiring to enter the kingdom of God must make and four promises which the Lord makes in turn to those who endure righteously in his kingdom. This two-way promise or covenant is the “baptismal covenant.”

The promises made by the individual are that they are willing (they promise) to:

1. enter the fold of God,
2. be called by his name,
3. bear the burdens of their fellow sojourners, including their willingness to “mourn with those that mourn,” and
4. stand as witness of God (Jesus Christ) at all times and in all places.
5. serve him and keep his commandments (2 Nephi 31:6-17; Moroni 6:2-4; D&C 20:37).

In turn the Lord promises that those baptized will:

1. be redeemed,
2. be numbered with those of the first resurrection, and

3. have eternal life.
4. pour out his Spirit more abundantly upon you

8 And it came to pass that he said unto them: Behold, here are the waters of Mormon (for thus were they called) and now, as ye are desirous to come into the fold of God, and to be called his people, and are willing to bear one another's burdens, that they may be light;

9 Yea, and are willing to mourn with those that mourn; yea, and comfort those that stand in need of comfort, and to stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all things, and in all places that ye may be in, even until death, that ye may be redeemed of God, and be numbered with those of the first resurrection, that ye may have eternal life—

verse 9 “stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all things, and in all places” Alma's counsel is a reminder to all of us of the importance of being willing to bear witness of Jesus Christ at any time and in any place. The recounting of one's witness clearly strengthens the faith of the testifier as well as the faith of those who receive his testimony.

“be numbered with those of the first resurrection” Review the commentary for Mosiah 16:11. In the Book of Mormon, the phrase “first resurrection” refers to those who are resurrected to inherit the celestial glory or eternal life.

10 Now I say unto you, if this be the desire of your hearts, what have you against being baptized in the name of the Lord, as a witness before him that ye have entered into a covenant with him, that ye will serve him and keep his commandments, that he may pour out his Spirit more abundantly upon you?

verse 10 The ordinance of baptism is the witness before God that a person has entered into the baptismal covenant.

Alma is given credit for being the founder of a truly covenant church. Here he organizes not a loose association of interested people but rather a committed congregation bound to one another and to their God in a covenant relationship. See a discussion of the three periods of an organized Church of Jesus Christ in the Book of Mormon in the commentary for 2 Nephi 6:2.

11 And now when the people had heard these words, they clapped their hands for joy, and exclaimed: This is the desire of our hearts.

verse 11 Dr. Joseph L. Allen related a charming anecdote pertinent to this verse: “On one of our tours, my wife and I were walking through the market place in Chichicastenango, Guatemala. Our group was shopping when a native Quiche woman came up to us and said, ‘May I be your guide to take you through the church?’ The church is the place where the native document, the Popol Vuh, was discovered, so we

were eager to take the tour. On the tour, our guide not only explained about things in the church but also took us through the little museum. We joked a little with her, and she got so excited that several times she said something and then laughed and laughed. I asked my wife, 'Do you see what she's doing? Do you remember reading in Mosiah, when Alma baptized at the waters of Mormon, that all of the people clapped their hands for joy? Look at what she's doing every time she laughs.' We smiled and agreed. 'That's right. She swings her hands together so they meet about eye level. She then gives a little jump and laughs.' I then recalled that I had seen this behavior hundreds of times in Mesoamerica. Dona Sofia at the black pottery shop in Woxaca does the very same thing. We concluded, 'I guess that makes more sense than applauding like we do or giving high fives like the athletes do'" (*Exploring the Lands of the Book of Mormon*, 173-74).

12 And now it came to pass that Alma took Helam, he being one of the first, and went and stood forth in the water, and cried, saying: O Lord, pour out thy Spirit upon thy servant, that he may do this work with holiness of heart.

13 And when he had said these words, the Spirit of the Lord was upon him, and he said: Helam, I baptize thee, having authority from the Almighty God, as a testimony that ye have entered into a covenant to serve him until you are dead as to the mortal body; and may the Spirit of the Lord be poured out upon you; and may he grant unto you eternal life, through the redemption of Christ, whom he has prepared from the foundation of the world.

verse 13 This verse is either a baptismal prayer or a bit of counsel from Alma to Helam.

“having authority from the Almighty God” We have discussed previously the possible origin of Alma’s priesthood (see the commentary for Mosiah 11:5). We know that he did have the priesthood from this verse and from verse 18 of this chapter. It is not clearly stated in the Book of Mormon whether or not Zeniff or any of his priests were properly ordained to the Melchizedek priesthood. We would presume that the priesthood authority did reside with Zeniff and his priests. It seems unlikely the prophet Abinadi had an opportunity to ordain Alma before Abinadi’s martyrdom. Thus, it is likely that Alma and the other priests of King Noah did trace their authority back to Zeniff’s court.

“ye have entered into covenant to serve him until you are dead as to the mortal body” This phrase refers to this mortal probationary period.

“may the Spirit of the Lord be poured out upon you” The ordinance of baptism carries with it a promise of the gift of the Holy Ghost.

Baptism has been mentioned previously in the Book of Mormon text and has been acknowledged to be an essential step for salvation (2 Nephi 31:9, 17-18). However, the context in which this ordinance is regarded in verses 13 through 17 is

unique. This is the first time that baptism is represented as a necessary initiatory rite for entrance into the church.

14 And after Alma had said these words, both Alma and Helam were buried in the water; and they arose and came forth out of the water rejoicing, being filled with the Spirit.

verse 14 “both Alma and Helam were buried in the water” This is a remarkable and unusual event. It is without precedent in all scripture. Was Alma baptizing both himself and Helam here? Joseph Fielding Smith taught that he was not (*Answers to Gospel Questions*, 3:203-4). Alma already held the priesthood, and it is therefore presumed that he had been previously baptized.

Perhaps his going down into the water with Helam was merely a token of his humility and full repentance and his desire to share in the first baptism in this new church. Perhaps he wished to recommit himself to God and to set the example for all who were to follow. Again, the Holy Spirit manifests himself following the ordinance of baptism.

We also learn that the proper method of baptism is to be “buried in the water” (Romans 6:3-6).

15 And again, Alma took another, and went forth a second time into the water, and baptized him according to the first, only he did not bury himself again in the water.

16 And after this manner he did baptize every one that went forth to the place of Mormon; and they were in number about two hundred and four souls; yea, and they were baptized in the waters of Mormon, and were filled with the grace of God.

verse 16 “they were baptized in the waters of Mormon, and were filled with the grace of God” The phrase “grace of God” here simply means the love of God and his willingness to extend to mankind blessings that are not fully merited. The word *grace* is virtually always associated with the blessings of God received by virtue of his atonement. Yet Christ would not atone for the sins of mankind for another 170-180 years. Here is another manifestation of the infinite nature of Christ’s atonement. Two of the obvious blessings received at the time of baptism are the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Ghost. Both of these blessings can only be received by virtue of the Lord’s atoning sacrifice.

17 And they were called the church of God, or the church of Christ, from that time forward. And it came to pass that whosoever was baptized by the power and authority of God was added to his church.

verse 17 “And they were called the church of God, or the church of Christ”

Actually Alma is organizing here the second Nephite church. He is restoring the Church of Christ to the land. The first Nephite church was brought to the New World by Lehi and his traveling company. The apostasy occurred in the land of Nephi just prior to the time of the first Mosiah. This apostasy made necessary Mosiah's departure out of the land in about 210 BC. This was apparently an incomplete apostasy since the priesthood authority did remain among the people. The prophet Mormon will later refer to Alma's church as “the first church which was established among them after their transgression” (3 Nephi 5:12). Mosiah needed to find a new land, Zarahemla, where the church may one day again be established and be able to flourish. The instrument through which the church was restored was Alma (Mosiah 23:16; 29:47; Alma 5:3), and ironically that restoration occurred in the very land of Nephi where the apostasy had occurred decades previously. The date of this restoration is about 145 BC. Though the church certainly existed at the time of Lehi and Nephi and Jacob, the first specific reference in the Book of Mormon to a church as an organized body of believers is here in connection with these events in the land of Nephi. There is no specific mention of the church's actually existing in the New World in the small plates of Nephi.

We will learn that after the arrival of Alma back in the land of Zarahemla in 121 BC, King Mosiah, the son of King Benjamin and grandson of the older Mosiah, will grant Alma permission to set up branches of the church throughout the land of Zarahemla (Mosiah 25:19-22). References to the church are actually quite common in and after the book of Mosiah.

The conversion of Alma's people and the later conversion of king Benjamin's people in 124 BC were the two great enabling events that prepared the way for the establishment of the church among the Nephites ruled by King Mosiah.

18 And it came to pass that Alma, having authority from God, ordained priests; even one priest to every fifty of their number did he ordain to preach unto them, and to teach them concerning the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.

verse 18 “Alma, having authority from God” See the commentary for Mosiah 11:5 for a discussion of the possible origin of Alma's priesthood.

“Alma . . . ordained priests; even one priest to every fifty” We will later learn that there were also “teachers” ordained among them (Mosiah 25:21-22). We should not suppose that these “priests” or “teachers” correspond to the office of priest or teacher in the Aaronic priesthood. There is no evidence the Aaronic or Levitical priesthood existed among the Book of Mormon peoples. These priests may have assisted in the rituals of the law of Moses, but the text suggests they were mainly involved in teaching the people.

19 And he commanded them that they should teach nothing save it were the things which he had taught, and which had been spoken by the mouth of the holy prophets.

20 Yea, even he commanded them that they should preach nothing save it were repentance and faith on the Lord, who had redeemed his people.

verse 20 “he commanded them that they should preach nothing save it were repentance and faith on the Lord” We might use this scripture to justify a failure to study the scripture and gospel principles and doctrines. “After all,” we might rationalize, “if we understand repentance and faith, then that should suffice.” Certainly this was not Alma’s intent. To “preach repentance” is to teach of Jesus Christ, the fall, the atonement, resurrection, obedience to the ordinances and principles of the gospel, repentance, and the possibility of exaltation. Indeed it is to teach all the principles of the gospel.

21 And he commanded them that there should be no contention one with another, but that they should look forward with one eye, having one faith and one baptism, having their hearts knit together in unity and in love one towards another.

verse 21 Unity was to be their watchword. “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” (John 13:35). This verse also contains the idea that there is only one faith, one Lord, one baptism, one true church (Ephesians 4:5-6).

22 And thus he commanded them to preach. And thus they became the children of God.

verse 22 “they became the children of [Christ]” We are all, of course, children of God the Father. Through the fall, however, we have all become in a sense alienated from him. By accepting Christ and his atonement, and through repentance and righteous living, we are restored to full membership in the family of the Father and the Son. Our membership in the family of Jesus Christ applies to our mortal sojourn and beyond.

23 And he commanded them that they should observe the sabbath day, and keep it holy, and also every day they should give thanks to the Lord their God.

verse 23 “every day they should give thanks to the Lord their God” Here is a reminder that one day in church does not compensate for six days of spiritual carelessness.

24 And he also commanded them that the priests whom he had ordained should labor with their own hands for their support.

25 And there was one day in every week that was set apart that they should gather themselves together to teach the people, and to worship the Lord their God, and also, as often as it was in their power, to assemble themselves together.

26 And the priests were not to depend upon the people for their support; but for their labor they were to receive the grace of God, that they might wax strong in the Spirit, having the knowledge of God, that they might teach with power and authority from God.

verse 26 “for their labor they were to receive the grace of God” See the commentary for verse 16 above. The blessings promised to the priests for their labors would have included closer association with the Spirit, greater knowledge of spiritual truths (D&C 121:42), and the ability to speak and teach with authority.

verses 27-29 It is apparent that Alma sought to establish among his people a Zion society in which the people would live the law of consecration and stewardship.

We have previously studied Benjamin’s counsel to the effect that we cannot be free of sin lest we voluntarily impart of our substance as we are able for the care of those less fortunate (Mosiah 4:26). For those of us who might be inclined to hoard our excesses, these verses contain another reminder that this principle is not going to go away.

27 And again Alma commanded that the people of the church should impart of their substance, every one according to that which he had; if he have more abundantly he should impart more abundantly; and of him that had but little, but little should be required; and to him that had not should be given.

28 And thus they should impart of their substance of their own free will and good desires towards God, and to those priests that stood in need, yea, and to every needy, naked soul.

29 And this he said unto them, having been commanded of God; and they did walk uprightly before God, imparting to one another both temporally and spiritually according to their needs and their wants.

verse 29 “according to their needs and their wants” The proper relationship between needs and wants has been clarified in this dispensation when the Lord taught, in referring to the claim each person has upon the goods in the bishop’s storehouse: “You are to have equal claims on the properties . . . every man according to his wants and his needs, inasmuch as his *wants* are just” (D&C 82:17, italics added).

30 And now it came to pass that all this was done in Mormon, yea, by the waters of Mormon, in the forest that was near the waters of Mormon; yea, the place of Mormon, the waters of Mormon, the forest of Mormon, how beautiful are they to

the eyes of them who there came to the knowledge of their Redeemer; yea, and how blessed are they, for they shall sing to his praise forever.

verse 30 The first “they” in this verse has, as its antecedent, the waters and forest of Mormon. The other two “they’s” seem to refer to those converted and baptized at the place called Mormon.

31 And these things were done in the borders of the land, that they might not come to the knowledge of the king.

verse 31 The phrase “in the borders of the land” may mean “in the outskirts of the land,” or perhaps in the mountains of the land. In either case, it implies that Alma wanted to be far enough away from Noah, and sufficiently inaccessible, so that Noah would not discover Alma’s doings.

32 But behold, it came to pass that the king, having discovered a movement among the people, sent his servants to watch them. Therefore on the day that they were assembling themselves together to hear the word of the Lord they were discovered unto the king.

verse 32 “they were discovered unto the king” The use of the word *discovered* here is an archaic one and means their presence was made known to or revealed to the king.

33 And now the king said that Alma was stirring up the people to rebellion against him; therefore he sent his army to destroy them.

34 And it came to pass that Alma and the people of the Lord were apprised of the coming of the king’s army; therefore they took their tents and their families and departed into the wilderness.

verse 34 The duration of Alma’s sojourn in the place called Mormon is not known. A few weeks to several months seems reasonable.

35 And they were in number about four hundred and fifty souls.

verse 35 Obviously, as Alma sojourned in Mormon, people continued to gather with the saints (see verse 16).

Mosiah Chapter 19

1 And it came to pass that the army of the king returned, having searched in vain for the people of the Lord.

2 And now behold, the forces of the king were small, having been reduced, and there began to be a division among the remainder of the people.

verse 2 “the forces of the king were small, having been reduced” What factors caused a reduction in the number of soldiers in the army of the king? Obviously, some had been converted by Alma and had joined him in the place called Mormon. Others may have been caught up in the “division among the remainder of the people,” joined with the minority opposition, and deserted the army.

It is possible that an increasing awareness of the king’s profligate and cruel ways among the people, perhaps partly precipitated by Abinadi’s preachings and Noah’s treatment of Abinadi, resulted in the growing opposition to king Noah among his people.

3 And the lesser part began to breathe out threatenings against the king, and there began to be a great contention among them.

4 And now there was a man among them whose name was Gideon, and he being a strong man and an enemy to the king, therefore he drew his sword, and swore in his wrath that he would slay the king.

5 And it came to pass that he fought with the king; and when the king saw that he was about to overpower him, he fled and ran and got upon the tower which was near the temple.

6 And Gideon pursued after him and was about to get upon the tower to slay the king, and the king cast his eyes round about towards the land of Shemlon, and behold, the army of the Lamanites were within the borders of the land.

verse 6 It is difficult, of course, to know the exact geography of the greater land of Nephi from the sketchy account we have in the Book of Mormon text. At this period of time there are three important lesser lands in the area. These are the lands of Nephi (or Lehi-Nephi), Shilom, and Shemlon. How are these lands oriented with respect to one another? It is not possible to know for certain. One can only create a plausible model that fits the text. We do know that the Nephites were allowed by the Lamanites to occupy the lands of Lehi-Nephi and Shilom (Mosiah 9:6). It would seem likely that these lands bordered upon one another. The Lamanites occupied the nearby land of Shemlon. It is also likely that this land borders one or both of the Nephite lands. Your author favors a model which locates the land of Shilom to the immediate south and sharing a common border with the land of Lehi-Nephi. Shemlon would be located to the south and perhaps to the west of both lands and perhaps sharing a common border with both Shilom and Lehi-Nephi (see the *Hypothetical Map of Book of Mormon Lands*).

7 And now the king cried out in the anguish of his soul, saying: Gideon, spare me, for the Lamanites are upon us, and they will destroy us; yea, they will destroy my people.

8 And now the king was not so much concerned about his people as he was about his own life; nevertheless, Gideon did spare his life.

9 And the king commanded the people that they should flee before the Lamanites, and he himself did go before them, and they did flee into the wilderness, with their women and their children.

verse 9 Contrast Noah's handling of this Lamanite advance with that of King Benjamin who, in similar circumstances, "gathered together his armies, and he did stand against them; and he did fight with the strength of his own arm, with the sword of Laban" (Words of Mormon 1:13).

10 And it came to pass that the Lamanites did pursue them, and did overtake them, and began to slay them.

11 Now it came to pass that the king commanded them that all the men should leave their wives and their children, and flee before the Lamanites.

verse 11 It seems likely that Noah issued this appalling and ignoble order in his own self interest. In his headlong rush to escape, he abandoned his own wife and family and then sought to legitimize his cowardliness by issuing an official mandate.

12 Now there were many that would not leave them, but had rather stay and perish with them. And the rest left their wives and their children and fled.

13 And it came to pass that those who tarried with their wives and their children caused that their fair daughters should stand forth and plead with the Lamanites that they would not slay them.

14 And it came to pass that the Lamanites had compassion on them, for they were charmed with the beauty of their women.

15 Therefore the Lamanites did spare their lives, and took them captives and carried them back to the land of Nephi, and granted unto them that they might possess the land, under the conditions that they would deliver up king Noah into the hands of the Lamanites, and deliver up their property, even one half of all they possessed, one half of their gold, and their silver, and all their precious things, and thus they should pay tribute to the king of the Lamanites from year to year.

verse 15 Here Limhi, a son of king Noah (see verses 16-17, 26) and his people were brought into bondage as Abinadi had previously prophesied (Mosiah 11:20-21; 12:2). Every other segment of Nephites who lived in the land of Nephi when Abinadi made his prophesy also spent some time living in bondage. These included the people of Alma (Mosiah 23:25-24:15) and the descendants of Amulon (Alma 25:1-12). Amulon

was one of the priests of Noah who became the leader of that wicked renegade group (Mosiah 23:32).

“they should pay tribute to the king of the Lamanites from year to year” It is helpful to have in mind a concept of time in connection with these events. It is felt that Alma and his converts left the land of Nephi for the land of Mormon in about 147 BC. They probably departed the land of Mormon for the land of Helam in about 146 or 145 BC. They remained in the land of Helam until they returned to Zarahemla in 121 BC. Noah and his people were chased out of the city of Nephi and then placed in bondage in about 145 BC. The Nephites would live in bondage with Limhi as their king until they were rescued by Ammon in 121 BC. They were led back to Zarahemla the same year that Alma and people arrived there. Apparently Limhi and his people arrived in Zarahemla a few weeks or months before the people of Alma.

16 And now there was one of the sons of the king among those that were taken captive, whose name was Limhi.

17 And now Limhi was desirous that his father should not be destroyed; nevertheless, Limhi was not ignorant of the iniquities of his father, he himself being a just man.

18 And it came to pass that Gideon sent men into the wilderness secretly, to search for the king and those that were with him. And it came to pass that they met the people in the wilderness, all save the king and his priests.

verse 18 Gideon sent his men into the wilderness but did not accompany them.

19 Now they had sworn in their hearts that they would return to the land of Nephi, and if their wives and their children were slain, and also those that had tarried with them, that they would seek revenge, and also perish with them.

20 And the king commanded them that they should not return; and they were angry with the king, and caused that he should suffer, even unto death by fire.

verse 20 Abinadi had warned King Noah that his life should be “valued even as a garment in a hot furnace” (Mosiah 12:3).

21 And they were about to take the priests also and put them to death, and they fled before them.

22 And it came to pass that they were about to return to the land of Nephi, and they met the men of Gideon. And the men of Gideon told them of all that had happened to their wives and their children; and that the Lamanites had granted unto them that they might possess the land by paying a tribute to the Lamanites of one half of all they possessed.

23 And the people told the men of Gideon that they had slain the king, and his priests had fled from them farther into the wilderness.

24 And it came to pass that after they had ended the ceremony, that they returned to the land of Nephi, rejoicing, because their wives and their children were not slain; and they told Gideon what they had done to the king.

verse 24 “after they had ended the ceremony” This is the only use of the word *ceremony* in the Book of Mormon text. It seems to imply that the meeting between the men of Gideon and the exiled Nephites was friendly and polite and perhaps formal.

25 And it came to pass that the king of the Lamanites made an oath unto them, that his people should not slay them.

verse 25 Obviously Gideon or Limhi relayed the account of the fate of Noah to the Lamanite king who was satisfied that Noah was dead (verse 15).

26 And also Limhi, being the son of the king, having the kingdom conferred upon him by the people, made oath unto the king of the Lamanites that his people should pay tribute unto him, even one half of all they possessed.

27 And it came to pass that Limhi began to establish the kingdom and to establish peace among his people.

28 And the king of the Lamanites set guards round about the land, that he might keep the people of Limhi in the land, that they might not depart into the wilderness; and he did support his guards out of the tribute which he did receive from the Nephites.

29 And now king Limhi did have continual peace in his kingdom for the space of two years, that the Lamanites did not molest them nor seek to destroy them.

Mosiah Chapter 20

1 Now there was a place in Shemlon where the daughters of the Lamanites did gather themselves together to sing, and to dance, and to make themselves merry.

verse 1 It is interesting to learn that in ancient Israel there was a widely celebrated holiday or festival which occurred for several centuries. It occurred on the 15th day of the fifth month, called Av. It was a matrimonial holiday during which the maidens of Israel gathered to dance. Their purpose was to attract prospective husbands. In turn, the young men attended this event to watch the dancing and hunt for a suitable bride. Noah's priests may well have known of the time and place of this event in advance. Perhaps this explains the fact that the young Lamanite women were not terribly unwilling to become the priests' wives. There is no indication that any of them tried to escape. And after all, they would have been dancing to attract husbands. All of them later pled with their brothers and fathers not to kill their husbands (Mosiah 23:33) (Based on research by John W. Welch, Robert F. Smith, and Gordon C. Thomasson. "Dancing Maidens and the Fifteenth of Av" in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, 139-41).

2 And it came to pass that there was one day a small number of them gathered together to sing and to dance.

3 And now the priests of king Noah, being ashamed to return to the city of Nephi, yea, and also fearing that the people would slay them, therefore they durst not return to their wives and their children.

4 And having tarried in the wilderness, and having discovered the daughters of the Lamanites, they laid and watched them;

5 And when there were but few of them gathered together to dance, they came forth out of their secret places and took them and carried them into the wilderness; yea, twenty and four of the daughters of the Lamanites they carried into the wilderness.

verse 5 How many priests of Noah had he maintained in his court? Although the number is never given, some have regarded this verse as evidence that there had been twenty-five counting, of course, Alma.

It has been pointed out by critics of the Book of Mormon that this story of the kidnapping of young Lamanite women is similar to a story in the Bible in which men of the tribe of Benjamin kidnapped daughters of Israel at Shiloh (Judges 21:19-21). Following a civil war among the Israelites, most of the tribe of Benjamin was destroyed. It was recognized by other Israelites that this tribe was in danger of extinction. In order to preserve and rejuvenate the tribe, wives were needed by the Benjaminites. The other tribes, however, had vowed not to allow their daughters to marry the Benjaminites. To get around this vow, a plan was devised. The Benjaminites were instructed to

kidnap some young Israelite women who lived at Shiloh while these young women danced in the vineyards. As these young women danced, the Benjaminites lay hidden. They then emerged from hiding, and each caught a wife and retreated to the land of Benjamin. While some may see this story of the kidnapper Amulonites as one which Joseph Smith plagiarized as he wrote the Book of Mormon, one LDS scholar sees it as a purposeful and effective re-emphasis of the lessons taught in the biblical story (Alan Goff, "The Stealing of the Daughters of the Lamanites" in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, 67-74). The author of this story in Mosiah 20:1-5 probably did know of the similar story in Judges to which he had access from the brass plates. He likely included this story of the Amulonites as a parallel account intended to emphasize the important negative lessons which we may learn from these former priests of Noah.

6 And it came to pass that when the Lamanites found that their daughters had been missing, they were angry with the people of Limhi, for they thought it was the people of Limhi.

7 Therefore they sent their armies forth; yea, even the king himself went before his people; and they went up to the land of Nephi to destroy the people of Limhi.

8 And now Limhi had discovered them from the tower, even all their preparations for war did he discover; therefore he gathered his people together, and laid wait for them in the fields and in the forests.

9 And it came to pass that when the Lamanites had come up, that the people of Limhi began to fall upon them from their waiting places, and began to slay them.

10 And it came to pass that the battle became exceedingly sore, for they fought like lions for their prey.

11 And it came to pass that the people of Limhi began to drive the Lamanites before them; yet they were not half so numerous as the Lamanites. But they fought for their lives, and for their wives, and for their children; therefore they exerted themselves and like dragons did they fight.

verse 11 The simile of "fighting like dragons" is unique to the Book of Mormon. It is found also in Alma 43:44.

12 And it came to pass that they found the king of the Lamanites among the number of their dead; yet he was not dead, having been wounded and left upon the ground, so speedy was the flight of his people.

13 And they took him and bound up his wounds, and brought him before Limhi, and said: Behold, here is the king of the Lamanites; he having received a wound has fallen among their dead, and they have left him; and behold, we have brought him before you; and now let us slay him.

14 But Limhi said unto them: Ye shall not slay him, but bring him hither that I may see him. And they brought him. And Limhi said unto him: What cause have

ye to come up to war against my people? Behold, my people have not broken the oath that I made unto you; therefore, why should ye break the oath which ye made unto my people?

verse 14 We have discussed previously the sacred and binding nature of oaths in this ancient culture even when made by the wicked. Apart from the one in this verse, there are no other instances of broken oaths in the Book of Mormon. We will read in the next verse the Lamanite king's justification for breaking his oath in this instance.

15 And now the king said: I have broken the oath because thy people did carry away the daughters of my people; therefore, in my anger I did cause my people to come up to war against thy people.

16 And now Limhi had heard nothing concerning this matter; therefore he said: I will search among my people and whosoever has done this thing shall perish. Therefore he caused a search to be made among his people.

17 Now when Gideon had heard these things, he being the king's captain, he went forth and said unto the king: I pray thee forbear, and do not search this people, and lay not this thing to their charge.

verse 17 To "forbear" means to stop what you are doing. This is not to be confused with a "forebear" which is an ancestor.

18 For do ye not remember the priests of thy father, whom this people sought to destroy? And are they not in the wilderness? And are not they the ones who have stolen the daughters of the Lamanites?

19 And now, behold, and tell the king of these things, that he may tell his people that they may be pacified towards us; for behold they are already preparing to come against us; and behold also there are but few of us.

verse 19 Gideon urgently counsels King Limhi to explain the situation immediately to the Lamanite king—including informing him of the situation of the priests of Noah. Gideon's military intelligence had informed Gideon that the Lamanites had already regrouped and were approaching again the city of Nephi to do battle.

20 And behold, they come with their numerous hosts; and except the king doth pacify them towards us we must perish.

21 For are not the words of Abinadi fulfilled, which he prophesied against us—and all this because we would not hearken unto the words of the Lord, and turn from our iniquities?

verse 21 "are not the words of Abinadi fulfilled, which he prophesied against us" It is helpful for the reader to pause here and reread Mosiah 12:1-7 wherein Abinadi prophesies what fate will befall the people of King Noah because of their iniquities.

22 And now let us pacify the king, and we fulfil the oath which we have made unto him; for it is better that we should be in bondage than that we should lose our lives; therefore, let us put a stop to the shedding of so much blood.

23 And now Limhi told the king all the things concerning his father, and the priests that had fled into the wilderness, and attributed the carrying away of their daughters to them.

24 And it came to pass that the king was pacified towards his people; and he said unto them: Let us go forth to meet my people, without arms; and I swear unto you with an oath that my people shall not slay thy people.

verse 24 “the king was pacified towards his people” The Lamanite king was satisfied with Limhi’s explanation of the likely culprits in the kidnapping of the Lamanite girls, and he was therefore “pacified towards his [Limhi’s] people.” The Lamanite king then proposed that he, Limhi, Gideon, and perhaps a few others who were present disarm themselves and go forth together to meet the attacking Lamanites. The Nephites must have been comforted by the Lamanite king’s swearing an oath that no harm would come to them.

25 And it came to pass that they followed the king, and went forth without arms to meet the Lamanites. And it came to pass that they did meet the Lamanites; and the king of the Lamanites did bow himself down before them, and did plead in behalf of the people of Limhi.

verse 25 The Lamanite king bowed down before his own people and plead for them to spare the people of Limhi.

26 And when the Lamanites saw the people of Limhi, that they were without arms, they had compassion on them and were pacified towards them, and returned with their king in peace to their own land.

Mosiah Chapter 21

Scripture Mastery

Mosiah 21:25-28 King Limhi had sent, previous to the coming of Ammon, a small number of men to search for the land of Zarahemla; but they could not find it .

1 And it came to pass that Limhi and his people returned to the city of Nephi, and began to dwell in the land again in peace.

2 And it came to pass that after many days the Lamanites began again to be stirred up in anger against the Nephites, and they began to come into the borders of the land round about.

3 Now they durst not slay them, because of the oath which their king had made unto Limhi; but they would smite them on their cheeks, and exercise authority over them; and began to put heavy burdens upon their backs, and drive them as they would a dumb ass—

4 Yea, all this was done that the word of the Lord might be fulfilled.

verse 4 If you still have not reread the persecutions of the Nephites by the Lamanites that were prophesied by Abinadi in Mosiah 12:1-7, then please do so now.

5 And now the afflictions of the Nephites were great, and there was no way that they could deliver themselves out of their hands, for the Lamanites had surrounded them on every side.

verse 5 “the Lamanites had surrounded them on every side” It seems likely that the Nephites were now largely confined to the city of Nephi and perhaps the area immediately around the city. The Lamanites seemed to occupy much of the surrounding land of Nephi.

6 And it came to pass that the people began to murmur with the king because of their afflictions; and they began to be desirous to go against them to battle. And they did afflict the king sorely with their complaints; therefore he granted unto them that they should do according to their desires.

7 And they gathered themselves together again, and put on their armor, and went forth against the Lamanites to drive them out of their land.

verse 7 The subject of armor in the Book of Mormon is an interesting one. The Book of Mormon uses eight terms for armor: breast-plates, shields, armor, head-plates, arm-shields, animal skins, thick clothing, and bucklers (a type of shield). The standard system of armor described in the Book of Mormon consists of a basic cloak or vest of thick fabric or animal skin, a breastplate, a headplate, and a shield, which broadly corresponds with artistic and archaeological evidence of pre-Columbian armor from

Mesoamerica. Book of Mormon armor also differs from the biblical descriptions of armor. Although coats of mail or scale (small overlapping pieces of metal sewn onto a leather jacket), greaves (leg armor), and helmets are conspicuous in biblical accounts of warfare (1 Samuel 17:5-6), they are absent from the Book of Mormon. Likewise, scale or mail armor and greaves are not found in early classic artistic and archaeological records in the New World (Hamblin, William J. "Armor in the Book of Mormon." *Warfare in the Book of Mormon*. Edited by Stephen D. Ricks and William J. Hamblin. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1990).

8 And it came to pass that the Lamanites did beat them, and drove them back, and slew many of them.

9 And now there was a great mourning and lamentation among the people of Limhi, the widow mourning for her husband, the son and the daughter mourning for their father, and the brothers for their brethren.

10 Now there were a great many widows in the land, and they did cry mightily from day to day, for a great fear of the Lamanites had come upon them.

11 And it came to pass that their continual cries did stir up the remainder of the people of Limhi to anger against the Lamanites; and they went again to battle, but they were driven back again, suffering much loss.

12 Yea, they went again even the third time, and suffered in the like manner; and those that were not slain returned again to the city of Nephi.

13 And they did humble themselves even to the dust, subjecting themselves to the yoke of bondage, submitting themselves to be smitten, and to be driven to and fro, and burdened, according to the desires of their enemies.

14 And they did humble themselves even in the depths of humility; and they did cry mightily to God; yea, even all the day long did they cry unto their God that he would deliver them out of their afflictions.

15 And now the Lord was slow to hear their cry because of their iniquities; nevertheless the Lord did hear their cries, and began to soften the hearts of the Lamanites that they began to ease their burdens; yet the Lord did not see fit to deliver them out of bondage.

16 And it came to pass that they began to prosper by degrees in the land, and began to raise grain more abundantly, and flocks, and herds, that they did not suffer with hunger.

17 Now there was a great number of women, more than there was of men; therefore king Limhi commanded that every man should impart to the support of the widows and their children, that they might not perish with hunger; and this they did because of the greatness of their number that had been slain.

verse 17 It is interesting to see how the Book of Mormon people dealt with the situation of having more women than men (see also verse 10). Historically their

Israelite ancestors had been commanded to practice the principle of polygamy—the taking of more than one wife and concubines—in order to adequately care for these women (Numbers 31:9; Deuteronomy 21:11). However, in the New World the situation was apparently different. The Lord had commanded that these people not practice plural marriage (Jacob 2:27). Rather they were simply to care for the widows' temporal needs, and they established a type of welfare system to accomplish that end.

18 Now the people of Limhi kept together in a body as much as it was possible, and secured their grain and their flocks;

19 And the king himself did not trust his person without the walls of the city, unless he took his guards with him, fearing that he might by some means fall into the hands of the Lamanites.

20 And he caused that his people should watch the land round about, that by some means they might take those priests that fled into the wilderness, who had stolen the daughters of the Lamanites, and that had caused such a great destruction to come upon them.

21 For they were desirous to take them that they might punish them; for they had come into the land of Nephi by night, and carried off their grain and many of their precious things; therefore they laid wait for them.

22 And it came to pass that there was no more disturbance between the Lamanites and the people of Limhi, even until the time that Ammon and his brethren came into the land.

verse 22 We have already studied a more detailed account of the arrival of Ammon and his men and their sojourn among the people of Limhi. It is found in Mosiah chapters 7 and 8. It might be well to review both of those chapters before continuing on.

23 And the king having been without the gates of the city with his guard, discovered Ammon and his brethren; and supposing them to be priests of Noah therefore he caused that they should be taken, and bound, and cast into prison. And had they been the priests of Noah he would have caused that they should be put to death.

24 But when he found that they were not, but that they were his brethren, and had come from the land of Zarahemla, he was filled with exceedingly great joy.

25 Now king Limhi had sent, previous to the coming of Ammon, a small number of men to search for the land of Zarahemla; but they could not find it, and they were lost in the wilderness.

26 Nevertheless, they did find a land which had been peopled; yea, a land which was covered with dry bones; yea, a land which had been peopled and which had been destroyed; and they, having supposed it to be the land of Zarahemla,

returned to the land of Nephi, having arrived in the borders of the land not many days before the coming of Ammon.

27 And they brought a record with them, even a record of the people whose bones they had found; and it was engraven on plates of ore.

verse 25-27 The account in these verses, though briefly told both here and in Mosiah 8:7-11, gives us considerable insight into the size of the Book of Mormon lands. An exploring party of forty-three men (Mosiah 8:7) was sent out by King Limhi and was given the charge of finding the city of Zarahemla. Limhi wanted to ask for help from those in Zarahemla to assist in the escape of him and his people from Lamanite captivity in the land of Nephi. Apparently the route of this exploring party inadvertently bypassed Zarahemla, their intended destination, and took them instead through the “narrow neck of land.” There they believed they had arrived in Zarahemla. However, they were actually in the land Desolation, the final battle ground of the Jaredites. Here they found ruins and a set of twenty-four gold plates left by the final Jaredite prophet, Ether (Ether 15:33). Sorrowfully, the explorers returned to their home in the land of Nephi to report to King Limhi that the remains they found must have been those of Zarahemla destroyed.

28 And now Limhi was again filled with joy on learning from the mouth of Ammon that king Mosiah had a gift from God, whereby he could interpret such engravings; yea, and Ammon also did rejoice.

verse 28 “Mosiah had a gift from God” We have already learned that Mosiah, the son of Benjamin, had not only been designated by God to translate ancient records, but he also possessed the Urim and Thummim or, as they are called in the Book of Mormon, the “interpreters” (see Mosiah 8:13-14 and the commentary for those verses).

One of the more interesting changes between the original Book of Mormon manuscript and our present edition is found in this passage and in Ether 4:1. The original manuscript had “Benjamin” where “Mosiah” now appears. King Benjamin would not likely have still been living at the time of this interaction between Limhi and Ammon. The year of this meeting between the two was 120 BC. Benjamin died three years following his turning the kingship over to his son Mosiah in 124 BC. Thus, Benjamin had probably been dead less than a year. The Prophet Joseph changed the 1837 edition reading of this verse. The change in Ether was made in the 1849 edition.

We can only speculate about who made the original “error” and included Benjamin’s name in this passage. Dr. Sidney B. Sperry asked, “Was it an inadvertent slip of the tongue on the part of Joseph Smith as he dictated his translation to Oliver Cowdery, or did he translate correctly enough an original error on the part of Mormon, the abridger of the Book of Mormon? The latter of these two suggestions is probably the correct one” (*Problems of the Book of Mormon*, 203). Hugh Nibley disagreed and felt the change from “Benjamin” to “Mosiah” was probably not necessary in the first

place. He wrote: “For though it is certain that Mosiah kept the records in question, it is by no means certain that his father, Benjamin, did not also have a share in keeping them. It was Benjamin who displayed the zeal of a life-long book lover in the keeping and studying of records; and after he handed over the throne to his son Mosiah he lived on and may well have spent many days among his beloved records. And among these records could have been the Jaredite plates, which were brought to Zarahemla early in the reign of Mosiah when his father could still have been living (Mosiah 8:9-15)” (*Since Cumorah: The Book of Mormon in the Modern World* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1967], 7).

29 Yet Ammon and his brethren were filled with sorrow because so many of their brethren had been slain;

verse 29 “Their brethren” here does not refer to men in Ammon’s rescue party. Rather it refers to those among the Zeniffite/Nephites who had been killed. Those that came up to the land of Nephi with Ammon to rescue the Zeniffites were obviously a caring and empathetic group.

30 And also that king Noah and his priests had caused the people to commit so many sins and iniquities against God; and they also did mourn for the death of Abinadi; and also for the departure of Alma and the people that went with him, who had formed a church of God through the strength and power of God, and faith on the words which had been spoken by Abinadi.

31 Yea, they did mourn for their departure, for they knew not whither they had fled. Now they would have gladly joined with them, for they themselves had entered into a covenant with God to serve him and keep his commandments.

verse 31 “they did mourn for their departure” Ammon’s group of rescuers sorrowed for Alma and the people that had followed him, assuming that they were lost in the wilderness.

32 And now since the coming of Ammon, king Limhi had also entered into a covenant with God, and also many of his people, to serve him and keep his commandments.

33 And it came to pass that king Limhi and many of his people were desirous to be baptized; but there was none in the land that had authority from God. And Ammon declined doing this thing, considering himself an unworthy servant.

verse 33 “Ammon declined doing this thing, considering himself an unworthy servant” The reasons for Ammon’s considering himself unworthy to baptize are not clear. He likely did hold the priesthood. The text leaves no doubt that proper authority is necessary to perform the ordinances of salvation.

34 Therefore they did not at that time form themselves into a church, waiting upon the Spirit of the Lord. Now they were desirous to become even as Alma and his brethren, who had fled into the wilderness.

35 They were desirous to be baptized as a witness and a testimony that they were willing to serve God with all their hearts; nevertheless they did prolong the time; and an account of their baptism shall be given hereafter.

verse 35 It is apparent that Limhi's people had repented of their previous iniquities and were now fully committed to serve God. Their period of bondage and persecution at the hands of the Lamanites was likely intended by the Lord to teach them dependence upon him. The phrase "they did prolong the time" may be a bit misleading. If Limhi and his people had had their way, it would seem they would certainly would have been baptized there and then without delay. As it turns out, they will later be baptized by Alma in the land of Zarahemla (Mosiah 25:18) probably a few to several months later. Perhaps "they did prolong the time" simply means they decided to wait.

"an account of their baptism shall be given hereafter" This phrase has been pointed out by John A. Tvedtnes as being an example of one of Mormon's "editorial promises" ("Mormon's Editorial Promises" in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, 29-31). Brother Tvedtnes points out that an author may promise in the course of writing to return to a subject later to supply further details, but actually keeping such promises can prove difficult. Even with modern writing aids, memory can betray a person into failing to tuck in the corners of plot or information. Mormon, the editor of much of the Book of Mormon, made these types of promises several other times. In each case, he or his son Moroni followed through perfectly. In this particular case Mormon makes good his promise about a hundred verses later when he describes the baptism of Limhi's people (Mosiah 25:17-18).

Rather than mentioning the other examples in context, we will summarize them here:

1. In Mosiah 28:9, 19-20, Mormon says that he will later describe the mission of the sons of Mosiah. Eighteen chapters later, in Alma 17-26, he does describe that mission.

2. In Alma 35:13, Mormon promises to describe the Nephite-Lamanite war that began in the eighteenth year. But, since he wanted to first report Alma's teachings to his sons, he postponed the story of the war until Alma 43, where in verse three he introduced the topic with the words, "And now I return to an account of the wars."

3. Writing in Mosiah 28:11-19, Mormon said that he would later provide the reader with the story of the Jaredites. He made this statement at the point where he mentioned that King Mosiah had translated the record of that people. Apparently the problems he faced in his role as commander of the Nephite armies prevented him from including the Jaredite record. But, his son Moroni later fulfilled this promise by

engraving onto the plates of Mormon the Book of Ether. Moroni doubtless included the Jaredite record at the bidding of his father.

4. In Helaman 2:12-14, Mormon said that he would speak more of Gadianton and his secret band “hereafter.” Indeed he did. The problems caused by the robbers and much about their characteristics were detailed in Helaman 6; 3 Nephi 1:27-29; 2:11-18; 3:1 through 4:29; and 4 Nephi.

In 1829 Joseph Smith dictated to Oliver Cowdery most of the scripture attributed to Mormon within the period of a few weeks, without reviewing, proofreading, or revising. Under these circumstances, if Joseph were the original author, then leaving no gaps in the promised materials would have been a remarkable achievement. This makes it much more likely that Joseph was translating rather than creating, and that the editorial consistency is Mormon’s work. The internal consistency of the Book of Mormon is remarkable and most complex!

36 And now all the study of Ammon and his people, and king Limhi and his people, was to deliver themselves out of the hands of the Lamanites and from bondage.

verse 36 The phrase “all the study” might be alternatively rendered: “the sole intent and purpose.”

Mosiah Chapter 22

1 And now it came to pass that Ammon and king Limhi began to consult with the people how they should deliver themselves out of bondage; and even they did cause that all the people should gather themselves together; and this they did that they might have the voice of the people concerning the matter.

2 And it came to pass that they could find no way to deliver themselves out of bondage, except it were to take their women and children, and their flocks, and their herds, and their tents, and depart into the wilderness; for the Lamanites being so numerous, it was impossible for the people of Limhi to contend with them, thinking to deliver themselves out of bondage by the sword.

verse 2 The only plausible way for the people of Limhi to escape was to find a way in which they could depart quietly. It would not be possible to fight their way out.

The meaning of the final phrase in this verse is somewhat clearer if the word “thinking” is replaced with “hoping.”

3 Now it came to pass that Gideon went forth and stood before the king, and said unto him: Now O king, thou hast hitherto hearkened unto my words many times when we have been contending with our brethren, the Lamanites.

4 And now O king, if thou hast not found me to be an unprofitable servant, or if thou hast hitherto listened to my words in any degree, and they have been of service to thee, even so I desire that thou wouldst listen to my words at this time, and I will be thy servant and deliver this people out of bondage.

5 And the king granted unto him that he might speak. And Gideon said unto him:

6 Behold the back pass, through the back wall, on the back side of the city. The Lamanites, or the guards of the Lamanites, by night are drunken; therefore let us send a proclamation among all this people that they gather together their flocks and herds, that they may drive them into the wilderness by night.

7 And I will go according to thy command and pay the last tribute of wine to the Lamanites, and they will be drunken; and we will pass through the secret pass on the left of their camp when they are drunken and asleep.

8 Thus we will depart with our women and our children, our flocks, and our herds into the wilderness; and we will travel around the land of Shilom.

verse 8 “we will travel around the land of Shilom” Please refer to the commentary for Mosiah 19:6 which contains some speculation regarding the geography of the area. By this time the Lamanites occupied parts, if not all, of the land of Shilom as well as the land of Shemlon, and Limhi and his people were confined to the land of Nephi. On planning their escape, Gideon planned to skirt the land of Shilom, probably to its north and east, so as to avoid attracting the attention of the Lamanites.

9 And it came to pass that the king hearkened unto the words of Gideon.

10 And king Limhi caused that his people should gather their flocks together; and he sent the tribute of wine to the Lamanites; and he also sent more wine, as a present unto them; and they did drink freely of the wine which king Limhi did send unto them.

11 And it came to pass that the people of king Limhi did depart by night into the wilderness with their flocks and their herds, and they went round about the land of Shilom in the wilderness, and bent their course towards the land of Zarahemla, being led by Ammon and his brethren.

12 And they had taken all their gold, and silver, and their precious things, which they could carry, and also their provisions with them, into the wilderness; and they pursued their journey.

13 And after being many days in the wilderness they arrived in the land of Zarahemla, and joined Mosiah's people, and became his subjects.

14 And it came to pass that Mosiah received them with joy; and he also received their records, and also the records which had been found by the people of Limhi.

verse 14 Mosiah received not only the twenty-four gold plates—the record of the Jaredites, which Limhi's people had found in the land Desolation—but he received also the plates containing the record of the Zeniffites (Mosiah 8:5) which had been begun by Zeniff (Mosiah 9:1) and continued by people of the courts of Noah and Limhi. The account of Abinadi and the records of Alma's people in the lands of Mormon and Helam was not, of course, included with these records, but was with Alma and his people who will arrive back in Zarahemla later the same year.

15 And now it came to pass when the Lamanites had found that the people of Limhi had departed out of the land by night, that they sent an army into the wilderness to pursue them;

16 And after they had pursued them two days, they could no longer follow their tracks; therefore they were lost in the wilderness.

verse 16 “they were lost in the wilderness” We will learn that the pursuing Lamanites did indeed become “lost in the wilderness,” and we will read more about this lost group in the following chapter (Mosiah 23:25-39).

The story of the ministries of Zeniff, Noah, and Limhi in the land of Nephi is one of those stories that occurred simultaneously with the story of the ministry of the elder Mosiah, Benjamin, and the younger Mosiah in the land of Zarahemla. The former story, of course, includes the story of the ministry of Abinadi and the conversion of the elder Alma and his sojourn in the wilderness for nearly 30 years with his fellow converts. The correlations between these two major stories are often little appreciated by readers of the Book of Mormon. For example, are you aware that the story of the wars fought against the Lamanites by King Benjamin and his people and the ministry of King Noah

occurred at about the same time—in about 160 BC. Are you also aware that the sojourn of the people of Alma in the wilderness after leaving the land of Nephi during Noah's ministry lasted nearly 30 years? See the illustration, *Book of Mormon History Diagram, 1 Nephi 1 through Mosiah 22*.

Mosiah Chapter 23

Scripture Mastery

Mosiah 23-24 The senior Alma and his people in the wilderness

Mosiah 23:21 The Lord seeth fit to chasten his people; yea, he trieth their patience and their faith.

An account of Alma and the people of the Lord, who were driven into the wilderness by the people of King Noah. Comprising chapters 23 and 24.

1 Now Alma, having been warned of the Lord that the armies of king Noah would come upon them, and having made it known to his people, therefore they gathered together their flocks, and took of their grain, and departed into the wilderness before the armies of king Noah.

verse 1 Alma and his people left the place called Mormon.

2 And the Lord did strengthen them, that the people of king Noah could not overtake them to destroy them.

3 And they fled eight days' journey into the wilderness.

4 And they came to a land, yea, even a very beautiful and pleasant land, a land of pure water.

verse 4 Geographical note: The land to which Alma and his party fled, the land of Helam, was probably off the usual trail between the land of Nephi and Zarahemla since the Lamanite army will later stumble onto it while they are lost in the wilderness (see Mosiah 23:30, 35).

5 And they pitched their tents, and began to till the ground, and began to build buildings; yea, they were industrious, and did labor exceedingly.

verses 6-9 Notice in these next four verses how Alma's experience with King Noah, and undoubtedly divine revelation, had turned him into an ardent anti-monarchist. He voices two major objections to having a king. First, he believed that it was not right that one man should be esteemed above another as a king is esteemed more highly than his subjects. Second, a wicked king might tend to spawn wickedness and iniquity in his subjects. Alma could personally testify of this danger since Noah had succeeded in leading him into wickedness. It is clear from examples in the Old Testament and in the Book of Mormon that kings set the moral tone for their people. Their potential influence over their people was profound. Alma perceived that the monarch's power

and influence over his people was significant whether he chose to do good or whether he elected to do evil.

6 And the people were desirous that Alma should be their king, for he was beloved by his people.

7 But he said unto them: Behold, it is not expedient that we should have a king; for thus saith the Lord: Ye shall not esteem one flesh above another, or one man shall not think himself above another; therefore I say unto you it is not expedient that ye should have a king.

8 Nevertheless, if it were possible that ye could always have just men to be your kings it would be well for you to have a king.

9 But remember the iniquity of king Noah and his priests; and I myself was caught in a snare, and did many things which were abominable in the sight of the Lord, which caused me sore repentance;

verse 9 The phrase “sore repentance” is a reminder that there is no true repentance without suffering.

10 Nevertheless, after much tribulation, the Lord did hear my cries, and did answer my prayers, and has made me an instrument in his hands in bringing so many of you to a knowledge of his truth.

11 Nevertheless, in this I do not glory, for I am unworthy to glory of myself.

12 And now I say unto you, ye have been oppressed by king Noah, and have been in bondage to him and his priests, and have been brought into iniquity by them; therefore ye were bound with the bands of iniquity.

verse 12 What does it mean to be “bound with the bands of iniquity”? The bondage in which the Nephites lived in the land of Nephi under the tyrannical leadership of King Noah, and later in captivity to the Lamanites, was apparently the direct result of their own sins. A misuse of one’s agency leads to a loss of freedoms. See *Agency and Freedom* in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 13.

13 And now as ye have been delivered by the power of God out of these bonds; yea, even out of the hands of king Noah and his people, and also from the bonds of iniquity, even so I desire that ye should stand fast in this liberty wherewith ye have been made free, and that ye trust no man to be a king over you.

verse 13 “stand fast in this liberty wherewith ye have been made free” Do not risk losing your new-found freedom or liberty by misusing your agency. Do not fail to distinguish clearly between the concepts of agency and freedom (liberty). See *Agency and Freedom*, in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 13.

14 And also trust no one to be your teacher nor your minister, except he be a man of God, walking in his ways and keeping his commandments.

15 Thus did Alma teach his people, that every man should love his neighbor as himself, that there should be no contention among them.

verse 15 One New Testament account of the Last Supper gives the impression that the “golden rule” was a new commandment given during Christ’s mortal ministry. John 13:34 reads: “A new commandment I give unto you, that ye *love one another; as I have loved you*” (italics added). This is a mis-impression. For one thing, Christ had earlier in his ministry taught the golden rule to his disciples (Matthew 7:12). We know that the golden rule was actually part of the Ten Commandments given to Moses on Sinai (Leviticus 19:18).

16 And now, Alma was their high priest, he being the founder of their church.

verse 16 It was the pattern of ancient Israel that a single high priest should preside over the whole church or at least a region of the church. The high priest ordained priests and teachers and later, elders (Alma 4:7, 16; 6:1; Moroni 3:1; 4:1; 6:1, 7) to assist him in directing the affairs of the church. Since there is no evidence that the Aaronic or Levitical priesthood existed in the New World at that time, all of these positions are presumed to be offices of the Melchizedek priesthood.

17 And it came to pass that none received authority to preach or to teach except it were by him from God. Therefore he consecrated all their priests and all their teachers; and none were consecrated except they were just men.

verse 17 “none received authority to preach or to teach except it were by him from God” The wording here is a bit awkward, but the meaning is clear. It is apparent that Alma possessed not only the priesthood, but also the keys of the priesthood—the right of presidency.

The word “consecrated” in this verse may be interpreted as ordained or set apart.

verses 18-24 The reader may be surprised to learn that these few verses represent the passage of nearly thirty years in the wilderness during which time Alma and his people lived and prospered.

18 Therefore they did watch over their people, and did nourish them with things pertaining to righteousness.

19 And it came to pass that they began to prosper exceedingly in the land; and they called the land Helam.

20 And it came to pass that they did multiply and prosper exceedingly in the land of Helam; and they built a city, which they called the city of Helam.

verse 20 We are reminded again that the word “city” in the Book of Mormon must be interpreted with caution. While we may see, in our mind’s eye, a city as the center of a large population of people, we know that Alma and his company comprised only four hundred and fifty people (Mosiah 18:35). This “city” was more of a village.

verses 21-24 These verses comprise an editorial note written by the prophet Mormon. It has an ominous tone and indicates that Mormon is about to teach us an important lesson about trusting in the Lord. He will use as his text for this lesson the example of the experiences of the people of Alma.

21 Nevertheless the Lord seeth fit to chasten his people; yea, he trieth their patience and their faith.

verse 21 “the Lord seeth fit to chasten his people” To *chasten* is to punish; to correct by punishment; to inflict pain for the purpose of teaching an offender. It is fundamental, of course, to this mortal experience that we be tried and chastened (Helaman 12:3; D&C 95:1; 136:31). There can be no growth without trial and pain.

22 Nevertheless—whosoever putteth his trust in him the same shall be lifted up at the last day. Yea, and thus it was with this people.

verse 22 To be “lifted up at the last day” is to be eventually saved or exalted in the celestial kingdom. On a more practical level, he who puts his trust in God will ultimately emerge the victor, though the Lord’s timetable for that victory may be different from man’s.

23 For behold, I will show unto you that they were brought into bondage, and none could deliver them but the Lord their God, yea, even the God of Abraham and Isaac and of Jacob.

24 And it came to pass that he did deliver them, and he did show forth his mighty power unto them, and great were their rejoicings.

25 For behold, it came to pass that while they were in the land of Helam, yea, in the city of Helam, while tilling the land round about, behold an army of the Lamanites was in the borders of the land.

verse 25 “an army of the Lamanites was in the borders of the land” We will learn in verse 30 that this is the Lamanite army which had become lost in the wilderness while pursuing the people of Limhi who had escaped from the city of Nephi.

26 Now it came to pass that the brethren of Alma fled from their fields, and gathered themselves together in the city of Helam; and they were much frightened because of the appearance of the Lamanites.

27 But Alma went forth and stood among them, and exhorted them that they should not be frightened, but that they should remember the Lord their God and he would deliver them.

28 Therefore they hushed their fears, and began to cry unto the Lord that he would soften the hearts of the Lamanites, that they would spare them, and their wives, and their children.

29 And it came to pass that the Lord did soften the hearts of the Lamanites. And Alma and his brethren went forth and delivered themselves up into their hands; and the Lamanites took possession of the land of Helam.

30 Now the armies of the Lamanites, which had followed after the people of king Limhi, had been lost in the wilderness for many days.

31 And behold, they had found those priests of king Noah, in a place which they called Amulon; and they had begun to possess the land of Amulon and had begun to till the ground.

32 Now the name of the leader of those priests was Amulon.

33 And it came to pass that Amulon did plead with the Lamanites; and he also sent forth their wives, who were the daughters of the Lamanites, to plead with their brethren, that they should not destroy their husbands.

34 And the Lamanites had compassion on Amulon and his brethren, and did not destroy them, because of their wives.

35 And Amulon and his brethren did join the Lamanites, and they were traveling in the wilderness in search of the land of Nephi when they discovered the land of Helam, which was possessed by Alma and his brethren.

36 And it came to pass that the Lamanites promised unto Alma and his brethren, that if they would show them the way which led to the land of Nephi that they would grant unto them their lives and their liberty.

verse 36 It is interesting to note that the Nephites and Lamanites seemed to have no trouble communicating with one another, particularly so since we will later learn that the language of the Nephites was different than the language of the Lamanites (Mosiah 24:4). Perhaps they did speak different languages, and Amulon was able to translate for both groups.

37 But after Alma had shown them the way that led to the land of Nephi the Lamanites would not keep their promise; but they set guards round about the land of Helam, over Alma and his brethren.

38 And the remainder of them went to the land of Nephi; and a part of them returned to the land of Helam, and also brought with them the wives and the children of the guards who had been left in the land.

verse 38 The wives and children of those Lamanite guards who had been left in Helam to keep watch over Alma and his people were brought from the area of the land of Nephi to be with their husbands and fathers.

39 And the king of the Lamanites had granted unto Amulon that he should be a king and a ruler over his people, who were in the land of Helam; nevertheless he should have no power to do anything contrary to the will of the king of the Lamanites.

verse 39 “a ruler over his people, who were in the land of Helam” Amulon was installed by the Lamanites as a puppet king over Alma’s people, Amulon’s “fellow Nephites”—“his people.”

Mosiah Chapter 24

1 And it came to pass that Amulon did gain favor in the eyes of the king of the Lamanites; therefore, the king of the Lamanites granted unto him and his brethren that they should be appointed teachers over his people, yea, even over the people who were in the land of Shemlon, and in the land of Shilom, and in the land of Amulon.

verse 1 Amulon and the former priests of Noah were granted favored status in the kingdom of the Lamanite king, not only in Helam but in the land of Lehi-Nephi. They became teachers of the Lamanites in secular matters. The antecedent of “his people” is apparently the Lamanite king Laman.

2 For the Lamanites had taken possession of all these lands; therefore, the king of the Lamanites had appointed kings over all these lands.

3 And now the name of the king of the Lamanites was Laman, being called after the name of his father; and therefore he was called king Laman. And he was king over a numerous people.

4 And he appointed teachers of the brethren of Amulon in every land which was possessed by his people; and thus the language of Nephi began to be taught among all the people of the Lamanites.

verse 4 We have previously commented on the fact that the Nephites and the Lamanites do not seem to have any trouble communicating with one another (see Mosiah 23:33, 36). Perhaps in this verse these Lamanites were actually being taught how to write (see Mosiah 24:6). It is also possible that the ordinary Lamanite might have been unable to communicate with the average Nephite and that most of the communication which took place occurred between the leaders of the groups who may have shared a common language.

5 And they were a people friendly one with another; nevertheless they knew not God; neither did the brethren of Amulon teach them anything concerning the Lord their God, neither the law of Moses; nor did they teach them the words of Abinadi;

6 But they taught them that they should keep their record, and that they might write one to another.

7 And thus the Lamanites began to increase in riches, and began to trade one with another and wax great, and began to be a cunning and a wise people, as to the wisdom of the world, yea, a very cunning people, delighting in all manner of wickedness and plunder, except it were among their own brethren.

verse 7 “the Lamanites . . . began to . . . wax great” One of the definitions of wax in *Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language* is, “To increase in size; to grow; to become larger.”

“delighting in all manner of wickedness and plunder, except it were among their own brethren” John L. Sorenson sees in this verse some evidence that the Lamanites were not simply a homogeneous group—one in which all descended from a common ancestor or ancestors (Laman and Lemuel):

Mosiah 24:7 reports the Lamanites’ practicing “all manner of wickedness and plunder, except it were among their own brethren.” Now, given this verse’s context, those plundered do not appear to have been Nephites. Who is referred to? Possibly the statement means that the Lamanites considered it acceptable to plunder any community other than those involving immediate relatives or neighbors, but such a limited sense of “their own brethren” is without precedent in the text. Rather it seems to me that this expression tells us that certain portions of the Lamanites classified other segments of the population in their lands as being of different origin and thus subject to less protection. That is, Mosiah 24:7 could mean that Lamanites were plundering “Lamanites” not of that bloodline, and vice versa. Amulonites and Amalekites [actually Amlicites—see the commentary for Alma 21:2] could have fallen into the target category as well as the Zeniffites, who certainly were “plundered” (see Mosiah 9:14). Yet it seems to me that the plunderable “others,” of non-Lehite stock, may have been at odds with “the [real] Lamanites” and thus have come into conflict with them (compare Mormon 8:8) (*Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*: “When Lehi’s Party Arrived in the Land, Did They Find Others There,” 31).

8 And now it came to pass that Amulon began to exercise authority over Alma and his brethren, and began to persecute him, and cause that his children should persecute their children.

9 For Amulon knew Alma, that he had been one of the king’s priests, and that it was he that believed the words of Abinadi and was driven out before the king, and therefore he was wroth with him; for he was subject to king Laman, yet he exercised authority over them, and put tasks upon them, and put task-masters over them.

verse 9 “he was wroth with him” Amulon was angry with Alma.

“for he was subject to king Laman” This might be more clearly rendered “for even though Amulon was subject to king Laman, Amulon was able to exercise authority over Alma and his people” (cf. Mosiah 23:39).

10 And it came to pass that so great were their afflictions that they began to cry mightily to God.

11 And Amulon commanded them that they should stop their cries; and he put guards over them to watch them, that whosoever should be found calling upon God should be put to death.

verse 11 In later generations the descendants of Amulon (the Amulonites) will retain their specific identity even though they will integrate with the Lamanites. They will become noted for their wickedness, extreme hatred, and impenetrable hearts (see Alma 21:3; 23:14; 24:1-2, 20-22, 28-30).

12 And Alma and his people did not raise their voices to the Lord their God, but did pour out their hearts to him; and he did know the thoughts of their hearts.

13 And it came to pass that the voice of the Lord came to them in their afflictions, saying: Lift up your heads and be of good comfort, for I know of the covenant which ye have made unto me; and I will covenant with my people and deliver them out of bondage.

14 And I will also ease the burdens which are put upon your shoulders, that even you cannot feel them upon your backs, even while you are in bondage; and this will I do that ye may stand as witnesses for me hereafter, and that ye may know of a surety that I, the Lord God, do visit my people in their afflictions.

15 And now it came to pass that the burdens which were laid upon Alma and his brethren were made light; yea, the Lord did strengthen them that they could bear up their burdens with ease, and they did submit cheerfully and with patience to all the will of the Lord.

verse 15 “the burdens which were laid upon Alma and his brethren were made light” The question has been asked as to why the Lord allowed Alma’s people to be placed in bondage since they had repented and made covenants with the Lord. The answer is that it was necessary to fulfill the prophecy of Abinadi. When Abinadi first came among the Zeniffites in the land of Nephi, he warned that if they did not repent they would be brought into bondage (Mosiah 11:21). Two years later, however, his warning and prophecy was different. Then he proclaimed that they *would* be placed in bondage (Mosiah 12:2). It was too late to avoid being placed into bondage. Furthermore he added that if they continued to refuse to repent, they would be destroyed (Mosiah 12:8).

It is instructive to compare the degree of bondage under which the Lord allowed Alma’s people to be placed with that of the people of Limhi. In this verse, for example, we learn that the Lord himself did ease the burdens placed upon those in Alma’s group. For Limhi’s people, the Lord acted more indirectly. He softened the hearts of the Lamanite captors, so that they eased the burdens on the people of Limhi (Mosiah 21:15). Among Alma’s people there was no bloodshed, whereas among Limhi’s people there was considerable (Mosiah 21:8-9). The Lord was quick to hear the cries of Alma’s people (Mosiah 24:13) but slow to respond to those of Limhi’s people (Mosiah 21:15).

For the actual deliverance of Alma's people from bondage the Lord acted directly. He delivered them without their having to devise a plan for their own deliverance (Mosiah 24:16). He put the guards to sleep (Mosiah 24:19). He led them to Zarahemla (Mosiah 24:23-25). On the other hand, Limhi's people had to devise their own plan of escape (Mosiah 22:9). They had to ensure themselves that the guards were asleep from drunkenness (Mosiah 22:7, 10), and Ammon had to lead them back to Zarahemla (Mosiah 22:11).

“they did submit . . . with patience to all the will of the Lord” It is interesting to note that Hebrew is decidedly lacking in adverbs. Instead of adverbs, it frequently uses the prepositions meaning “in” or “with.” Here, for example, we read “with patience” instead of *patiently*. Another example is found in 1 Nephi 18:11 where we read with much harshness instead of very harshly.

16 And it came to pass that so great was their faith and their patience that the voice of the Lord came unto them again, saying: Be of good comfort, for on the morrow I will deliver you out of bondage.

17 And he said unto Alma: Thou shalt go before this people, and I will go with thee and deliver this people out of bondage.

18 Now it came to pass that Alma and his people in the night-time gathered their flocks together, and also of their grain; yea, even all the night-time were they gathering the flocks together.

19 And in the morning the Lord caused a deep sleep to come upon the Lamanites, yea, and all their task-masters were in a profound sleep.

verse 19 We have commented upon the contrasting methods of escape of the people of Limhi and the people of Alma. Limhi's people had to provide wine to the Lamanites to ensure that they would be in a drunken stupor. There was no wine involved, however, in Alma's escape. The Lord simply, yet miraculously, caused a deep sleep to come upon the Lamanites.

20 And Alma and his people departed into the wilderness; and when they had traveled all day they pitched their tents in a valley, and they called the valley Alma, because he led their way in the wilderness.

21 Yea, and in the valley of Alma they poured out their thanks to God because he had been merciful unto them, and eased their burdens, and had delivered them out of bondage; for they were in bondage, and none could deliver them except it were the Lord their God.

22 And they gave thanks to God, yea, all their men and all their women and all their children that could speak lifted their voices in the praises of their God.

23 And now the Lord said unto Alma: Haste thee and get thou and this people out of this land, for the Lamanites have awakened and do pursue thee; therefore

get thee out of this land, and I will stop the Lamanites in this valley that they come no further in pursuit of this people.

24 And it came to pass that they departed out of the valley, and took their journey into the wilderness.

25 And after they had been in the wilderness twelve days they arrived in the land of Zarahemla; and king Mosiah did also receive them with joy.

verse 25 By combining the information in this verse to that in Mosiah 23:3 and Mosiah 24:20, we learn that the trip from the Waters of Mormon to Zarahemla was twenty-one days. The Waters of Mormon were probably not more than a few days journey from the city of Nephi (Mosiah 18:4). Note that when the sixteen strong men led by Ammon in search of the Zeniffites had traveled this route in reverse (Mosiah 7:4), they took some forty days to make the journey. This might well have been because they “knew not the course they should travel in the wilderness to go up to the land of Lehi-Nephi.” Alma’s party which included women, children, and “flocks” would probably not have traveled more than ten or eleven miles per day. Thus the distance from the city of Nephi to Zarahemla, then was probably about 250 miles. The distance as the crow flies would probably be more like 180 miles (John L. Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*, 8).

Alma’s people arrived in Zarahemla somewhat after the arrival of Limhi and his people probably by at least a few months. This is suggested by the phrase “king Mosiah did *also* receive them with joy” (italics added). Also, the same Lamanite army that pursued the people of Limhi into the wilderness happened onto the people of Alma and kept them captive for probably a few months.

We are not told what eventually became of this special covenant group of people. Did they merge back into Nephite society? Did they remain apart from the other Nephites? They were likely happy to be in Zarahemla where they could enjoy the blessings of the temple. They had, after all, lived in the wilderness for nearly thirty years.

Please see the illustration *Book of Mormon History Diagram 1 Nephi 1 through Mosiah 22*. It is well worth committing to memory.

Mosiah Chapter 25

Chapter 25 reports the reactions of the people of Zarahemla as they listened to the accounts of Zeniff and his people and to the account of Alma and his people and the afflictions they suffered. It also recounts Alma's labors in establishing the church in Zarahemla.

One latter-day church scholar observed: "Some Christians have criticized members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints for being church-centered instead of Christ-centered in worship. Perhaps this belief comes from repeated testimonies of members that the Church is true, as they attempt to bear witness of the truth of the restoration. Chapters 25-27 of Mosiah reveal the true relationship between Christ and his Church. One must come to Christ through faith and repentance of all sin, and then receive the ordinances of salvation provided by the Church" (Dennis L. Largey, "Lessons from the Zarahemla Churches" in *The Book of Mormon: Mosiah, Salvation Only Through Christ*, 61).

1 And now king Mosiah caused that all the people should be gathered together.

2 Now there were not so many of the children of Nephi, or so many of those who were descendants of Nephi, as there were of the people of Zarahemla, who was a descendant of Mulek, and those who came with him into the wilderness.

verse 2 Obviously the people of Zarahemla or "Mulekites" significantly outnumbered the Nephites. The "Nephites" in Zarahemla at this time are obviously not all literal "descendants of Nephi." Numbered among the Nephites were certainly some who were also descendants of Nephi's brothers Sam, Jacob, and Joseph, as well as some who descended from Zoram. While King Zarahemla himself was apparently a literal descendant of Mulek, the Mulekites or people of Zarahemla were descendants of the mixed group that came to the New World aboard ship with Mulek, including the ship's crew who may well have been non-Israelites.

This is the first mention in the Book of Mormon text of the name "Mulek," even though we have discussed the people of Zarahemla previously (Omni 1:13-20). Mulek was a son of King Zedekiah of Judah. His name is of interest. In the printer's manuscript of the Book of Mormon it appeared as Muloch and as Mulok in editions from 1830 to 1852. Then it became Mulek (*Book of Mormon Critical Text: A Tool for Scholarly Reference, Volume 2: Mosiah-Alma*, 1st ed. [Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1989], 483). It seems clear, regardless of how we spell it, that we are dealing with the Hebrew root *mlk*, as in Hebrew *melek*, which means "little king" or simply "king."

Some research by Mormon scholars Robert F. Smith, Benjamin Urrutia, and John L. Sorenson has brought to light some truly exciting information about Mulek. To

summarize this information, I will quote from the article “Mulek, Son of the King” found in the publication *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, edited by John W. Welch, 142-44:

Mulek, the son of Zedekiah, is mentioned several times in the Book of Mormon (see Mosiah 25:2; Helaman 6:10; 8:21) but not in the Bible—at least not in a way that people have recognized, until just recently. Biblical scholarship now bears out this Book of Mormon claim: King Zedekiah had a son named Mulek.

In the summer of 586 BC, when the troops of King Nebuchadnezzar breached the walls of Jerusalem, King Zedekiah of Judah and a large company of warriors attempted to escape by night to the East. Babylonian troops caught up with them in the plains of Jericho. Many presumably escaped, but Zedekiah himself was seized and taken to Nebuchadnezzar’s operational headquarters at Riblah (in what is now Syria). There, as punishment for breaking his sacred oath of fealty to King Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonians forced Zedekiah to witness the execution of his captured sons, had his own eyes put out, and took him in bronze fetters to Babylon (see 2 Kings 25:4-7; 2 Chronicles 36:13).

According to the Book of Mormon, that was not the end of the matter. One son named Mulek was not killed by the Babylonians. He had escaped (see Omni 1:15-16; Helaman 8:21), even though the details remain shadowy.

The first biblical clue to the existence and escape of Mulek, son of Zedekiah, can be found in 2 Kings 25:1-10, which reports that Nebuchadnezzar and “all his host” scattered “all the men” and “all [the king’s] army” and burnt “all the houses of Jerusalem,” and with “all the army” they destroyed the walls. In the midst of all this, however, 2 Kings 25:7 omits the word all when it reports only that “the sons” of Zedekiah were killed, leaving open the question whether all of his sons were slain.

Biblical scholars have recently had interesting things to say about a person named Malchiah. Jeremiah 38:6 speaks of a “dungeon of Malchiah the son of Hammelech . . . in the court of the prison.” [this name in the Hebrew is pronounced Malkiyahu ben hamelek. The name *Malkiyahu* was reasonably rendered into English as “Malchiah” by the King James scholars, and the word *ben* was accurately translated as son. But the King James term *Hammelech*—pronounced ha’-melek—is not really a name; it is a transliteration. In Hebrew, *hamelek* means “the king” (*ha* is the definite article “the,” and *melek* is the word for “king.” Thus, accurately translated, Jeremiah 38:6 refers to “Malkiyahu son of the king.” Noted biblical scholar John Bright translates the phrase as “Prince Malkiah”—the term *prince* referring to a royal son—in his *Anchor Bible* commentary on Jeremiah.]

Was this MalkiYahu a son of King Zedekiah? Several factors indicate that he was. For one thing, the title “son of the king” was used throughout the ancient Near East to refer to actual sons of kings who served as high officers of imperial administration. The same is certainly true of the Bible, in which kings’ sons ran prisons (see 1 Kings 22:26-27; Jeremiah 36:26; 38:6) or performed other official functions (see

2 Kings 15:5; 2 Chronicles 28:7). Moreover, in view of the fact that the name MalkiYahu has been found on two ostraca from Arad (in southern Judah), the late head of the Department of Archaeology at Tel Aviv University, Yohanan Aharoni, said that "MalkiYahu is a common name and was even borne by the contemporary son of King Zedekiah."

But was the MalkiYahu the same person as Mulek? Study of these names tells us he may very well be. In the case of Baruch, scribe of Jeremiah, for example, the long form of his name, BerekhYahu, has been discovered on a seal impression by Nahman Avigad of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. The full name has been shortened in Jeremiah's record to "Baruch." [In like manner, then, we might suppose that the name MalkiYahu might be shortened to Mulek.]

In view of this shortening, as in many other biblical names, there is no reason why a short form such as Mulek might not be possible.

A prominent non-Mormon ancient Near Eastern specialist declared recently of the Book of Mormon's naming "Mulek" as a son of Zedekiah, "If Joseph Smith came up with that one, he did pretty good!" He added that the vowels in the name could be accounted for as the Phoenician style of pronunciation. He found himself in general agreement that "MalkiYahu, son of the King" might very well be a son of King Zedekiah, and that the short-form of the name could indeed be Mulek (references may be found in original article).

But was Malkiyahu the son of the specific king Zedekiah? Since the passage in Jeremiah 38:6 does not specifically stipulate that Zedekiah was the king to whom Malkiyahu was related, we may only assume that this was so. But there are strong points of evidence for this assumption. The first point is the context of Jeremiah 38, where Zedekiah is the king with whom Jeremiah and his opponents are interacting. Because Zedekiah is mentioned by name in Jeremiah 38:5, it is probable that the scribe composing the text in the subsequent reference to Malkiyahu (verse 6) used the term *ben hamelek* rather than awkwardly repeating the royal name Zedekiah in a phrase like son of Zedekiah. It appears that this was an acceptable way of referring to a royal son and his kingly father without specifically using the father's name. Indeed, if Jeremiah 38:6 refers to any king other than Zedekiah, we should expect that king to be specifically named in the course of the story, for such was the care taken by Judean scribes. That no other monarch's name was recorded in Jeremiah 38 suggests very strongly that the king who was the father of Malkiyahu was Zedekiah.

A major question would be the age of Malkiyahu in Jeremiah 38, the chapter that records events during the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem in 586 BC, not long before the fall of the city. Was he old enough to have his name mentioned in the context described in Jeremiah 38? In this chapter, Jeremiah was put into confinement: "Then took they Jeremiah, and cast him into the dungeon of Malchiah the son of Hammelech, that was in the court of the prison: and they let down Jeremiah with cords. And in the dungeon

there was no water, but mire: so Jeremiah sunk in the mire” (verse 6). A problem with this verse is the misconceptions which arise from certain incorrect terms used by the King James translators. Not only should Hammelech be rendered as “the king,” but the Hebrew word that they translated as “dungeon” does not mean “dungeon.” Rather, the Hebrew word means “pit,” and in the context of Jeremiah 38 it means a pit for water storage, properly a cistern. Note that there was no water in the “dungeon” (cistern) and that “Jeremiah sunk in the mire” (mud). Also the King James use of the word prison in Jeremiah 38:6 cannot be correct either. The Hebrew term is *matarah* and does not really mean prison, but rather “aim,” “objective,” or “target.” A more accurate rendition of Jeremiah 38:6 suggests that within a palace courtyard used by the royal guard for, among other things, archery practice (as in 1 Samuel 20:20), was the wellhead of a cistern connected with his name.

So how old would a royal son have to be in order to have a cistern connected with his name? What was the connection? And how old could Malkiyahu have been, as the son of King Zedekiah, in the context of Jeremiah 38? It is reported in the Bible that Zedekiah was 21 years old when he began to reign (see 2 Kings 24:18). His reign began in 597 B.C. and ended eleven years later in 586 B.C., when Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians and Zedekiah was captured. It was during Zedekiah’s eleventh year that the events of Jeremiah 38 occurred, which would make Zedekiah 32 years old at that point. Taking into consideration that a young man in the royal family could marry and father children as early as 15 or 16 year of age, it is perfectly conceivable [no pun intended] that Zedekiah could, at age 32, have had a son who was 15 or 16 years old by 586 BC. If, therefore, Malkiyahu were the first son of Zedekiah, and thus the heir apparent to the throne, as the owner of the title *ben hamelek* might well be, he could have been as old as 15 or 16 years himself in the context of Jeremiah 38. A teenage crown prince might very well have been assigned his own personal wing or apartment in the royal palace complex, whether he had married or not, and that wing or apartment could have abutted a courtyard where the royal guard held archery practice. One cistern (there might have been more) that was accessed by a wellhead in that courtyard could easily have stretched underneath the princely quarters, so that it was designed as the “cistern of Malkiyahu son of the king.” In other words, it is entirely plausible that the Malkiyahu of Jeremiah 38:6 could have been the teenage son of Zedekiah and that a cistern in a courtyard of the royal palace could have carried his name. And if that is true, it is entirely possible that Malkiyahu the son of Zedekiah could have been the Mulek of whom the Book of Mormon reports.

Other options for Mulek’s age at the fall of Jerusalem have been suggested. John L. Sorenson, in his detailed *BYU Studies article* on the “Mulekites,” seems to have preferred a model in which Mulek was much younger: “We do not know that Mulek was more than an infant. The younger he was, the greater the likelihood that he could have escaped the notice of the Babylonians and subsequent slaughter at their hands.

Whatever his age, he may have been secreted away to Egypt by family retainers and close associates of the king along with the king's daughters (Jeremiah 43:6-7)."

Probably the only way that an infant or a teenage Mulek could have gone undetected by the Babylonians was that he was not in Judah at the Jerusalem fall. In 589 BC Zedekiah rebelled against Babylon, apparently in a conspiracy with Phoenicia and Ammon, to aid Egypt's efforts to take control of western Asia. Young Prince Mulek (Malkiyahu), perhaps barely 13, could have been sent to Egypt by his father either as part of an ambassadorial mission or as part of the liaison that would coordinate Judah's role in the rebellious coalition. Another scenario, perhaps more likely, is that a 15-year-old Mulek was sent to Egypt during 587 BC, when the Babylonian siege, which had commenced early in 588, was lifted so that Nebuchadnezzar's forces could deal with an Egyptian advance in the south (see Jeremiah 37:5-8). Others evidently traveled safely to Egypt during this time, and it may be that Mulek did as well, either to bear messages to Egypt and help coordinate the war or to secure his safety as heir to the throne of Judah, or both. In any case, the choice of Egypt as a safe haven for Mulek was also suggested by Sorenson, who maintained: "It is obvious that in order to leave by sea for America, he would have to reach a port. Since the Babylonians controlled the ports of Israel and Phoenicia at the time, going south to Egypt (among his father's allies) would be about the only possibility."

What does the Book of Mormon say about Mulek? Would the model of a teenage Mulek going to Egypt at the behest of his father, King Zedekiah, before the actual fall of Jerusalem fit with the references to Mulek in the Book of Mormon? There are only three places in the Book of Mormon that mention Mulek, and one of them (Helaman 6:10) is not germane to the discussion of his movements.

A passage in Omni alludes to Mulek's travel party without naming him specifically. Key phrases from these pertinent passages are of interest:

"The people of Zarahemla came out from Jerusalem at the time that Zedekiah, king of Judah, was carried away captive into Babylon. And they journeyed in the wilderness, and were brought by the hand of the Lord across the great waters" (Omni 1:15-16).

"The people of Zarahemla, who was a descendant of Mulek, and those who came with him into the wilderness . . ." (Mosiah 25:2).

"The sons of Zedekiah were . . . slain, all except it were Mulek [and] . . . the seed of Zedekiah are with us, and they were driven out of the land of Jerusalem" (Helaman 8:21).

Addressing these passages in reverse order, Helaman 8:21 suggests that Mulek and his people "were driven out of the land of Jerusalem." In a technical sense, whether Mulek was an infant or a teenage prince acting on behalf of his father, his travel to Egypt would not have been the result of having been "driven out." Rather, it was an escape. The passage does not address whether Mulek escaped from Jerusalem earlier

than the party that eventually cross the ocean with him or whether they all left Jerusalem at once. It is worth noting that the very next verse (verse 22) maintains that “Lehi was driven out of Jerusalem,” which is also technically incorrect—Lehi, too, made an orderly and planned departure from Jerusalem. The inaccurate idea of the parties of Lehi and Mulek being “driven out” of Jerusalem may have developed late in Nephite thought. In any case, Helaman 8 says nothing that would contradict the idea of a teenage Mulek leaving Jerusalem for Egypt before the city’s fall to the Babylonians.

The reference in Mosiah 25:2 is of interest because it specifically identifies Zarahemla as a descendant of Mulek. In other words, had the Judean monarch survived, a direct heir to the throne of Jerusalem, Zarahemla, would ironically have been found in ancient America. A key phrase in the verse mentions Mulek’s party going “into the wilderness.” This theme also appears in Omni. But, again, nothing in Mosiah 25:2 contradicts the proposition that Mulek went to Egypt before Jerusalem’s fall.

Omni 1:15-16 gives the most specific information. Written upon the small plates of Nephi (not the plates of Mormon), the words of Amaleki in Omni represent a far earlier record of events than the other two references. Curiously, Mulek is not mentioned by name in Omni. The passage correctly specifies that “the people of Zarahemla came out [not “were driven out”] from Jerusalem at the time that Zedekiah, king of Judah, was carried away captive into Babylon.” This would place the departure from Jerusalem of at least some of Mulek’s party, perhaps the bulk of it, sometime in late 586 BC, more than a year after the point suggested for teenage Mulek himself to have gone to Egypt.

However, since Omni 1:15 does not specifically mention Mulek by name, it does not contradict the proposal that he went to Egypt earlier than the party with whom he eventually came across the sea. It is certainly possible that the party included some of the people who left Jerusalem in Jeremiah 43, as Sorenson suggested. And with the later reference in Mosiah 25:2, Omni 1:16 specifies that the group “journeyed in the wilderness.” That wilderness might have been the trail across northern Sinai from Judah to Egypt, as also suggested by Sorenson (“The Mulekites,” *BYU Studies*, 30/3 [1990], 9), or it could even refer to a subsequent trip from Egypt westward across the desert of North Africa (*Ibid.*, 9). But returning to the subject at hand, nothing in Omni contradicts the model of a teenage Mulek going to Egypt a year before the fall of Jerusalem.

There is yet another biblical reference which some have interpreted as referring to Mulek. In Ezekiel 17:1-21, the Lord gave to Ezekiel a parable concerning the king of Judah and his seed being taken into Babylon. As an apparent addendum to this prophecy the Lord said: “Thus saith the Lord God; I will also take of the highest branch of the high cedar, and will set it; I will crop off from the top of his young twigs a tender one, and will plant it upon an high mountain and eminent: In the mountain of the height of Israel will I plant it: and it shall bring forth boughs, and bear fruit, and be a goodly

cedar: and under it shall dwell all fowl of every wing; in the shadow of the branches thereof shall they dwell” (Ezekiel 17:22- 23).

Elder Orson Pratt, to whom the Lord had given the gift of prophecy (D&C 34:10), interpreted these verses as a prophecy concerning the Mulekites:

When Zedekiah, king of Judah, was carried away captive into Babylon, the Lord took one of his sons, whose name was Mulok [sic], with a company of those who would hearken unto his words, and brought them over the ocean, and planted them in America. This was done in fulfillment of the 22nd and 23rd verses of the seventeenth chapter of Ezekiel . . . By reading this chapter, it will be seen that the Jews were the “high cedar,” that Zedekiah the king was the “highest branch,” that the “tender one” cropped off from the top of his young twigs, was one of his sons, whom the Lord brought out and planted him and his company upon the choice land of America, which he had given unto a remnant of the tribe of Joseph for an inheritance, in fulfillment of the blessing of Jacob and Moses upon the head of that tribe (*Orson Pratt’s Works*, compiled by Parker Pratt Robinson [Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press], 1945).

Recently, an ancient Judean stamp seal has been identified as bearing the Hebrew form of the name “Malchiah son of Hammelech” (Jeffrey R. Chadwick, “Has the Seal of Mulek Been Found?” in *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, 12/2, 2003, 72-83). A stamp seal is a small stone, usually about the size of a jelly bean, with at least one side that is flat or slightly convex, engraved with a name, a title, a design, or some combination of these in mirror image so that it might be used as a stamp. The stamp seal might be encased in a ring to be worn on the finger or might be perforated with a single hole through which a string was passed, allowing the seal to be worn around the neck. The function of the seal was to be pressed into wet clay to leave an impression of the name, title, or design of the seal’s owner. Ancient documents were often sealed by tying them with string and then pressing a stamp seal into a marble-sized ball of clay on the string ends to bond them together. Clay seal impressions are often called bullae (the singular form is bulla) by scholars. The stamp seal might also be impressed into the wet clay of a newly made ceramic jar before kiln firing, on either one or more of the jar handles, or even on the shoulder of the jar. Archaeologists have discovered numerous stamp seals, stamped jar handles, and clay bullae in excavations throughout the land of Israel. Those with names or titles upon them provide valuable data for many fields of biblical and Near Eastern studies.

The oval-shaped stamp seal of Malkiyahu ben hamelek was fashioned of bluish green malchite stone and is very small, measuring just 15 mm long by 11 mm wide (smaller than a dime) and only 7 mm thick. The printing face of the seal is convex, which leaves a concave image on imprinted clay.

Just where and when the seal was originally found is not known. It was probably excavated illegally or kept (stolen) by a workman at a legitimate excavation in Jerusalem during the 1980s. Work was still being carried out then in the city of David,

the southern Temple Mount, and the Jewish Quarter areas. The seal first appeared on the international antiquities market in a 1991 catalog of Numismatic Fine Arts Inc. of New York. It was purchased by Jewish millionaire Shlomo Moussaieff, of London, who has a large collection of ancient stamp seals and other antiquities. The first scholarly reference to the seal appeared in 1995 in an article in French by Andre Lemaire. The initial English-language publication of the seal appeared in 1997 in the magnum opus of Israeli scholars Nahman Avigad and Benjamin Sass, entitled *Corpus of West Semitic Stamp Seals*, which included a photo of a modern impression from the seal. A subsequent publication in English appeared in 2000 in *Biblical Period Personal Seals in the Shlomo Moussaieff Collection*, by Robert Deutsch and Andre Lemaire, which included photos of the seal as well as a modern impression.

The authenticity of the Malkiyahu seal is supported by the existence of a number of other seals of similar design and content. Also, it is of interest that the Hebrew Bible contains thirteen occurrences of the term *ben hamelek* in the singular form, referring to eight different men. Eight of the thirteen of these references (referring to four of the eight men) are known for certain to refer to be biologic sons of the mentioned king. The biological veracity of the titles in the others are uncertain. Of the five biblical *ben hamelek* references in the Bible that do not clearly identify a son-to-father relationship to the king, not a single one indicates that any man called *ben hamelek* was a son of someone other than the king. There is simply no positive evidence that *ben hamelek* meant anything other than a biological son of the king.

So was Mulek the “Malkiyahu the son of the king” mentioned in Jeremiah 38:6? Nothing in the Bible or the Book of Mormon negates this identification. And the evidence rehearsed above lends significant support to it. the *m-l-k* basis of both Hebrew names is clear, and the case of Berekhyahu/Baruch demonstrates that there is theoretical precedent for a person being called both Malkiyahu and Mulek—the one a longer, more formal version of the name with a theophoric yahu element, and the other a shorter form lacking that element but featuring a different vowel vocalization. Malkiyahu/Mulek would not have been killed by the Babylonians before Zedekiah’s eyes, as were his brothers (all younger than himself), because as the king’s eldest son and heir to the throne, he was likely sent to Egypt by his father well before the fall of Jerusalem and the capture of the royal family. Whether Mulek was sent to Egypt as a royal messenger or ambassador or in an effort to ensure his safety, it is unlikely that he could have taken all of his possessions with him to Egypt. Other men in Judah with the *ben hamelek* title are known to have possessed multiple stamp seals, and if Malkiyahu/Mulek did also it would have been easy for him to have left one behind. Some 2,570 years or so later, that seal was found by someone digging in Jerusalem and was surreptitiously sold. The stamp seal of “Malkiyahu son of the king” now in the London collection of Shlomo Moussaieff seems to be authentic. It is quite possible that

an archaeological artifact of a Book of Mormon personality has been identified. It appears that the seal of Mulek has been found.

3 And there were not so many of the people of Nephi and of the people of Zarahemla as there were of the Lamanites; yea, they were not half so numerous.

verse 3 As Mormon discusses here the relative numbers of Nephites, Mulekites, and Lamanites, one might get the impression that Lamanites joined in this gathering—see verse 1. This is unlikely, however, in view of the following verse.

During most of the Book of Mormon history, the Lamanites far outnumbered the Nephites. The possibility exists that the descendants of Laman and Lemuel intermarried with the native inhabitants of the land who already lived in the area when Lehi and his group landed, thus adding to their numbers (see also 4 Nephi 1:40).

4 And now all the people of Nephi were assembled together, and also all the people of Zarahemla, and they were gathered together in two bodies.

verse 4 When the Nephites originally arrived in Zarahemla (210 BC) and found the people of Zarahemla, they joined with them under the leadership of Mosiah as king. It is interesting to note that in spite of this political amalgamation, here the people of Zarahemla are still numbered separately from the people of Nephi. Some ninety years have passed, yet they still “gathered together in two bodies.” The differences between the two groups are interesting to consider. They likely spoke two different languages, though they apparently did have at least one language in common. They probably lived in different sections of the city of Zarahemla and the land of Zarahemla. We know nothing about how much, if any, intermarriage might have occurred between the two groups. We will learn that the Mulekites will never combine with the Nephites to form a completely homogenized population. “The Mulekites seemed to remain a separate social and ethnic group responsible for civil wars within the land of Zarahemla, led by Amlici (Alma 2-4) and Zerahemnah (Alma 43-44), both of whom appear to have Mulekite names and support” (John W. Welch, “Finding Answers to B. H. Roberts’ Questions and an Unparallel,” a FARMS reprint, 9).

There is a most interesting archaeological correlate of this particular verse. The archaeological site known forty years ago as Santa Rosa, which sat beside the Grijalva River in the Mexican state of Chiapas (the ruin now lies beneath waters impounded by a large dam), meets all the geographical requirements for the Nephite city of Zarahemla (see Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*, 46-47, 153-57). Test excavations in a limited portion of Santa Rosa were made in 1958. An exact chronology and full picture of life there could not be determined in detail, but it was concluded that a “tremendous amount of building activity” likely took place in about the first century BC. In addition to earthen mound foundations up to more than 40 feet high, a huge platform built in the center of the place measured over 150 feet wide by 180 feet

long and 22 feet high; this platform lay directly on the center line through the site. Presumably, various public buildings had once been built on top of the giant platform, although no search was made for evidence of such structures. At some point, likely in the first century BC (approximately when Mosiah, son of Benjamin, was alive) this platform was newly covered with a layer of gravel, and a plaster floor was laid over that. The gravel on either side of a line that ran exactly through the middle of this “temple” was found to be of distinct composition, half from one geological source, the other half of a different origin. The excavator suggested that the divided floor “may be taken to imply two separate groups, each working on its section” in a ceremonial context. The surrounding residential area was also divided into two sections that were separated along an extension of the line between the gravels. The archaeologist involved thought that a division of the community into two social groups had prevailed and that the gravel laying had been a ceremonial act acknowledging the social separation (See Donald L. Brockington, *The Ceramic History of Santa Rosa, Chiapas, Mexico, Papers of the New World Archaeological Foundation*, BYU, no. 23 [1967], especially 1, 2, 60, and 61. The archaeologists who produced these results were not Latter-day Saints).

This dual pattern recalls the situation in the city of Zarahemla at the time of King Mosiah when his subjects, who spoke two different languages, assembled to hear him—“all the people of Nephi . . . and also all the people of Zarahemla, and they were gathered together in two bodies.” At the least, Santa Rosa provides an example of the type of ethnically or linguistically divided Mesoamerican community reflected in this particular verse, whether or not it was the actual scene of the historical event reported there.

5 And it came to pass that Mosiah did read, and caused to be read, the records of Zeniff to his people; yea, he read the records of the people of Zeniff, from the time they left the land of Zarahemla until they returned again.

6 And he also read the account of Alma and his brethren, and all their afflictions, from the time they left the land of Zarahemla until the time they returned again.

verse 6 “the account of Alma . . . from the time they left the land of Zarahemla” The “records of Zeniff” and the “account of Alma” were presumably identical until Alma’s people departed the land of Nephi for the waters of Mormon.

7 And now, when Mosiah had made an end of reading the records, his people who tarried in the land were struck with wonder and amazement.

8 For they knew not what to think; for when they beheld those that had been delivered out of bondage they were filled with exceedingly great joy.

9 And again, when they thought of their brethren who had been slain by the Lamanites they were filled with sorrow, and even shed many tears of sorrow.

verse 9 There had been no bloodshed among the people of Alma. Those “who had been slain by the Lamanites” were all among the people of Noah and Limhi.

10 And again, when they thought of the immediate goodness of God, and his power in delivering Alma and his brethren out of the hands of the Lamanites and of bondage, they did raise their voices and give thanks to God.

11 And again, when they thought upon the Lamanites, who were their brethren, of their sinful and polluted state, they were filled with pain and anguish for the welfare of their souls.

12 And it came to pass that those who were the children of Amulon and his brethren, who had taken to wife the daughters of the Lamanites, were displeased with the conduct of their fathers, and they would no longer be called by the names of their fathers, therefore they took upon themselves the name of Nephi, that they might be called the children of Nephi and be numbered among those who were called Nephites.

verse 12 Presumably the ignoble Amulon and his fellow priests of Noah were Nephites. Hence their children, whom they had left behind in the city of Nephi when they panicked and fled from their Lamanite attackers, were also Nephites by descent. Here the offspring of these cowardly priests disown them. The children did not wish to be known as “Amulonites.” Rather they will go by the more general title Nephites.

13 And now all the people of Zarahemla were numbered with the Nephites, and this because the kingdom had been conferred upon none but those who were descendants of Nephi.

verse 13 We have already discussed the concept that the Nephites and Mulekites will never completely unite (see the commentary for verse 4). Rightful leadership of this combined group will always remain in the hands of the Nephites.

14 And now it came to pass that when Mosiah had made an end of speaking and reading to the people, he desired that Alma should also speak to the people.

15 And Alma did speak unto them, when they were assembled together in large bodies, and he went from one body to another, preaching unto the people repentance and faith on the Lord.

16 And he did exhort the people of Limhi and his brethren, all those that had been delivered out of bondage, that they should remember that it was the Lord that did deliver them.

verses 15-16 Grant R. Hardy in his helpful article “Mormon as Editor” (in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, edited by John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne, 15-28) has suggested that these verses may show an interesting example of the biases of the prophet Mormon as he edited the large plates of Nephi. Brother Hardy points out

two major tendencies Mormon evidenced as he made his editorial choices. First, he interpreted political events in spiritual terms, and he highlighted the distinction between the obedient and the disobedient.

Two assumptions about this passage seem reasonable: Limhi and his brethren made up one of these large bodies of people, and Mormon had access to records of Alma's words to each of these groups. Mormon mentioned general preachings of repentance and faith, but the only specific instruction he recounted was the exhortation to Limhi's people to remember that the Lord was responsible for their deliverance. This editorial choice is puzzling when we recall that Limhi's people had freed themselves by getting their Lamanite guards drunk (see Mosiah 22). We even know the name of the man who concocted the scheme—Gideon. We also remember the conference in which Ammon and Limhi "began to consult with the people how they should deliver themselves out of bondage" (Mosiah 22:1). Their liberation seemed to be the result of sheer cunning—chapter twenty-two does not mention God once. And yet here in chapter twenty-five, Mormon's editing stresses that, despite appearances, God delivered Limhi's people just as much as he did Alma's people who had made a genuinely miraculous escape (Mosiah 24:16-25).

We thus see evidence of the point behind Mormon's editing—no matter what we may think about our own resourcefulness, decisiveness, and timing, God is still in charge. Mormon tends to interpret political and historical events in spiritual terms. This inclination is evident in his editing as well as in his direct "thus we see" comments.

Further evidence of Mormon's editing can be seen in this chapter. Look again at verses 7-11. Notice how Mormon probably takes some license with the reaction of the crowd to their being read the records of Zeniff and Alma. He has them all shifting back and forth simultaneously, from joy in verse eight to sorrow in verse nine, to praise in verse ten, and back to pain and anguish in verse eleven. In each case the pains of the disobedient contrast sharply and immediately with the joys of the obedient. The exposition of God's justice is clear, simple, and concise, and it owes its striking form to Mormon's editorial hand.

This type of editing is characteristic of the entire Book of Mormon. Mormon's motives for what he includes and what he does not are clear. His goal is not to give us a detailed historical account of ancient Nephite culture. Rather it is to turn our hearts to God. One of the ways Mormon does this is by emphasizing that those who follow God are blessed, while those who reject him suffer. The problem however, is that life is more complicated than this. We all know of instances in which good people suffer while the evil go unpunished. And most people are neither entirely righteous nor wholly wicked. Yet because the principle of God's justice is ultimately true, Mormon helps us out in the Book of Mormon by simplifying stories so that we can clearly see the results of good and bad behavior. Because of Mormon's editing, there is no question as to who

is righteous and who is wicked, and that the bad things that happen are truly terrible, while the good things are wondrous indeed.

In some of Mormon's interpolations, Mormon identifies himself (see Words of Mormon; 3 Nephi 5:8-26; 26:6-12; 28:24; 4 Nephi 1:23), but more often he uses signals such as "thus we see," and "behold," and "I will show you" in an attempt to stress matters of particular spiritual importance to his readers (see Alma 24:19, 27; 50:19-23; Helaman 3:27-30; 12:1-2).

17 And it came to pass that after Alma had taught the people many things, and had made an end of speaking to them, that king Limhi was desirous that he might be baptized; and all his people were desirous that they might be baptized also.

18 Therefore, Alma did go forth into the water and did baptize them; yea, he did baptize them after the manner he did his brethren in the waters of Mormon; yea, and as many as he did baptize did belong to the church of God; and this because of their belief on the words of Alma.

verses 17-18 You will recall that King Limhi and his people had wanted to be baptized while they were still in the land of Nephi. Yet there was no one with the proper authority available to baptize them (Mosiah 21:33-35).

verse 18 "as many as he did baptize did belong to the church of God" Here is a teaching that we have learned since childhood. Baptism is necessary for entry into the church and required in order to take upon oneself the name of Christ (see verse 23).

19 And it came to pass that king Mosiah granted unto Alma that he might establish churches throughout all the land of Zarahemla; and gave him power to ordain priests and teachers over every church.

verse 19 "king Mosiah granted unto Alma . . . power to ordain priests and teachers over every church" Previously the right to administer the church and to ordain priests and teachers had belonged solely to the Nephite king who obviously held the priesthood keys or right of presidency. Here is the first instance in the Book of Mormon of separation of church and state.

Alma will preside over the church in Zarahemla for about thirty years, from his arrival in Zarahemla in about 122 BC until his death in 91 BC at the age of 82. He is considered to be the great builder of the church in the Book of Mormon, and is given credit for founding the church both in Mormon (at the "waters of Mormon") and in Zarahemla.

"granted unto Alma that he might establish churches throughout all the land of Zarahemla" Each of the Nephite congregations is referred to as a "church." The church likely already existed in Zarahemla, but Alma was called to divide it into congregations and bring to it more organization and leadership.

We will learn that in spite of delegating the responsibility of administering the church to Alma, Mosiah maintained his own council of priest advisers (Mosiah 27:1). This should not be surprising. These priests, notwithstanding their ecclesiastical designation, were likely the best educated and most astute men in the kingdom, and might be expected to form a body well qualified to counsel the king, even on political matters.

We have already concluded that these priests and teachers held the Melchizedek priesthood (Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, 3:87). Elder McConkie has added to our understanding of these offices: “In general terms, a priest is a minister.” While a priest must hold the priesthood, the “designation [priest] . . . has no reference to any particular office in the priesthood” (*Mormon Doctrine*, 598). “Among the Nephites, brethren holding the Melchizedek priesthood were consecrated teachers and given teaching and administrative powers and responsibilities. . . . They had jurisdiction over the churches [congregations] and, along with the priests, were ‘to preach and to teach the word of God’ (Alma 23:4)” (*Ibid.*, 776).

20 Now this was done because there were so many people that they could not all be governed by one teacher; neither could they all hear the word of God in one assembly;

21 Therefore they did assemble themselves together in different bodies, being called churches; every church having their priests and their teachers, and every priest preaching the word according as it was delivered to him by the mouth of Alma.

22 And thus, notwithstanding there being many churches they were all one church, yea, even the church of God; for there was nothing preached in all the churches except it were repentance and faith in God.

verses 21-22 The church consisted of many “churches” or congregations, yet they all taught the same doctrine.

verse 22 “even the church of God” Elder Bruce R. McConkie’s definition of the church of God is beautiful in its simplicity. The church is, he said, “God’s kingdom, the kingdom of God on earth, and as such is designed to prepare men for an inheritance in the kingdom of God in heaven, which is the celestial kingdom. Our Lord Jesus Christ is the Eternal King” (*A New Witness for the Articles of Faith*, 335).

“there was nothing preached in all the churches except it were repentance and faith in God” To preach “repentance” is to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is to teach of Christ’s atonement and resurrection and their implications in our eternal lives.

23 And now there were seven churches in the land of Zarahemla. And it came to pass that whosoever were desirous to take upon them the name of Christ, or of God, they did join the churches of God;

verse 23 “seven churches” In Zarahemla there was one “church,” but it was made up of subordinate local units also called “churches.” For a discussion of the possible significance of the number seven, see the commentary for Jacob 1:13.

24 And they were called the people of God. And the Lord did pour out his Spirit upon them, and they were blessed, and prospered in the land.

Mosiah Chapter 26

This chapter reports the difficulties encountered by the church due to the unbelief of the rising generation. It also describes Alma's struggle to appropriately deal with the transgressions of church members.

verses 1-4 If the people of King Benjamin, who were all converted by his preaching, diligently taught the gospel to their children, why did many of those children fall away? After all, 2 Nephi 4:5 teaches us the doctrine that "If ye are brought up in the way ye should go ye will not depart from it." We must be careful to keep in mind that this statement from 2 Nephi is not actually a doctrinal pronouncement. Rather it is an expression of faith and hope which will not always, unfortunately, hold true.

1 Now it came to pass 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.

verse 1 "being little children at the time he spake unto his people" Benjamin delivered his speech in 124 BC. This verse probably refers to a time about 100 BC when the children who listened to King Benjamin would have grown to adulthood.

"tradition of their fathers" We have encountered this expression previously (Mosiah 10:12; 26:1). It refers to the unwritten "lore" or beliefs passed along by word of mouth from generation to generation. In this particular case it refers to the tradition of righteousness, the principles of the gospel of Christ, being passed along by the Nephites in Zarahemla.

2 They did not believe what had been said concerning the resurrection of the dead, neither did they believe concerning the coming of Christ.

3 And now because of their unbelief they could not understand the word of God; and their hearts were hardened.

verse 3 The process is as old as the earth itself. Sin leads to a loss of the Spirit of God. Without the influence of the Spirit, it is simply impossible to comprehend spiritual truths. Such an individual who does not possess the influence of the Holy Spirit is said to have a "hardened heart." In the non-believer's heart, things of the world—carnality in all its forms—displace all matters of a spiritual nature. See the discussion of hard-heartedness in the commentary for Alma 10:6.

4 And they would not be baptized; neither would they join the church. And they were a separate people as to their faith, and remained so ever after, even in their carnal and sinful state; for they would not call upon the Lord their God.

5 And now in the reign of Mosiah they were not half so numerous as the people of God; but because of the dissensions among the brethren they became more numerous.

verse 5 Obviously there became a growing wave of dissent among these young people in Zarahemla, though they were not yet in the majority.

The meaning of the phrase “dissensions among the brethren” is not entirely clear. We have not been told of any major dissensions among the brethren of Mosiah who held positions of leadership. It is likely that the phrase is simply intended to refer to inter-generational dissension.

6 For it came to pass that they did deceive many with their flattering words, who were in the church, and did cause them to commit many sins; therefore it became expedient that those who committed sin, that were in the church, should be admonished by the church.

verse 6 “For it came to pass that they did deceive many with their flattering words” The spiritless and unbelieving younger generation were vocal in their godlessness and worldliness. *Flattery*, as it is used in the Book of Mormon, is a negative characteristic. It is the inclination and the ability of an unrighteous individual to bring others to his way of thinking. Such an individual who desires to so influence others is oft times attractive and prominent and honored by the world. He appeals to those worldly desires and needs which each of us possesses. Jesus taught that worldly individuals are likely to be loved by the world, while true disciples of Christ are more likely to be hated by the world (John 15:19). Jesus further warned, “Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you!” (Luke 6:26).

For a discussion of the various forms of the word *flatter*, see the commentary for 2 Nephi 28:22.

Obviously, some of the non-believers at this particular time in Book of Mormon history were similarly charismatic and persuasive and had the ability to lead others away from the Church. One such was the son of the prophet Alma, the younger Alma (Mosiah 27:8).

“it became expedient that those who committed sin, that were in the church, should be admonished by the church” We are taught here an important principle—that those who sin and pose a danger to the spiritual welfare of others in the church should be “admonished by the church.” To admonish is to reprove or to express warning or disapproval. It has been suggested that if we were to tolerate blatant sin and divisiveness in the church today, the brightness of the church as a beacon or light to the world would dim, and the Spirit would cease to strive with the church as it otherwise

might. President George Q. Cannon, in speaking of apostasy within the church, said: “Now, such a condition of things if permitted to continue in our midst, unchecked, would be productive of the most terrible consequences. The Spirit of God would undoubtedly be so grieved that it would forsake not only those who are guilty of these acts, but it would withdraw itself from those who would suffer them to be done in our midst unchecked and unrebuked; and from the president of the church down, throughout the entire ranks of the priesthood, there would be a loss of the Spirit of God, a withdrawal of his gifts and blessing and his power, because of their not taking the proper measures to check and to expose their iniquity” (*JD*, 26:139).

Modern-day scriptures suggest that we may offend God lest we judge the sinners within the church: “And him that repenteth not of his sins, and confesseth them not, ye shall bring before the church, and do with him as the scripture saith unto you, either by commandment or by revelation. And this ye shall do that God may be glorified—not because ye forgive not, having not compassion, but that ye may be justified in the eyes of the law, that ye may not offend him who is your lawgiver—verily I say, for this cause ye shall do these things” (D&C 64:12-14). This is a subject that might provoke some debate among thoughtful individuals. Obviously each individual case must be considered on its own merits, and there is certainly much room in the church for repentance and forgiveness (verses 28-30). President Harold B. Lee taught, “The gospel is to save men, not to condemn them; but to save, it is sometimes necessary to confront and to discipline as the Lord has directed (*The Teachings of Harold B. Lee*, Edited by Clyde J. Williams, [Salt Lake City: Book craft], 1996, 118).

In addition to helping transgressors repent, formal church discipline serves to cleanse the church. When sin goes unchecked in the church, the Spirit of the Lord withdraws, and the entire institution is adversely affected (Cannon, George Q., *JD*, 26:139). The Lord’s authorized leaders have a solemn obligation to protect the church from such danger (Alma 4:10; 5:59-60; D&C 20:83; 107:72). Christ taught his disciples that those who will not repent “shall not be numbered among my people, that [they] may not destroy my people, for behold I know my sheep, and they are numbered” (3 Nephi 18:31). “Nevertheless,” Jesus continued, “ye shall not cast [them] out of your synagogues . . . for unto such shall ye continue to minister; for ye know not but what they will return and repent . . . and I shall heal them” (3 Nephi 18:32). Jesus’s instructions, which teach intolerance of sin and yet compassion for the transgressor, echo his words to the prophet Joseph Smith: “For I the Lord cannot look upon sin with the least degree of allowance; nevertheless, he that repents and does the commandments of the Lord shall be forgiven” (D&C 1:31-33).

Alma’s implementation of the Lord’s instructions will be a blessing to individuals and to the church, for “they began again to have peace and to prosper exceedingly in the affairs of the church, walking circumspectly before God, receiving many, and baptizing many” (verse 37).

“those who committed sin . . . should be admonished by the church” Some definitions of the word *admonished* found in *Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language* include, “to warn or notify of a fault; to reprove with mildness; to counsel against wrong practices; to caution or advise; in ecclesiastical affairs, to reprove a member of the church for a fault, either publicly or privately.” For an alternate meaning of *admonished*, see the commentary for Omni 1:13.

7 And it came to pass that they were brought before the priests, and delivered up unto the priests by the teachers; and the priests brought them before Alma, who was the high priest.

8 Now king Mosiah had given Alma the authority over the church.

9 And it came to pass that Alma did not know concerning them; but there were many witnesses against them; yea, the people stood and testified of their iniquity in abundance.

verse 9 “Alma did not know concerning them” It appears that when these dissenters were brought before Alma, he had no prior first-hand knowledge of their offenses. Accordingly he required the testimony of “many witnesses against them.”

10 Now there had not any such thing happened before in the church; therefore Alma was troubled in his spirit, and he caused that they should be brought before the king.

11 And he said unto the king: Behold, here are many whom we have brought before thee, who are accused of their brethren; yea, and they have been taken in divers iniquities. And they do not repent of their iniquities; therefore we have brought them before thee, that thou mayest judge them according to their crimes.

verse 11 “And they do not repent of their iniquities” This phrase implies that these dissenters had already been admonished or warned, yet they had not heeded the warning. They had failed to repent.

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

verses 10-12 It is interesting that Alma would turn to the king for assistance in solving this troublesome ecclesiastical problem. Alma, after all, had expressed firm anti-monarchical views (Mosiah 23:6-9). Perhaps old habits die hard. Mosiah, however, refuses to become involved in this purely religious issue, and he places the issue back on Alma’s shoulders: “I judge them not; therefore I deliver them into thy hands to be judged.” Obviously Mosiah is even more committed to the principle of separation of church and state than is Alma. We will learn that Mosiah is also a firm anti-monarchist himself (Mosiah 29:13, 16-18).

13 And now the spirit of Alma was again troubled; and he went and inquired of the Lord what he should do concerning this matter, for he feared that he should do wrong in the sight of God.

verse 13 Now Alma is in a quandary. Previously in Nephite culture, the king had been the last word and final resort in all religious questions. It is obvious, however, that Mosiah had given up such a role.

14 And it came to pass that after he had poured out his whole soul to God, the voice of the Lord came to him, saying:

verse 14 This is a most exciting verse. In response to Alma's sincere and earnest prayer, he was privileged to hear the voice of the Lord! One is left to wonder as to the mechanism by which Alma received this important revelation on church discipline (verses 15-32). Was, for example, the will of the Lord made known to him by the Spirit? Did he hear the audible voice of the Lord? Was he favored to see and hear the Lord in open vision? Enos had a similar experience after he had prayed "all the day long" and into the night (Enos 1:4-5). We will later learn that Alma wrote down this counsel from the Lord so that he would not forget it and so that he might judge members of the Church fairly and according to the commandments of the Lord (verses 29-30, 32- 33). The Lord will teach Alma that this pattern of judgment in the church was parallel to what would occur at the final judgment (verse 20-28).

15 Blessed art thou, Alma, and blessed are they who were baptized in the waters of Mormon. Thou art blessed because of thy exceeding faith in the words alone of my servant Abinadi.

16 And blessed are they because of their exceeding faith in the words alone which thou hast spoken unto them.

verses 15-16 What is the significance of the word "alone" in these verses? Alma had believed the preaching of Abinadi without the help of any particular divine manifestation and without the testimony of other witnesses except for the whispering of the Spirit. The Lord in our dispensation has called such believing souls "blessed" (D&C 50:36).

17 And blessed art thou because thou hast established a church among this people; and they shall be established, and they shall be my people.

verse 17 "they shall be established" The Lord here still has reference to those "who were baptized in the waters of Mormon." This phrase appears to mean, "they shall become established members of the church here in Zarahemla."

18 Yea, blessed is this people who are willing to bear my name; for in my name shall they be called; and they are mine.

verse 18 In this verse the Savior states that the members of his church will be called “in my name” rather than “by my name.” He is not giving us his name. Rather he is saying that when we are called up to receive eternal life, he will be our advocate. Those who know and love him will be called up. We will be called in his name (see also verse 24).

19 And because thou hast inquired of me concerning the transgressor, thou art blessed.

verse 19 “Thou art blessed,” and therefore you shall learn the answer to your entreaty.

20 Thou art my servant; and I covenant with thee that thou shalt have eternal life; and thou shalt serve me and go forth in my name, and shalt gather together my sheep.

verse 20 Alma is sealed up by the Lord to eternal life. His calling and election is made sure. For a discussion of this remarkable covenant between God and man, see the commentary for Helaman 10:4-7 and also the *Calling and Election Made Sure* in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, chapter 16.

verses 21-32 These verses contain the divine pattern for church disciplinary action. This information was revealed to Alma by the Lord after Alma’s sincere prayer for direction (verse 14) and is still pertinent today in the Lord’s Church.

21 And he that will hear my voice shall be my sheep; and him shall ye receive into the church, and him will I also receive.

22 For behold, this is my church; whosoever is baptized shall be baptized unto repentance. And whomsoever ye receive shall believe in my name; and him will I freely forgive.

verses 21-22 The first principle of church discipline is prevention. The best form of prevention is to baptize only truly repentant converts who had accepted Jesus Christ. Accordingly, only those who hear and believe the word of the Lord will be received into the church.

“him shall ye receive into the church, and him will I also receive” Alma was to judge whether or not the prospective member was a truly repentant believer committed to a Christ-like life. The Lord would then ratify Alma’s decision. The Lord thus confirms that Alma held the keys of the kingdom. And how does he confirm this fact? The Lord said to Joseph Smith in our dispensation: “I have conferred upon you the keys and power of the priesthood, wherein I restore all things, and make known unto you all things in due time. And verily, verily, I say unto you, that whatsoever you seal on

earth shall be sealed in heaven; and whatsoever you bind on earth, in my name and by my word, saith the Lord, it shall be eternally bound in the heavens” (D&C 132:45-46).

“For behold, this is my church” Here is an important doctrine. Christ is head of the church, and he directs his church through revelation to his prophet (verse 14).

“him will I freely forgive” The Lord extends a generous offer of forgiveness to those who are baptized with sincere intent. It is comforting to know that this same offer applies to us today in the Church. It is vital that each of us has been “baptized unto repentance.”

23 For it is I that taketh upon me the sins of the world; for it is I that hath created them; and it is I that granteth unto him that believeth unto the end a place at my right hand.

verse 23 The Lord reiterates his qualifications as our Savior.

What is the antecedent of the pronoun “them” in this verse? It certainly is not the “sins of the world.” It is, from the previous two verses, “he that will hear my voice,” “him shall ye receive into the church,” and “whosoever is baptized.”

Is Jesus our creator? Wasn’t it the Father who created us? In what sense is Jesus referred to here as having “created them”? We know that the Father of our spirits is God the Father. Christ participated with his Father in creating the earth and all things upon the face of the earth including the mortal materials of the earth—the dust of the earth—of which the bodies of man are comprised. “And I, God, said unto mine Only Begotten, which was with me from the beginning: Let us make man *in our image, after our likeness*; and it was so” (Moses 2:26-27, italics added; see also Isaiah 45:12; 2 Nephi 29:7; Jacob 2:21; Alma 1:4). Additionally the Savior may be speaking here for God the Father according to the principle of “divine investiture of authority.” See also the commentary for Alma 5:15.

“a place at my right hand” This phrase refers to exaltation in the celestial kingdom.

24 For behold, in my name are they called; and if they know me they shall come forth, and shall have a place eternally at my right hand.

verse 24 “and if they know me” What does it mean to know God? It is the same as to love God. It is to obey his commands—to follow his counsel. It is only in this way that we will come home to him.

verses 25-28 These verses apparently refer to those who will eventually go with Satan and become sons of perdition.

25 And it shall come to pass that when the second trump shall sound then shall they that never knew me come forth and shall stand before me.

verse 25 “when the second trump shall sound” Keep in mind the fact that the doctrine of the after-life, as taught to and understood by the Book of Mormon prophets, was apparently simplified and incomplete relative to our present-day understanding. The expression “second trump” here seems to signal the time between the resurrection of those who will inherit the telestial glory and the resurrection of those who will become sons of perdition. In the only other usage of the phrase “second trump” in the scriptures (D&C 88:99), the expression refers instead to the moment between the morning and afternoon of the first resurrection. This is the interval following the resurrection of the celestial souls and just before the resurrection of those bound for the terrestrial kingdom. Please review the doctrine of the resurrection in the commentary for 2 Nephi 9:15.

26 And then shall they know that I am the Lord their God, that I am their Redeemer; but they would not be redeemed.

verse 26 Even the sons of perdition will know that Christ is the Savior, though they will confess that knowledge only grudgingly, and their confession will imply no acceptance or submission.

27 And then I will confess unto them that I never knew them; and they shall depart into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

verse 27 “I will confess unto them that I never knew them” Certainly the Lord knows, in fact is intimately acquainted with, every creature. How then could the Lord say of the wicked, “I never knew them.” John W. Welch has provided a possible explanation: “The Hebrew word ‘know’ (*yada*) has a broad range of meanings. One of them is covenantal. [Speaking to Israel, the Lord said through the prophet Amos] “You only have I known of all the families on earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities (Amos 3:3). . . . Yahweh had recognized only Israel as his legitimate servants; only to them had he granted the covenant” (*Illuminating the Sermon at the Temple & Sermon on the Mount*, [Copublished by FARMS: Provo, Utah and Deseret Book: Salt Lake City, Utah], 95-96). Certainly the Lord is aware of every being upon the earth, but he covenants with or “knows,” in the special sense of these two verses (26 and 27), only those who do good works in his name and by the Spirit of God.

28 Therefore I say unto you, that he that will not hear my voice, the same shall ye not receive into my church, for him I will not receive at the last day.

29 Therefore I say unto you, Go; and whosoever transgresseth against me, him shall ye judge according to the sins which he has committed; and if he confess his sins before thee and me, and repenteth in the sincerity of his heart, him shall ye forgive, and I will forgive him also.

verse 29 **“him shall ye judge according to the sins which he has committed”** The judgment of a person must be commensurate with the violation. Certain priesthood officers in the church then and now are appointed judges in Israel. Then, it included Alma the high priest and perhaps others. Today it includes bishops, stake presidents, mission presidents, and general authorities. The judgments that might be meted out by these officers are strictly restricted. Today our doctrine on this subject is: “We believe that all religious societies have a right to deal with their members . . . provided that such dealings be for fellowship and good standing; but we do not believe that any religious society has authority to try men on the right of property or life, to take from them this world’s goods, or to put them in jeopardy of either life or limb, or to inflict any physical punishment upon them. They can only excommunicate them from their society, and withdraw from them their fellowship” (D&C 134:10).

“if he confess his sins before thee and me” A vital step toward repentance is that the transgressor confess his sins before God and, when appropriate, before an authorized church leader.

There are certain serious sins which may affect an individual’s standing in the church and his ability to hold office in the church. Examples would include such sins as murder, certain instances of apostasy, incest, other serious moral transgressions, and serious criminal acts. These sins require two kinds of forgiveness, the forgiveness of the Lord and the forgiveness of the church. They also require confessions both to God and to the “common judges” of the church.

“repenteth in the sincerity of his heart” True repentance requires more than “worldly sorrow.” It also requires “godly sorrow” (2 Corinthians 7:9-11). Worldly sorrow consists of that sorrow born of fear of social ostracism, the fear of having to suffer the practical and often humiliating consequences of one’s actions. In contrast, godly sorrow consists in the knowledge that one has offended God, broken the divine law, strayed from the strait and narrow path, and jeopardized his eternal future. An individual who “in the sincerity of his heart” suffers godly sorrow is eager and anxious to receive any punishment required to right himself before the Lord. He is not inclined to dictate the terms of his own punishment. He possesses “a broken heart and a contrite spirit” (2 Nephi 2:7; 3 Nephi 9:20). He is devoid of hypocrisy, pretense, and deception. The prophet Joel described him as one who is apt to “rend [his] heart and not [his] garments” (Joel 2:12-13). One cannot come to experience true godly sorrow lest it be personally revealed by the Holy Spirit. It does not come easily. It is a precious gift of the Spirit. And how does one acquire this gift of the Spirit? The formula for acquiring any gift of the Spirit is always the same. First one must summon from within himself a genuine desire to obtain the gift—in this case to repent. One must then evidence this desire by “experimenting upon the words.” That is, one must strive with one’s conscious and purposeful thoughts and behavior to recognize one’s errors and feel remorse for them. One must plead for forgiveness from the Lord in humble prayer. One must make

amends where possible by asking the forgiveness of any who might have been offended. One must also contemplate the excruciating suffering which the Lord willingly agreed to suffer and the gratitude which each of us should have to him. Once sufficient effort has been expended, then the Lord may see fit to bestow the gift of godly sorrow, a heartfelt desire and determination to repent—to change one's life. Only when one possesses true godly sorrow does that individual have the strength and ability to complete the process of true repentance or change.

Exactly what are the characteristics of the spiritual gift of godly sorrow? Figuratively it may be understood as being equivalent to a personal interview with the Savior himself in which the Lord addressed himself to the particular sin of the individual. The love and concern of the Savior for the sinner would prevail at this interview. The individual would be brought to a clear understanding of his sins and the consequences of remaining unrepentant, yet the Savior would plainly manifest to the individual the road to repentance and the real hope of forgiveness. A genuine remorse would result from a yearning to remain or return to the warm and loving presence of the Lord and the possibility that a failure to repent of one's sins may render that hope forever untenable. The overall effect of this "personal interview" would be to engender in the individual a compelling urge to do whatever it takes to be forgiven and start anew.

There are many forms of counterfeit godly sorrow. A person may be sorry he has lost a blessing, or he may be unhappy that he is not permitted to continue "to take happiness in sin" (see Alma 41:10; Mormon 2:13). His sorrow may be only because of the embarrassment of being caught. That type of "repentance" will not cleanse a soul of its unrighteousness. Indeed, Paul indicated that some "repentance" itself needs to be repented of: "Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner. . . . For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death. For behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves" (2 Corinthians 7:9-11). True repentance follows when a person has deep remorse that he has offended God by breaking his laws and being disobedient. He is sorry because of the alienation from God that the sin has brought into his life. Repentance then is "of the godly sort," and he learns that "wickedness never was happiness" (Alma 41:10). Because repentance requires a broken heart and a contrite spirit, nothing less will bring permanent relief. Mormon lamented that the Nephites were sorrowful, but not for the right reasons: "Their sorrowing was not unto repentance, because of the goodness of God; but it was rather the sorrowing of the damned" (Mormon 2:13). Even though the scripture says the blood of Jesus Christ "was shed for the remission of your sins" (D&C 27:2), because nothing but genuine remorse for having offended God can bring forgiveness, the Lord has said that "my blood shall not cleanse them if they hear me not" (D&C 29:17).

30 Yea, and as often as my people repent will I forgive them their trespasses against me.

verse 30 Is it possible to abuse the principle of repentance by repeatedly sinning and repenting as seems convenient? Keep in mind that the Lord knows intimately the heart of each man.

31 And ye shall also forgive one another your trespasses; for verily I say unto you, he that forgiveth not his neighbor's trespasses when he says that he repents, the same hath brought himself under condemnation.

verse 31 The doctrine of forgiveness without qualification is clearly laid out in the scriptures and is sobering to contemplate: "For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you; But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matthew 6:14-15; 3 Nephi 13:14-15; see also D&C 64:8-10).

32 Now I say unto you, Go; and whosoever will not repent of his sins the same shall not be numbered among my people; and this shall be observed from this time forward.

verse 32 "Now I say unto you, Go" The command "Go" or "Go to" in the scriptures means "Go to it" or "Get to work."

"whosoever will not repent of his sins the same shall not be numbered among my people" Here is introduced the concept of excommunication. This likely was a new idea to Alma. Nephite culture had held the idea that merely being born a Nephite numbered one among the people of the Lord, and one could not be excommunicated from being a Nephite (see the commentary for Alma 5:57).

33 And it came to pass when Alma had heard these words he wrote them down that he might have them, and that he might judge the people of that church according to the commandments of God.

verse 33 In what context did Alma hear "these words"? See the commentary for verse 14.

34 And it came to pass that Alma went and judged those that had been taken in iniquity, according to the word of the Lord.

35 And whosoever repented of their sins and did confess them, them he did number among the people of the church;

verse 35 Here we again are taught the importance of confessing, when appropriate, one's sins to the Lord and to proper church authority or even to oneself. The Lord said, "Behold, he who has repented of his sins, the same is forgiven, and I, the

Lord, remember them no more. By this ye may know if a man repenteth of his sins— behold, he will confess them and forsake them” (D&C 58:42-43).

36 And those that would not confess their sins and repent of their iniquity, the same were not numbered among the people of the church, and their names were blotted out.

verse 36 Blotted out, of course, means removed. According to the Lord’s word, “the names of the wicked shall not be mingled with the names of my people” (Alma 5:57). Transgressors who fail to humble themselves, confess their sins, and repent, have their names removed, or blotted out, from the records of the Church. The corollary to “not [being] numbered among the people of Christ” is excommunication (Moroni 6:7). The removal of the names of rebellious and unrepentant church members from church records is a formal measure reflecting a loss that has already taken place in the heart. King Benjamin taught that the name of Christ, received by those who enter the gospel covenant will “never shall be blotted out, except it be through transgression” (Mosiah 1:12; cf. 5:7-8, 11). In an ultimate sense, the names of the wicked are blotted out of the Lord’s book of life. The book of life contains the names of those who will receive an inheritance at the Lord’s right hand (Alma 5:57-58).

It might also be added that those who are “blotted out” or excommunicated should still be received and welcomed in church meetings in case they should one day return to the fold (3 Nephi 18:32).

37 And it came to pass that Alma did regulate all the affairs of the church; and they began again to have peace and to prosper exceedingly in the affairs of the church, walking circumspectly before God, receiving many, and baptizing many.

verse 37 “walking circumspectly before God” *Circumspectly* means cautiously; with watchfulness or attention.

38 And now all these things did Alma and his fellow laborers do who were over the church, walking in all diligence, teaching the word of God in all things, suffering all manner of afflictions, being persecuted by all those who did not belong to the church of God.

39 And they did admonish their brethren; and they were also admonished, every one by the word of God, according to his sins, or to the sins which he had committed, being commanded of God to pray without ceasing, and to give thanks in all things.

verse 39 Here is an appropriate comment on life in general. As we labor in life, we find ourselves in a position to admonish others around us, whether they be children, employees, or fellow church members. But it never ceases to be true that we ourselves are constantly “admonished, every one by the word of God, according to [our] sins.”

Mosiah Chapter 27

Scripture Mastery

Mosiah 27 The rebellion and conversion of the younger Alma and the four sons of Mosiah

This chapter is the first account of the conversion of the younger Alma and the four sons of King Mosiah and the beginning of their labors for the church. We will yet read two additional accounts of this miraculous conversion related by the younger Alma to his sons Helaman and Shiblon.

1 And now it came to pass that the persecutions which were inflicted on the church by the unbelievers became so great that the church began to murmur, and complain to their leaders concerning the matter; and they did complain to Alma. And Alma laid the case before their king, Mosiah. And Mosiah consulted with his priests.

verse 1 In any era, it is inevitable that persecution will be felt by members of the church of Christ. Paul wrote, “All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Timothy 3:12). Joseph Smith taught, “The enemies of this people will never get weary of their persecution against the church, until they are overcome” (*TPJS*, 259).

“Mosiah consulted with his priests” Apparently Mosiah maintained a group of priests that functioned at times as a council to which he could go for advice and counsel (see also Alma 23:16). Even King Noah had utilized his priests for this function (Mosiah 12:17). Presumably Mosiah’s priests also had ecclesiastical functions when they were not counseling the king.

Mosiah had previously refused to become involved when Alma requested that Mosiah judge a group of Nephite sinners (Mosiah 26:10-12). Mosiah had apparently felt that the matter was purely a religious one and should be handled by Alma and the church. On this particular occasion, however, Mosiah obviously felt that there were civil issues involved, and he did become involved.

2 And it came to pass that king Mosiah sent a proclamation throughout the land round about that there should not any unbeliever persecute any of those who belonged to the church of God.

3 And there was a strict command throughout all the churches that there should be no persecutions among them, that there should be an equality among all men;

verse 3 “that there should be an equality among all men” This phrase suggests that among the persecutions leveled against the church members, there might have been something of social or socioeconomic discrimination or class prejudice.

4 That they should let no pride nor haughtiness disturb their peace; that every man should esteem his neighbor as himself, laboring with their own hands for their support.

5 Yea, and all their priests and teachers should labor with their own hands for their support, in all cases save it were in sickness, or in much want; and doing these things, they did abound in the grace of God.

verses 4-5 Notice here how Alma emphasizes the need for equality in the church. This is, of course, a clear contrast to the practices of King Noah and his priests (Mosiah 11:6, 14).

verse 5 The expression “much want” may be alternatively rendered “extraordinary need.”

6 And there began to be much peace again in the land; and the people began to be very numerous, and began to scatter abroad upon the face of the earth, yea, on the north and on the south, on the east and on the west, building large cities and villages in all quarters of the land.

verse 6 “The people began to be very numerous, and began to scatter abroad upon the face of the earth . . . in all quarters of the land” This refers to the land of Zarahemla. It is interesting that Book of Mormon writers commonly spoke of their land as being divided into four quarters (“north,” “south,” “east,” and “west”—see also Alma 43:26; 52:10; 56:1; 58:30). They similarly thought of the earth as being divided into four quadrants (see 1 Nephi 19:16; 22:25; 2 Nephi 10:8; 21:12; 3 Nephi 5:24; 5:26; 16:5; Ether 13:11). Research by Diane E. Wirth and Steven L. Olsen has shown that similar ideas existed in pre-Columbian America and also in the Old World. For details of this concept see the article, “Four Quarters” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, edited by John W. Welch, pages 145-47.

7 And the Lord did visit them and prosper them, and they became a large and wealthy people.

verse 7 “And the Lord did visit them” When the Lord “visits” a people, he exerts his influence over them and exercises his will among them. This may be for the purpose of blessing them (as it is in this verse); for comforting them (Alma 17:10); for judging them (Omni 1:7); or for expressing his anger at them (Ether 14:25).

“and prosper them” This may refer to material prosperity and/or spiritual prosperity.

“they became a large and wealthy people” How do you interpret the adjective “large”? The previous verse has already mentioned that they had become “numerous.” Perhaps “large” refers to manifesting an ideal nutritional state and being healthy and strong.

verses 8-37 Here is the Book of Mormon’s first of three accounts of the conversion of Alma and the sons of Mosiah. Alma will later recount his conversion story on two additional occasions, to his son Helaman in Alma 36:4-26 and to his son Shiblon in Alma 38:6-8.

John W. Welch in his article “Three Accounts of Alma’s Conversion” (*Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, 150-53) has made some interesting observations as he compared these three texts. He points out that it is apparent that all three accounts originated from the same man. Evidence for this includes the fact that the accounts contain the same distinctive phrases such as “destroy the church of God,” “lead astray,” “rebellng against God,” “he spake as it were with a voice of thunder,” “fell to the earth,” “born of God,” “the gall of bitterness,” “marvelous light,” “racked with eternal torment,” and “pained no more.” Also the details of the three accounts are remarkably consistent. “Even what superficially appears to be a difference is not. Alma 36:16 states that Alma was racked for three days and three nights. Mosiah 27:23, however, says the priests fasted for two days and two nights in pleading with the Lord for the soul of Alma. This disparity is easily explained. According to the Nephite practice, the fast would not have begun until the morning of the next day after the decision to fast, and Alma had suffered for a day before the fast began (Helaman 9:10).”

The account here in Mosiah 27 gives more emphasis to the sons of Mosiah than do the other two accounts. This is likely because king Mosiah is the one reporting the events in Mosiah 27, whereas Alma is speaking in the other accounts.

“The three accounts also consistently reflect different vantage points in Alma’s life. In Mosiah 27, Alma is a young man, spontaneously overwhelmed by the power of the angel and terrified by the prospect of the day of judgment (see verse 31). Later in Alma’s life, it is clear that the older man has faithfully and successfully served his Lord and his people all the rest of his days (see Alma 36:26-27) so that he now emphasizes his longing to be present with God (see Alma 36:22)” (*Ibid.*).

The first person here is obviously the prophet Mormon. He is telling the story, using as his resource, records written by, most probably, the younger Alma himself, though Mosiah or the senior Alma may have also written on this event.

8 Now the sons of Mosiah were numbered among the unbelievers; and also one of the sons of Alma was numbered among them, he being called Alma, after his father; nevertheless, he became a very wicked and an idolatrous man. And he

was a man of many words, and did speak much flattery to the people; therefore he led many of the people to do after the manner of his iniquities.

verse 8 Just how wicked were the younger Alma and the sons of Mosiah? Obviously they were more than simply rebellious youngsters passing through a temporary period of defiance of authority. Here Alma is described as “a very wicked and an idolatrous man,” and the sons of Mosiah will later be described as “the very vilest of sinners” (Mosiah 28:4). The experience of these four men should give hope to those today who feel hopelessly mired in sin.

The word “nevertheless” is a poignant one here, particularly for those of us who have reared children who have not been responsive to the gospel teachings. The younger Alma was reared in the home of one of the world’s great prophets and was even named after him. “Nevertheless, he became a very wicked and an idolatrous man.”

The younger Alma was obviously charismatic, persuasive, and had exceptional personal power and influence. He is described as “a man of many words, and did speak much flattery to the people.” For a discussion of the various forms of the word *flatter*, see the commentary for 2 Nephi 28:22.

The names of Alma’s mother and any siblings are unknown. He himself might have been born in the colony established by his father in the land of Helam or even earlier (see Alma 5:5).

“he being called Alma, after his father” See the commentary on “patristic names’ in the supplemental article, *Names in the Book of Mormon*.

9 And he became a great hinderment to the prosperity of the church of God; stealing away the hearts of the people; causing much dissension among the people; giving a chance for the enemy of God to exercise his power over them.

verse 9 This is the only instance in all the scriptures where Satan is referred to with the specific phrase “enemy of God.”

10 And now it came to pass that while he was going about to destroy the church of God, for he did go about secretly with the sons of Mosiah seeking to destroy the church, and to lead astray the people of the Lord, contrary to the commandments of God, or even the king—

verse 10 Alma and the four sons of Mosiah were not only guilty of breaking the commandments, they were also engaged in activities forbidden by King Mosiah’s proclamation mentioned in verse 2. They were guilty of breaking the law of the land.

11 And as I said unto you, as they were going about rebelling against God, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto them; and he descended as it were in

a cloud; and he spake as it were with a voice of thunder, which caused the earth to shake upon which they stood;

verse 11 “the angel of the Lord appeared unto them” We obviously do not know the name of this angel, but it is provocative that he is referred to as “the angel” rather than *an* angel.

One might well ask the questions: Why were these apostate sinners granted the privilege of a miraculous heavenly manifestation? Is there a danger that this remarkable story might teach those who read it the wrong lesson? Are we to learn that if a young person who has misgivings about the truth of the gospel gives vent to his doubts by actively and maliciously campaigning against the church, then he will be rescued by a heavenly manifestation from a merciful God? Perhaps it is not entirely appropriate to even ask these questions. Who are we, after all, to question our God and his agenda? Why was the apostle Paul, for example, so honored on the road to Damascus? Obviously there was a far-reaching purpose for this remarkable experience had by Alma and the sons of Mosiah. While there may be no simple answer to these questions, consider the following thoughts:

1. We certainly can assume that Alma and his brethren were among the very spiritually elect of those who have come to earth. They likely were valiant in the pre-existence as evidenced by their mortal performance after their conversions. It is to their eternal credit that they were indeed converted by this experience. It is obvious that not all of those who are favored with extraordinary spiritual experiences like this one will be completely converted by them. Consider for example Laman and Lemuel (1 Nephi 3:29) and even some individuals from our own dispensation such as Martin Harris, Oliver Cowdery, or David Whitmer.

2. We are also given to ponder the potential power of the earnest and persistent prayers of a loving parent (James 5:16). We can be sure that the senior Alma and King Mosiah were praying fervently and daily for their wayward sons (see verse 14).

12 And so great was their astonishment, that they fell to the earth, and understood not the words which he spake unto them.

verse 12 It is interesting that the angel had to repeat his message to make himself understood. It seems likely that the recipients of this divine manifestation were initially so distracted by the experience itself, that they were not receptive to the message. A similar situation will occur at the time of the Lord's personal appearance to the people in the land Bountiful following his resurrection (3 Nephi 11:3-6).

13 Nevertheless he cried again, saying: Alma, arise and stand forth, for why persecutest thou the church of God? For the Lord hath said: This is my church, and I will establish it; and nothing shall overthrow it, save it is the transgression of my people.

verse 13 Among those who were traveling about and persecuting the church, Alma was singled out and addressed by the angel. It seems likely that he was the ring leader in this group of dissenters.

“why persecutest thou the church of God?” Paul was asked a similar question on the road to Damascus—“Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?” (Acts 9:4).

“the Lord hath said: This is my church” The Lord had previously made it clear, in speaking to the elder Alma, that the church was his—it belong to the Lord (Mosiah 26:22).

“nothing shall overthrow it, save it is the transgression of my people” This seems to be an important principle which has held true since the earth began. The church is not vulnerable to destruction by external influences so long as its people are diligent and righteous. Only corruption and error within the Church is capable of destroying it.

14 And again, the angel said: Behold, the Lord hath heard the prayers of his people, and also the prayers of his servant, Alma, who is thy father; for he has prayed with much faith concerning thee that thou mightest be brought to the knowledge of the truth; therefore, for this purpose have I come to convince thee of the power and authority of God, that the prayers of his servants might be answered according to their faith.

15 And now behold, can ye dispute the power of God? For behold, doth not my voice shake the earth? And can ye not also behold me before you? And I am sent from God.

16 Now I say unto thee: Go, and remember the captivity of thy fathers in the land of Helam, and in the land of Nephi; and remember how great things he has done for them; for they were in bondage, and he has delivered them. And now I say unto thee, Alma, go thy way, and seek to destroy the church no more, that their prayers may be answered, and this even if thou wilt of thyself be cast off.

verse 16 “Now I say unto thee: Go” Here, again, is that heavenly command, alternately “Go to,” which might be interpreted as “Go to it” or “Get to work.”

“remember the captivity of thy fathers” The angel refers to the previous captivity of the two major divisions of the Zeniffites—those who followed Alma to the land of Helam and those who remained behind in the land of Nephi under the leadership of Limhi.

“and remember how great things he has done for them” The interesting expression “how great things” is found elsewhere in the scriptures (1 Samuel 12:24; Mark 5:19, 20; Luke 8:39; Acts 9:16) and is also found in other Book of Mormon verses (2 Nephi 1:1; Alma 62:50; Ether 4:14; 6:30).

“and this even if thou wilt of thyself be cast off” Here the angel delivers to Alma a naked threat. He says, in effect, “Cease this campaign to destroy the church

even if you yourself leave the church and are cast off eternally.” The implication to Alma must have been a sobering one. It was, “We don’t particularly need you in the church, but you will stop trying to destroy it for others, or else.”

17 And now it came to pass that these were the last words which the angel spake unto Alma, and he departed.

verse 17 The angel departed with his threat ringing in Alma’s ears.

18 And now Alma and those that were with him fell again to the earth, for great was their astonishment; for with their own eyes they had beheld an angel of the Lord; and his voice was as thunder, which shook the earth; and they knew that there was nothing save the power of God that could shake the earth and cause it to tremble as though it would part asunder.

verse 18 “Alma and those that were with him” We are never told exactly who was with him. We know that four of them were the sons of Mosiah—Ammon, Aaron, Omner, and Himni. Verse 34 of this chapter implies that there may have been others as well who were blessed with this marvelous spiritual experience.

“asunder” From *Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language*, we read the definition of *asunder*: “Apart, into parts; separately; in a divided state.”

19 And now the astonishment of Alma was so great that he became dumb, that he could not open his mouth; yea, and he became weak, even that he could not move his hands; therefore he was taken by those that were with him, and carried helpless, even until he was laid before his father.

verse 19 “he became weak, even that he could not move his hands” The verse suggests that in fact he couldn’t move any of his extremities! It is of interest that only Alma was so profoundly afflicted physically, or at least there is no mention of the others’ being so affected.

20 And they rehearsed unto his father all that had happened unto them; and his father rejoiced, for he knew that it was the power of God.

21 And he caused that a multitude should be gathered together that they might witness what the Lord had done for his son, and also for those that were with him.

verse 21 Father Alma was quick to recognize an incomparable teaching moment.

22 And he caused that the priests should assemble themselves together; and they began to fast, and to pray to the Lord their God that he would open the mouth of Alma, that he might speak, and also that his limbs might receive their

strength—that the eyes of the people might be opened to see and know of the goodness and glory of God.

verse 22 Fasting under these circumstances may be referred to as petitionary fasting. A precedent for this petitionary fasting is found in the Bible as when David “fasted, and went in, and lay all night upon the earth” as he prayed to the Lord to spare the life of his first son with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 12:16-23; cf. Nehemiah 1:4; Psalm 69:10; 109:24; Daniel 6:18; 9:3).

Perhaps some further comments about the habits of fasting in the Book of Mormon are appropriate. Fasting is mentioned in a few settings and apparently was used for a few different specific purposes. These include (1) fasting to mourn the death of a public figure (see the commentary for Helaman 9:10); (2) fasting in association with petitioning the Lord for certain blessings as in this verse; (3) fasting in preparation for receiving certain blessings or gifts from the Lord (see the commentary for Alma 17:3; and (4) fasting as a religious exercise or rite (see the commentary for 3 Nephi 27:1).

As the reader turns to these appointed verses, he will note that there is a biblical precedent for each of these types of fasting and that the settings in the Book of Mormon in which fasting is mentioned are wholly appropriate.

23 And it came to pass after they had fasted and prayed for the space of two days and two nights, the limbs of Alma received their strength, and he stood up and began to speak unto them, bidding them to be of good comfort:

verses 24-31 These verses have been considered a “psalm of Alma.”

24 For, said he, I have repented of my sins, and have been redeemed of the Lord; behold I am born of the Spirit.

verse 24 As we consider the experiences of both the younger Alma and Saul of Tarsus, it would seem that the only scriptural account in any way tantamount to their experience was the experience of the Savior in Gethsemane and at Calvary. Apparently the Lord has the ability, just as the Father will later manifest in Gethsemane and Calvary, to pointedly produce, in the life of a mortal, the same suffering which might be produced by a specific adverse experience, or even a series of adverse experiences. In other words he can cause suffering, in an individual, that corresponds to any adverse experience he chooses? This is the “suffering of sanctification” discussed in the section titled “How might we categorize adversities and sufferings?” in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 3, chapter 1, *Adversity and Suffering*. Pay particular attention to the discussion of type 3 suffering—that suffering orchestrated deliberately by the Lord for the purpose of schooling us. This is the same type of suffering the Father imposed upon his firstborn Son during the atoning experience. Please also read and understand

The Essence of the Lord's Atonement, volume 1, chapter 19 of *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*.

Now let us consider some important questions regarding this type of experience orchestrated by the Lord Jehovah and the Father. First, was the experience forcibly imposed upon Alma and Paul? Or, did they have some say in the matter? It seems clear that Deity would not, nor indeed could not, neglect or override the agency of any individual and force them to experience the suffering associated with this experience. Just as Jesus agreed to his awful atoning experience (“not as I will, but as thou wilt”—Matthew 26:39), so must Alma and Paul have agreed to experience this suffering. They first experienced a personal epiphany from a divine personage, either an angel or the Lord himself. Undoubtedly their spiritual plight was explained to them. There can be no question that both Alma and Paul were exceptional in the premortal world and were foreordained to a great work here in mortality. But both had lost their way. Now they needed rescuing, and perhaps there was only one way back. They had to voluntarily suffer (see Alma 36:17-18).

Another important question is: What was accomplished by their suffering? Simply stated, as they suffered well the imposed sufferings, they “earned,” and the Lord mercifully granted them, by personal revelation, gifts of the Spirit including the perquisite gifts associated with those gifts. These perquisites resulted in the conversion of Alma and Paul. Please see the section “Perquisite Gifts of the Spirit” in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 8, *The Blessings of Spiritual Gifts*.

The result was their conversion to the Lord and to his gospel in the fullest sense of the word. Alma will later utter eloquent evidence for his conversion: “Behold . . . I could remember my pains no more; yea, I was harrowed up by the memory of my sins no more. And oh, what joy, and what marvelous light I did behold; yea, my soul was filled with joy as exceeding as was my pain! Yea, I say unto you, my son, that there could be nothing so exquisite and so bitter as were my pains. Yea, and again I say unto you, my son, that on the other hand, there can be nothing so exquisite and sweet as was my joy” (Alma 36:19-21).

Alma and Paul were also inducted into what Paul will call “the fellowship of his [Christ’s] suffering” (Philippians 3:10). Please see the section entitled “The Atonement Principle” in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 3, chapter 2, *The Roles of Suffering in Our Lives*. An important effect of this suffering, aside from the conversion to the Lord and his purposes, is empathy and charity for all mankind.

We may assume that the four sons of Mosiah shared in a similar experience with their friend Alma, and evidence for their impressive empathy is found in Mosiah 28:3: “Now they were desirous that salvation should be declared to every creature, for they could not bear that any human soul should perish; yea, even the very thoughts that any soul should endure endless torment did cause them to quake and tremble.”

“I have . . . been redeemed of the Lord” Obviously it is only because of the Savior’s eventual atonement, in addition to the suffering which he himself experienced, that Alma was able to be forgiven of his sins. Again, we see an illustration of how the atonement benefited those in Old Testament times even hundreds of years before the event of Christ’s suffering in Gethsemane and on the cross.

25 And the Lord said unto me: Marvel not that all mankind, yea, men and women, all nations, kindreds, tongues and people, must be born again; yea, born of God, changed from their carnal and fallen state, to a state of righteousness, being redeemed of God, becoming his sons and daughters;

26 And thus they become new creatures; and unless they do this, they can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God.

verses 25-26 People must be “born again . . . born of God . . . changed from their carnal and fallen state, to a state of righteousness . . . [changed] to new creatures.” At this point, please reread the commentary for Mosiah 3:19 on the “natural man.” Read also the section “Baptism of Fire and of the Holy Ghost in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 1, chapter 18, *Baptism, the Ordinance that Brings Spiritual Growth*.

Every man is a “natural man” and in bondage to the flesh. In order for a man to have a chance at exaltation, it is necessary that he be repeatedly justified and sanctified by the Holy Ghost. By the Spirit’s influence, the sins of the obedient are forgiven (justification). Then increments of the iniquity, carnality, sensuality, and every other evil thing can be “burned out” of the repentant soul as if by fire. Also he receives an increment of the pertinent gifts of the Spirit. These two events comprise the phenomenon of sanctification. The person who has been thus cleansed (justified and sanctified) becomes a “new creature” of the Holy Ghost. It may be said of him that he is “born again.” Such a man is fundamentally and profoundly changed.

27 I say unto you, unless this be the case, they must be cast off; and this I know, because I was like to be cast off.

verse 27 “I was like to be cast off” Alma was about to be cast off. In light of modern revelation, we might be tempted to interpret the phrase “cast off” here as meaning that the individual is no longer a considered candidate for exaltation in the celestial kingdom. The actual meaning is more likely that Alma felt he was about to be cast off into hell or everlasting fire as a son of Perdition (see verse 28). Keep in mind the simplified doctrine of the post mortal life taught in the Book of Mormon: Man will be exalted in heaven or be cast into outer darkness with Satan. By virtue of the added insight afforded us by modern revelation, we know that the younger Alma, in spite of his “wickedness,” in all likelihood, would not have qualified to be cast into outer darkness. He might certainly, however, have been “cast off” temporarily into hell—the spirit prison.

28 Nevertheless, after wading through much tribulation, repenting nigh unto death, the Lord in mercy hath seen fit to snatch me out of an everlasting burning, and I am born of God.

verse 28 “repenting nigh unto death” Punishment must be commensurate with the gravity of the sin. It is obvious that Alma’s sins had been grievous. And he had to suffer commensurate with those sins.

“to snatch me out of an everlasting burning” To snatch is to seize hastily or abruptly. It is a bit ironic to note that here the label “everlasting burning” is used to describe a place akin to hell or to outer darkness. We know also that the phrase “everlasting burnings” is also a name for the place God dwells (*JD*, 4:54; *DHC*, 6:366).

29 My soul hath been redeemed from the gall of bitterness and bonds of iniquity. I was in the darkest abyss; but now I behold the marvelous light of God. My soul was racked with eternal torment; but I am snatched, and my soul is pained no more.

verse 29 “gall of bitterness and bonds of iniquity” Gall is a bitter and poisonous herb. “Its juice is commonly thought to be the ‘hemlock’ poison which Socrates drank” (*Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*). When the word is used in the Bible, it is usually interpreted to mean poison. In the Old Testament gall is often mentioned in association with wormwood which is a plant with a bitter taste. It is interesting that the specific phrase “gall of bitterness” is found in only one scriptural verse outside the Book of Mormon—Acts 8:23. Perhaps both Alma and Paul were quoting the phrase from an unknown Old Testament period source. Here the phrase “gall of bitterness” seems to refer to the embittered spirit that Alma had held regarding the church.

Alma’s “eternal torment” lasted only about seventy-two hours. We learn in modern revelation that “eternal” and “endless” are names given to God. Therefore “eternal” or “endless” punishment is simply God’s punishment. “Eternal” here says nothing about its duration. Eternal or endless punishment does not go on forever (*D&C* 19:6-12).

“the darkest abyss” An abyss is a vast, immeasurable void often associated with hell, darkness, and misery. The term signifies a state far from God and his light. The gospel of Jesus Christ redeems repentant individuals from the abyss of rebellion and apostasy as well as that of ignorance and false traditions (cf. Alma 26:3).

“I am snatched” The verse footnote commentary in the 1989 version of the Book of Mormon points out that the word “snatched” likely comes from the Hebrew word *natzal* which means to snatch away from danger, to save. Notice that the same verb was also used in verse 28.

30 I rejected my Redeemer, and denied that which had been spoken of by our fathers; but now that they may foresee that he will come, and that he remembereth every creature of his creating, he will make himself manifest unto all.

verse 30 A careful reading of this verse leaves one wondering about the meaning of the phrase “but now that they may foresee that he will come.” The meaning is clearer if the phrase is rendered, “but now I understand that they truly are able to foresee that he will come.” Here Alma states that he had previously rejected the Savior and the messianic prophecies and testimonies of all the Nephite prophets. But now, following his harrowing process of conversion, he understands that Christ will indeed come and that the Nephite prophets foresaw and spoke of that blessed event.

“he remembereth every creature of his creating, he will make himself manifest unto all” Here is an important principle. Every person born into the world is provided with the necessary tools and exposure to the Spirit to enable them to accept Christ. Each person is thus responsible for his own eternal destiny. No competent member of the human family will be kept sufficiently ignorant as to give them a valid excuse for not accepting Christ. It certainly is true that many on the earth may not have an opportunity to learn about his church or to hear the teachings of contemporary prophets, but the “light of Christ” exists within all of us. “And the Spirit giveth light to every man that cometh into the world; and the Spirit enlighteneth every man through the world, that hearkeneth to the voice of the Spirit” (see D&C 84:46; see also Moroni 7:16 and the commentary for that verse).

31 Yea, every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess before him. Yea, even at the last day, when all men shall stand to be judged of him, then shall they confess that he is God; then shall they confess, who live without God in the world, that the judgment of an everlasting punishment is just upon them; and they shall quake, and tremble, and shrink beneath the glance of his all-searching eye.

verse 31 “every knee shall bow and every tongue confess before him” Review the discussion of this phrase in the commentary for Mosiah 16:1. Can you imagine the drama which will surround this event? It will likely occur after all have been resurrected, even those destined to go with Satan into outer darkness. Then will each and every member of the human family kneel and acknowledge Jesus Christ as the Savior and concede that his judgments are just (D&C 84:104). Certainly a few will either refuse to confess or make this concession grudgingly and through clenched teeth. For these, this will be less a real confession of Christ, and more a grudging acknowledgment of who he is. These few will therefore remain “filthy still” (D&C 88:35).

Those “who live without God in the world” are those who never respond to the light of Christ within them. They never heed the subtle promptings which try to teach

them of their eternal identity. Most have long since choked off that small divine pipeline by their worldliness.

“then shall they confess, who live without God in the world” In biblical Hebrew the relative clause (usually introduced by who or which) often follows, rather than precedes the word or phrase to which it refers. This unique aspect of the Hebrew language is seen in this particular phrase which has the relative clause following the word *confess*. More common English would be “then shall they who live without God in the world shall confess.” Another example is found in 1 Nephi 17:27 where we read, “The Egyptians were drowned in the Red Sea, who were the armies of Pharaoh” instead of “The Egyptians who were the armies of Pharaoh were drowned in the Red Sea.”

“the glance of his all-searching eye” Christ’s knowledge of us is intimate and complete. He comprehends our every strength, failing, and motive. He understands our every desire, both noble and ignoble. He knows our hearts completely. No one can escape his insight.

32 And now it came to pass that Alma began from this time forward to teach the people, and those who were with Alma at the time the angel appeared unto them, traveling round about through all the land, publishing to all the people the things which they had heard and seen, and preaching the word of God in much tribulation, being greatly persecuted by those who were unbelievers, being smitten by many of them.

verse 32 “Alma began from this time forward to teach the people, and those who were with Alma at the time the angel appeared unto them” This passage introduces a little-known mission to the Nephites by Alma and Mosiah’s sons, seemingly between one and eight years in duration.

“being greatly persecuted by those who were unbelievers” Again, persecution of the saints is inevitable (see the commentary for verse 1 of this chapter). Now it’s the turn of the younger Alma and the four sons of Mosiah to be persecuted.

33 But notwithstanding all this, they did impart much consolation to the church, confirming their faith, and exhorting them with long-suffering and much travail to keep the commandments of God.

verse 33 “confirming their faith” Undoubtedly these five or more missionaries told the story of their miraculous conversion many times. Undoubtedly the story was a source of strength to the members of the church.

“exhorting them with long-suffering and much travail” Apparently it was the missionaries themselves who exercised “long-suffering” and who experienced “much travail” as they traveled about doing their missionary work. Travail is painful labor; severe toil.

34 And four of them were the sons of Mosiah; and their names were Ammon, and Aaron, and Omner, and Himni; these were the names of the sons of Mosiah.

35 And they traveled throughout all the lands of Zarahemla, and among all the people who were under the reign of king Mosiah, zealously striving to repair all the injuries which they had done to the church, confessing all their sins, and publishing all the things which they had seen, and explaining the prophecies and the scriptures to all who desired to hear them.

verse 35 It is sound doctrine that the diligent proclaiming of the gospel and the bearing of testimony is one way in which a sinner can be forgiven of his shortcomings. In D&C 84:61 the Lord said, “For I will forgive you of your sins with this commandment—that you remain steadfast in your minds in solemnity and the spirit of prayer, in bearing testimony to all the world of those things which are communicated unto you” (see also James 5:20).

“Himni” For commentary on the Hebrew origins of the name Himni, see the supplemental article, *Names in the Book of Mormon*.

36 And thus they were instruments in the hands of God in bringing many to the knowledge of the truth, yea, to the knowledge of their Redeemer.

37 And how blessed are they! For they did publish peace; they did publish good tidings of good; and they did declare unto the people that the Lord reigneth.

verse 37 As we have learned previously (see the commentary for Mosiah 12:21) “peace” and “good tidings of good” are all terms that refer to the good news of the everlasting gospel. To “publish” is to announce, proclaim, or promulgate.

Mosiah Chapter 28

Scripture Mastery

Mosiah 28:3 The sons of Mosiah could not bear that any human soul should perish.

1 Now it came to pass that after the sons of Mosiah had done all these things, they took a small number with them and returned to their father, the king, and desired of him that he would grant unto them that they might, with these whom they had selected, go up to the land of Nephi that they might preach the things which they had heard, and that they might impart the word of God to their brethren, the Lamanites—

verse 1 “after the sons of Mosiah had done all these things” Mosiah’s four sons had just traveled throughout the land of Zarahemla, declaring Jesus Christ to the people and trying to repair the damage they had done to the church.

“they took a small number with them” We do not know, of course, just who or how many the four sons of Mosiah took with them on their mission to the Lamanites (see also Alma 17:8).

2 That perhaps they might bring them to the knowledge of the Lord their God, and convince them of the iniquity of their fathers; and that perhaps they might cure them of their hatred towards the Nephites, that they might also be brought to rejoice in the Lord their God, that they might become friendly to one another, and that there should be no more contentions in all the land which the Lord their God had given them.

verse 2 Note that the goals of the sons of Mosiah included not only to preach the gospel to the Lamanites (“bring them to the knowledge of the Lord their God”), but also to “convince them of the iniquity of their fathers.” Please refer back to the discussion of the important concept of the “founding myth” tradition of the Lamanites, found in the commentary for Jacob 3:3-9. The sons of Mosiah were not only going to preach the gospel, but they also were going to attack head-on the primary source of Lamanite animosity, the traditional hatred of the Nephites held by the Lamanites, the “traditions of their [the Lamanites’] fathers.” They hoped to disabuse some of the Lamanites of this heinous tradition. Thus, in a sense, this was also a diplomatic mission intended to try to establish peace between the two peoples. We will learn later that they were, in some measure, successful in this crusade.

3 Now they were desirous that salvation should be declared to every creature, for they could not bear that any human soul should perish; yea, even the very

thoughts that any soul should endure endless torment did cause them to quake and tremble.

verse 3 To declare “salvation” to a people is, of course, to preach Jesus Christ to them.

“the very thoughts that any soul should endure endless torment did cause them to quake and tremble” It is likely that the anguish of soul, which the sons of Mosiah experienced in the hours and days after the angel appeared to them, was excruciating. Like Alma, they also had waded through tribulation and had been “nigh unto death” during their process of repentance (Mosiah 17:28). The suffering they had endured had surely taught them empathy for others who were also called upon to “endure endless torment.” Again, “endless torment” does not mean torment which goes on forever. It is simply a term which means God’s suffering—the suffering God intends or feels appropriate (D&C 19:10-12).

4 And thus did the Spirit of the Lord work upon them, for they were the very vilest of sinners. And the Lord saw fit in his infinite mercy to spare them; nevertheless they suffered much anguish of soul because of their iniquities, suffering much and fearing that they should be cast off forever.

verse 4 “And thus did the Spirit of the Lord work upon them” This verse explains how the Spirit schooled the sons of Mosiah and caused them to become the fully converted and fully committed saints which they had become (see verses 1-3 above).

“they suffered much anguish of soul because of their iniquities” Here is a reminder that true repentance involves more than merely apologizing. It may also involve the necessity of experiencing the godly sorrow discussed in the commentary for Mosiah 26:29. Apparently, the insight necessary to feel true godly sorrow can be experienced only with the help of the Spirit through personal revelation and personal travail.

5 And it came to pass that they did plead with their father many days that they might go up to the land of Nephi.

6 And king Mosiah went and inquired of the Lord if he should let his sons go up among the Lamanites to preach the word.

7 And the Lord said unto Mosiah: Let them go up, for many shall believe on their words, and they shall have eternal life; and I will deliver thy sons out of the hands of the Lamanites.

verse 7 Who is it that is promised eternal life in this verse, the sons of Mosiah or the Lamanites to whom they will preach the gospel? It would seem that it is most likely the former.

As we follow the sons of Mosiah on their fourteen-year mission to the Lamanites in the land of Nephi, we will see that the Lord will be kept busy keeping his promise to protect the missionaries. On several occasions they will find themselves in harm's way, yet they will never walk alone.

8 And it came to pass that Mosiah granted that they might go and do according to their request.

9 And they took their journey into the wilderness to go up to preach the word among the Lamanites; and I shall give an account of their proceedings hereafter.

verse 9 The date for this verse in the 1981 edition of the Book of Mormon is given as "about 92 BC" It probably ought to be changed to 91 BC based on the information in Alma 17:6 and Mosiah 29:44.

"I shall give an account of their proceedings hereafter" Who is the first person in this verse? It is the prophet Mormon, of course. He will provide an account of the fourteen-year mission of the sons of Mosiah in Alma chapters 17 through 26.

10 Now king Mosiah had no one to confer the kingdom upon, for there was not any of his sons who would accept of the kingdom.

11 Therefore he took the records which were engraven on the plates of brass, and also the plates of Nephi, and all the things which he had kept and preserved according to the commandments of God, after having translated and caused to be written the records which were on the plates of gold which had been found by the people of Limhi, which were delivered to him by the hand of Limhi;

verse 11 Notice that this verse is not a complete sentence. The thought begun in this verse is not completed until verse 20, as verses 12-19 form an eight-verse parenthetical expression. Here we learn that Mosiah gathers up the sacred records and other objects which he holds in his possession. We are not told why he is gathering them up until verse 20.

The "plates of brass" are, of course, the brass plates of Laban.

What are the "plates of Nephi"? These consist of two separate sets of plates: (1) the "small" plates of Nephi, now a completed set, which were begun in 570 BC, and (2) the collection of plates we refer to as the "large" plates of Nephi begun earlier in 589 BC. If you are not "fresh" in your understanding of the plates of the Book of Mormon, please review the article, *Those Confusing Book of Mormon Plates*.

"all the things which he had kept and preserved according to the commandments of God" These things would include the sword of Laban, the Urim and Thummim or interpreters, the Liahona, and perhaps other sacred objects.

Also included were the twenty-four gold plates containing the writings of the prophet Ether which were found in the land Desolation by the expedition sent out by King Limhi. In addition, Mosiah had made and included in his gathering a translation of

these plates. Here is a question to contemplate: Do we today have access to Mosiah's translation of these twenty-four gold plates? The answer will be given below in the commentary for verse 19.

12 And this he did because of the great anxiety of his people; for they were desirous beyond measure to know concerning those people who had been destroyed.

verse 12 The word “anxiety” is used here somewhat differently than we tend to use it today. Today we are inclined to use the word to mean uneasiness or apprehension. In this verse its meaning seems to be more eagerness, determination, concern, or even curiosity.

13 And now he translated them by the means of those two stones which were fastened into the two rims of a bow.

verse 13 “those two stones which were fastened into the two rims of a bow” These two stones are the “interpreters” or the Urim and Thummim. Please review the commentary for Mosiah 8:13. Joseph Smith described the Urim and Thummim as “two transparent stones set in the rim of a silver bow fastened to a breast plate” (*HC*, 1:35). Please see the description of this device in *The Process of Translating the Book of Mormon* in *Ye Shall Know of the Doctrine*, volume 2, Appendix A.

14 Now these things were prepared from the beginning, and were handed down from generation to generation, for the purpose of interpreting languages;

verse 14 “These things” are, of course, the interpreters.

15 And they have been kept and preserved by the hand of the Lord, that he should discover to every creature who should possess the land the iniquities and abominations of his people;

verse 15 “that he should discover to every creature who should possess the land the iniquities and abominations of his people” The word “discover” means reveal. The Urim and Thummim is one medium through which the Lord may reveal to his prophet a comprehensive look of the world from beginning to end. This sweeping vision might include the “iniquities and abominations” of the world's people. It is then the prophet's responsibility to warn the people that they must repent of their iniquities.

16 And whosoever has these things is called seer, after the manner of old times.

verse 16 Whoever possesses the Urim and Thummim is a “seer”—one who sees. The terms seer and the prophet are not necessarily synonymous (see the commentary for Mosiah 8:15-16).

17 Now after Mosiah had finished translating these records, behold, it gave an account of the people who were destroyed, from the time that they were destroyed back to the building of the great tower, at the time the Lord confounded the language of the people and they were scattered abroad upon the face of all the earth, yea, and even from that time back until the creation of Adam.

18 Now this account did cause the people of Mosiah to mourn exceedingly, yea, they were filled with sorrow; nevertheless it gave them much knowledge, in the which they did rejoice.

19 And this account shall be written hereafter; for behold, it is expedient that all people should know the things which are written in this account.

verse 19 “And this account shall be written hereafter” Where can we find Mosiah’s translation of the twenty-four plates of Ether found by Limhi’s people? Do we have access to it? Perhaps we do. The book of Ether, written by Mormon’s son Moroni, is possibly Moroni’s abridgment of Mosiah’s translation. It is also possible that the book of Ether is Moroni’s independent translation of the twenty-four plates (see Ether 1:1-2).

20 And now, as I said unto you, that after king Mosiah had done these things, he took the plates of brass, and all the things which he had kept, and conferred them upon Alma, who was the son of Alma; yea, all the records, and also the interpreters, and conferred them upon him, and commanded him that he should keep and preserve them, and also keep a record of the people, handing them down from one generation to another, even as they had been handed down from the time that Lehi left Jerusalem.

verse 20 “and also the interpreters” For a discussion of the interpreters, see the commentary for Mosiah 8:13.

“and commanded him that he should . . . also keep a record of the people” Alma’s record will be recorded on plates—the “large plates of Nephi.”

Mosiah Chapter 29

Beginning at the time Lehi and his group left Jerusalem, the government of the people was patriarchal in nature. Lehi was the leader until his death. Then Nephi was appointed king, and the succession of Nephite kings began. After Nephi, his successors “were called by the people, second Nephi, third Nephi, and so forth, according to the reigns of the kings” (Jacob 1:11). This system was perpetuated until the time of Mosiah, the son of Benjamin. The only four kings over the main body of Nephites of whom we have specific knowledge are Nephi, Mosiah, Benjamin, and Mosiah, the son of Benjamin.

In this chapter the younger Mosiah will propose abolishing the monarchy and instituting instead a system of judges. These judges are to be elected by the “voice of the people.” The judges would govern and pass judgment based upon the traditional or religious laws found in their scriptures.

Let us consider a few definitions and then try to classify this new Nephite government. A theocracy is government by someone who is considered divine, or at least divinely inspired. An example of a theocracy might be the period when the Israelites were governed by Moses. A Nephite prophet-king such as Benjamin or Nephi is another example. An autocracy is government in which one mortal man or woman possesses unlimited power. Kingship is an example of this kind of government. A democracy is government by the people themselves. Generally, in a democracy, the people exercise their will through a system of representation and through free elections. This would be classed as a republic or a parliamentary form of government.

We might classify this new system of Nephite government as a theodemocracy in that the people elected the judges who rendered judgments “according to the commandments of God” (verse 11).

The Book of Mormon has been criticized for containing “nineteenth century” concepts. Some of these critics have suggested that the book was actually written by Joseph Smith or someone else in the nineteenth century, and it is not in fact an account of an ancient civilization. This chapter contains a case in point. Book of Mormon critics have suggested that Mosiah, in this chapter, is dissolving the kingship and forming a representative or republican form of government. After all, they contend, a nineteenth century American author would certainly be expected to know something about this form of government, since the American Constitution was one of the world’s prototype blue prints for democratic government. A close look at this new Nephite form of government, however, shows that most of the principles contained in the American Constitution are missing. In fact, Mosiah himself taught that the ideal form of government consisted of a righteous king (see Mosiah 29:13). Some “deficiencies” of the Nephite government relative to the American Constitution include:

1. The people could not remove the chief judge at the polls, as he stood for election only once and subsequently enjoyed a life tenure.

2. There were not three branches of government to check one another, since a single office encompassed all governmental powers. The chief judge was judge, executive, and legislator. In war time, he raised the army, armed them, and arranged provisions for them (see Alma 46:34; 60:1-9). He served interchangeably as chief judge and governor (see Alma 2:16; 50:39; 60:1; and 3 Nephi 3:1). He was also a lawmaker (see Alma 2:2-7; 4:6; 51:1-7).

3. There was no legislature in the Book of Mormon. The only “representation” was in the choice of judges, not in the selection of legislators.

4. There was no taxation by a popular assembly.

Actually Book of Mormon political attitudes have more of an Old Testament flavor. Biblical peoples raised up kings among themselves. In the anointing of Saul, for example, a Book of Mormon theme is exemplified directly: The people demanded of Samuel a king, but Samuel tried to persuade them otherwise, warning them of the possible hazards (see 1 Samuel 8:1-22; 10:18-25; Deuteronomy 17:14). Earlier, the Israelites had requested Gideon to be their king, and he had refused because, he said, “the Lord will rule over you” (Judges 8:22-23). In a similar way, Alma and Mosiah warned of the dangers of a king.

Another clear biblical tradition is the reliance on traditional law instead of a representative legislature. We have already mentioned the indifference to the separation of powers.

1 Now when Mosiah had done this he sent out throughout all the land, among all the people, desiring to know their will concerning who should be their king.

verse 1 Mosiah had appointed Alma high priest over the church. He had handed on the responsibility for the religious affairs of the people. He now turned his attentions to the secular governance of his people.

2 And it came to pass that the voice of the people came, saying: We are desirous that Aaron thy son should be our king and our ruler.

verse 2 Why was it that among the sons of Mosiah, the people selected Aaron? Was he the eldest of the brothers? Usually when the four sons of Mosiah are listed by name, the order is Ammon, Aaron, Omner, and Himni (Mosiah 27:34; Alma 22:35; 25:17; 31:6). This might lead one to assume that Ammon and not Aaron was the eldest of the brothers. It is likely, however, that Aaron was the eldest, and that the people were assuming that their next king would be Mosiah’s eldest son by the law of primogeniture. In verse 6 of this chapter, Aaron is referred to as “he to whom the kingdom doth rightly belong.” In a few other places in the Book of Mormon text, the sons of Mosiah are referred to as “Aaron and his brethren” (Alma 22:1; 23:4; 25:6).

3 Now Aaron had gone up to the land of Nephi, therefore the king could not confer the kingdom upon him; neither would Aaron take upon him the kingdom; neither were any of the sons of Mosiah willing to take upon them the kingdom.

verse 3 Apparently Aaron and the other sons of Mosiah were simply not interested in becoming king. Their present endeavor (mission to the Lamanites) was consuming all of their energies.

4 Therefore king Mosiah sent again among the people; yea, even a written word sent he among the people. And these were the words that were written, saying:

verse 4 “even a written word sent he among the people” Mosiah composed a letter which was distributed among his people. In verses 5 through 36, Mormon quotes part of this letter and paraphrases other parts of it.

5 Behold, O ye my people, or my brethren, for I esteem you as such, I desire that ye should consider the cause which ye are called to consider—for ye are desirous to have a king.

6 Now I declare unto you that he to whom the kingdom doth rightly belong has declined, and will not take upon him the kingdom.

verse 6 “he to whom the kingdom doth rightly belong” Aaron has refused the kingship (see verse 2).

7 And now if there should be another appointed in his stead, behold I fear there would rise contentions among you. And who knoweth but what my son, to whom the kingdom doth belong, should turn to be angry and draw away a part of this people after him, which would cause wars and contentions among you, which would be the cause of shedding much blood and perverting the way of the Lord, yea, and destroy the souls of many people.

8 Now I say unto you let us be wise and consider these things, for we have no right to destroy my son, neither should we have any right to destroy another if he should be appointed in his stead.

9 And if my son should turn again to his pride and vain things he would recall the things which he had said, and claim his right to the kingdom, which would cause him and also this people to commit much sin.

verses 7-9 Mosiah, exercising divinely inspired foresight, perceived that it would prove to be disastrous to appoint another king instead of his own eldest son Aaron. He apparently felt it possible that Aaron might, at some future time, change his mind and decide that he wanted the kingship. After all, the office of king belonged to him by the law of primogeniture. If that were to occur, then Aaron and his adherents would do battle against the king and his supporters. This would result in much bloodshed

including the death of the king or Aaron. Unwholesome and unrighteous motives would abound resulting in the eternal condemnation of many.

10 And now let us be wise and look forward to these things, and do that which will make for the peace of this people.

11 Therefore I will be your king the remainder of my days; nevertheless, let us appoint judges, to judge this people according to our law; and we will newly arrange the affairs of this people, for we will appoint wise men to be judges, that will judge this people according to the commandments of God.

verse 11 “let us appoint judges” Here is Mosiah’s inspired recommendation to his people. The governmental judicial system that Mosiah establishes here will later be referred to as the “law of Mosiah” (Alma 11:1).

“to judge this people according to our law . . . according to the commandments of God” Mosiah desired to establish a free society, but he was fully aware that for people to exist successfully together there must be order based on law. Laws do, in some measure, abridge a people’s freedom. They punish those acts which, if unchecked, would prove the sure destruction of a society. Thus the Lord holds individuals accountable for their acts in relation to the laws—not only for obeying them, but for making them and administering them (D&C 134:1).

The “commandments of God” are intended to form an absolute and unchanging standard for the laws against which the Nephites would be judged. This divine standard is vital. A godless society has no such standard. If a people believe there is no God, then there are no absolutes in their laws. They eventually come to believe they can choose their actions. Morality becomes a relative thing which can be altered to fit the whims of the majority. In a godless democracy the will of the majority becomes supreme, and it answers to no outside standard. This type of government is based on a philosophy which may be said to be *humanistic*.

How do you assess the direction the United States of America is taking today? Can the voice of the people always be depended upon to decide issues in righteousness? Do we base our system of laws on the commandments of God? There are some who feel the political future of the United States is gloomy, judging by the directions we are now following. The prophet Moroni will later warn, “Behold, this is a choice land, and whatsoever nation shall possess it shall be free from bondage, and from captivity, and from all other nations under heaven, if they will but serve the God of the land, who is Jesus Christ” (Ether 2:12).

12 Now it is better that a man should be judged of God than of man, for the judgments of God are always just, but the judgments of man are not always just.

13 Therefore, if it were possible that you could have just men to be your kings, who would establish the laws of God, and judge this people according to his

commandments, yea, if ye could have men for your kings who would do even as my father Benjamin did for this people—I say unto you, if this could always be the case then it would be expedient that ye should always have kings to rule over you.

verses 12-13 These verses imply that the ideal form of government is a theocracy where the head of government is also the righteous head of the kingdom of God—even Jesus Christ himself. The next best is a theocracy in which the autocrat or king is a good and righteous man called by God to lead the people. He would establish and uphold the laws of God, and the people would be judged according to the commandments of God. Every other form of government formed by man is therefore a compromise and less than ideal. There are certain fundamental principles and safeguards that must be protected, however, in any acceptable form of government. Among the most important of these is the allowing of the “voice of the people” to be heard and to prevail.

What is the saints’ responsibility when living under a government where the civil authority of that government comes into conflict with the authority of God? While the Lord may not always require submission to evil secular authority, we do “believe in being subject to kings, presidents, rulers, and magistrates, in obeying, honoring, and sustaining the law” (Article of Faith 12). Jesus offered a valuable guideline when he said, “Render . . . unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s; and unto God the things that are God’s” (Luke 20:21-25). Peter added the counsel, “Honour all men, love the brotherhood, fear God. Honour the king” (1 Peter 2:13-17). Elder Bruce R. McConkie pointed out that, “Subjection to secular power does not constitute an endorsement or approval of the governmental system involved” (*A New Witness for the Articles of Faith*, 687). The object of submission to secular authority is to maintain a peaceful life so that the people may be free to live their religion. Elder James E. Talmage counseled, “It is the duty of the saints to submit themselves to the laws of their country. Nevertheless, they should use every proper method, as citizens or subjects of their several governments, to secure for themselves and for all men the boon of freedom in religious service. . . . Their protests should be offered in legal and proper order” (*The Articles of Faith*, 422-23).

14 And even I myself have labored with all the power and faculties which I have possessed, to teach you the commandments of God, and to establish peace throughout the land, that there should be no wars nor contentions, no stealing, nor plundering, nor murdering, nor any manner of iniquity;

verse 14 Just as a wicked king such as Noah can foster wickedness among his people, so can a righteous king do much to inspire righteous behavior among his followers.

15 And whosoever has committed iniquity, him have I punished according to the crime which he has committed, according to the law which has been given to us by our fathers.

16 Now I say unto you, that because all men are not just it is not expedient that ye should have a king or kings to rule over you.

17 For behold, how much iniquity doth one wicked king cause to be committed, yea, and what great destruction!

18 Yea, remember king Noah, his wickedness and his abominations, and also the wickedness and abominations of his people. Behold what great destruction did come upon them; and also because of their iniquities they were brought into bondage.

verse 18 Mosiah's reference to King Noah suggests the possibility that Alma had been at least partly instrumental in converting Mosiah to his anti-monarchical position. Alma had likely discussed his negative experiences with King Noah, and this discussion had been deeply influential in producing Mosiah's new position. Undoubtedly another factor was Mosiah's experience translating the Jaredite record.

19 And were it not for the interposition of their all-wise Creator, and this because of their sincere repentance, they must unavoidably remain in bondage until now.

verse 19 "the interposition of their all-wise Creator" One of the definitions of interposition in *Webster's 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language* is, "intervention." The text suggests that the Lord had a role in deposing the wicked Noah and in Mosiah's dispatching Ammon and his men to rescue the people of Limhi. And this because of sincere repentance among the people of Limhi.

20 But behold, he did deliver them because they did humble themselves before him; and because they cried mightily unto him he did deliver them out of bondage; and thus doth the Lord work with his power in all cases among the children of men, extending the arm of mercy towards them that put their trust in him.

21 And behold, now I say unto you, ye cannot dethrone an iniquitous king save it be through much contention, and the shedding of much blood.

22 For behold, he has his friends in iniquity, and he keepeth his guards about him; and he teareth up the laws of those who have reigned in righteousness before him; and he trampleth under his feet the commandments of God;

23 And he enacteth laws, and sendeth them forth among his people, yea, laws after the manner of his own wickedness; and whosoever doth not obey his laws he causeth to be destroyed; and whosoever doth rebel against him he will send his armies against them to war, and if he can he will destroy them; and thus an unrighteous king doth pervert the ways of all righteousness.

verses 21-23 To dethrone an unrighteous king requires considerable social unrest and even civil war. Also the refusal to obey his unrighteous laws also leads to destruction of the people.

24 And now behold I say unto you, it is not expedient that such abominations should come upon you.

verse 24 “it is not expedient that such abominations should come upon you” Here Mosiah utilizes a peculiar form of speech called antenantiosis which is discussed in the commentary for Jacob 4:8. In this figure of speech an expression is stated in terms of its negated opposite. The result is to emphasize the positive to a very high degree. His intent is not merely to say that it is not a good idea to commit or allow such abominations. Rather he is forcefully admonishing the people to prevent them.

25 Therefore, choose you by the voice of this people, judges, that ye may be judged according to the laws which have been given you by our fathers, which are correct, and which were given them by the hand of the Lord.

verse 25 “by the voice of this people” Here is the essential democratic feature of the government which Mosiah is proposing. As stated in the introductory comments for this chapter, we should not jump to the conclusion that this Nephite government was a democracy similar to that of the United States. It was simply a unique form of democracy, but a democracy nonetheless wherein the majority ruled by popular vote. Again, we will briefly reiterate the features of this Nephite government which made it different from that of the United States: There was no parliamentary system, no constitution, no separate branches of government (no “checks and balances”), and the elected officers served for life.

26 Now it is not common that the voice of the people desireth anything contrary to that which is right; but it is common for the lesser part of the people to desire that which is not right; therefore this shall ye observe and make it your law—to do your business by the voice of the people.

27 And if the time comes that the voice of the people doth choose iniquity, then is the time that the judgments of God will come upon you; yea, then is the time he will visit you with great destruction even as he has hitherto visited this land.

verses 26-27 In these profound verses, the Lord’s criterion for allowing the destruction of a people is clearly set forth. Having a “free” form of government, which allows the voice of the people to have their say, is a privilege which must be continually earned by the people. They do so by exercising personal responsibility. Constant vigilance must be maintained in order to preserve this freedom. When the majority of a people come to choose iniquity, then that people will be destroyed. Such a nation is said to have “ripened in iniquity” (Ether 2:9; 9:20). In this circumstance, societal

destruction is the inevitable and just consequence. This warning is pertinent to all who read the Book of Mormon. It has special relevance to those people who inhabit the “mighty nation among the Gentiles,” the United States of America (1 Nephi 22:7).

28 And now if ye have judges, and they do not judge you according to the law which has been given, ye can cause that they may be judged of a higher judge.

29 If your higher judges do not judge righteous judgments, ye shall cause that a small number of your lower judges should be gathered together, and they shall judge your higher judges, according to the voice of the people.

verses 28-29 While this new Nephite form of government does not contain the complete system of checks and balances found in a fully democratic form of government, these verses outline a system of judges which provides a limited strategy for checks and balances.

In spite of this reasonable form of government with built in checks and balances, we will eventually learn that wicked judges will combine with some who will seek to restore a system of kings. Their motivation is nobility and privilege for themselves. This group will ruin the government and bring destruction upon their society (Alma 10:27; 3 Nephi 6).

30 And I command you to do these things in the fear of the Lord; and I command you to do these things, and that ye have no king; that if these people commit sins and iniquities they shall be answered upon their own heads.

verse 30 Here Mosiah makes it clear that his intention in writing this letter to his people is not to suggest that they change their form of government, but rather to “command” them in the name of the Lord that they do so.

To be “in the fear of the Lord” is to be aligned with his will.

This verse implies what is made explicit in the following verse: that a king may absolve in some measure a people of some personal responsibility for their sins. These sins may be moral sins or political sins. An unrighteous king, as stated previously, may foster unrighteous behavior among his subjects, and then the king himself will bear some of the responsibility for his subjects’ sins.

31 For behold I say unto you, the sins of many people have been caused by the iniquities of their kings; therefore their iniquities are answered upon the heads of their kings.

verse 31 Sometimes iniquitous kings result in iniquitous societies. The Lord sees the “inequality” between the autocratic king and the common people as causative of this problem (see verse 32). In these cases the Lord will hold the wicked kings responsible for the sins of the people. The Lord favors a system wherein there is no possibility that a wicked autocrat will lead his people astray. He prefers a system of

equality (“a land of liberty”) in which no leader can be to blame for the sins of the people (again, see verse 32). In that more ideal society, the people are responsible for their own sins.

32 And now I desire that this inequality should be no more in this land, especially among this my people; but I desire that this land be a land of liberty, and every man may enjoy his rights and privileges alike, so long as the Lord sees fit that we may live and inherit the land, yea, even as long as any of our posterity remains upon the face of the land.

verse 32 “I desire that this inequality should be no more in this land”

Mosiah decries the “inequality” in the land—that is, the difference between the king and the common man. This inequality is the root cause of a wicked autocrat’s being able to adversely affect the moral performance of his people. The solution to this “inequality” is “a land of liberty,” a land without a monarch. In such a land, “every man may enjoy his rights and privileges alike.” There is a downside to such a land: Every man is therefore responsible for his own sins. There is a profound implication in this verse. It is that in a land of liberty the people are at greater eternal risk. They are free to make personal choices, but then they must individually answer for their own sins. There is no absolute leader who compels them to do this or that and thus spare them that responsibility (see verse 34).

33 And many more things did king Mosiah write unto them, unfolding unto them all the trials and troubles of a righteous king, yea, all the travails of soul for their people, and also all the murmurings of the people to their king; and he explained it all unto them.

verses 33 “And many more things did king Mosiah write unto them”

Obviously the prophet Mormon did not quote or paraphrase Mosiah’s entire proclamation (see verse 4).

“unfolding unto them all the trials and troubles of a righteous king, yea, all the travails of soul for their people” It is interesting that part of Mosiah’s anti-monarchical stance is based in part on the unfair burden that is placed on a righteous king—his “travails of soul” and the “murmurings” which he must endure.

The pronoun *their* in this phrase seems to have as its antecedent the word kings in verse 31. This phrase would probably read a bit better if the word king were changed to kings (“all the trials and troubles of righteous kings”) or if the plural pronoun *their* were changed to *his*.

34 And he told them that these things ought not to be; but that the burden should come upon all the people, that every man might bear his part.

verse 34 “the burden should come upon all the people, that every man might bear his part” It would seem that when a form of government grants agency to a society, then it becomes essential that the people within that society assume more individual responsibility if that form of government is to be successful. A free society creates a better milieu for testing of a people against the gospel standard. But such a free society also comes with the possibility for abuse of individuals within that society.

In an article “Government by the Voice of the People,” Byron R. Merrill observed: “The history of civilization is a continual balancing act between anarchy (freedom taken to its extreme) and tyranny (order taken to its extreme), with the pendulum swinging back and forth at different times. Freedom by law to act out one’s choices requires enormous self-restraint, for without self-discipline freedom is so readily abused that external controls must be employed to maintain order and prevent chaos” (*The Book of Mormon: Mosiah, Salvation Only Through Christ*, 118). Brother Merrill quotes the Irish political theorist Edmund Burke: “Men are qualified for civil liberty in exact proportion to their disposition to put moral chains upon their own appetites. . . . Society cannot exist, unless a controlling power upon will and appetite be placed somewhere; and the less of it there is within, the more there must be without. It is ordained in the eternal constitution of things, that men of intemperate minds cannot be free. Their passions forge their fetters” (*The Works of Edmund Burke*. 12 volumes, Boston: Little, 4:51-52).

35 And he also unfolded unto them all the disadvantages they labored under, by having an unrighteous king to rule over them;

verse 35 It would seem likely that the prophet/abridger Mormon still has the wicked king Noah in mind as he writes this verse and the following verse.

36 Yea, all his iniquities and abominations, and all the wars, and contentions, and bloodshed, and the stealing, and the plundering, and the committing of whoredoms, and all manner of iniquities which cannot be enumerated—telling them that these things ought not to be, that they were expressly repugnant to the commandments of God.

verse 36 Here are examples of the types of iniquities to which a people might be exposed because of having to live under an unrighteous monarch. In this verse, of course, Mosiah is “telling them that these things ought not to be.”

37 And now it came to pass, after king Mosiah had sent these things forth among the people they were convinced of the truth of his words.

verse 37 Mosiah’s letter had been persuasive, and the people were convinced.

38 Therefore they relinquished their desires for a king, and became exceedingly anxious that every man should have an equal chance throughout all the land; yea, and every man expressed a willingness to answer for his own sins.

verse 38 It is clear that there was a positive spirit of freedom brooding over the Nephites. The Nephites had lived under the authority of a king, albeit mostly righteous ones, for centuries. We might have expected them to be hesitant to give up their submissive security and jump right into a system where they had to determine their own future by their own choices. Much to their credit, they were obviously enthusiastically willing to do so.

39 Therefore, it came to pass that they assembled themselves together in bodies throughout the land, to cast in their voices concerning who should be their judges, to judge them according to the law which had been given them; and they were exceedingly rejoiced because of the liberty which had been granted unto them.

verse 39 “To cast in their voices” is, of course, to vote.

“according to the law which had been given them” Apparently these judges did not have the power to create the law. Rather, the law that they applied was “given them” by Mosiah. The judicial system established by Mosiah will later be referred to as the “law of Mosiah” (Alma 11:1), and the individual laws that Mosiah gave to them will be remembered several generations later as the “laws of Mosiah” (Helaman 4:22). These were the laws “which the Lord commanded him to give unto the people” (*Ibid.*). The laws of Mosiah likely did not make any radical changes in the tenets of the law of Moses, but more likely they consisted of mainly procedural changes (see verses 22-23)—mainly abolishing the kingship and establishing a system of judges. We will later learn that these judges were to be salaried (Alma 11:1). The law of Mosiah also will establish a system of legal monetary exchange equivalents (Alma 11:7). We will also learn that the laws of Mosiah dealt with other issues such as abolishing slavery (Alma 27:9), defining debtors as thieves (Alma 11:2), and giving the governor alone the jurisdiction over capital offenses (3 Nephi 6:22).

40 And they did wax strong in love towards Mosiah; yea, they did esteem him more than any other man; for they did not look upon him as a tyrant who was seeking for gain, yea, for that lucre which doth corrupt the soul; for he had not exacted riches of them, neither had he delighted in the shedding of blood; but he had established peace in the land, and he had granted unto his people that they should be delivered from all manner of bondage; therefore they did esteem him, yea, exceedingly, beyond measure.

verse 40 The word *esteem* in this verse means to prize; to set a high value on; to regard with reverence, respect, or friendship.

Lucre is profit obtained in a negative sense. The word has the sense of something base or unworthy.

41 And it came to pass that they did appoint judges to rule over them, or to judge them according to the law; and this they did throughout all the land.

verse 41 “they did appoint judges to rule over them” The “appointing” done in this and in the next verse was done by the vote of the people.

42 And it came to pass that Alma was appointed to be the first chief judge, he being also the high priest, his father having conferred the office upon him, and having given him the charge concerning all the affairs of the church.

verse 42 Even though Mosiah’s people had previously “relinquished their desires for a king,” the younger Alma is asked to assume both sacred and secular authority which gives him authority similar to that of a king.

Kingship had obviously been a popular institution among the Nephites, and some Nephites will have trouble letting go of it. This desire to have a king will persist among some Nephites. We will read in Alma chapters 51 through 62 of the struggles of the so-called “king-men” who will seek to reestablish the monarchical order among the Nephites (see also 3 Nephi 6:30; 7:9-10).

43 And now it came to pass that Alma did walk in the ways of the Lord, and he did keep his commandments, and he did judge righteous judgments; and there was continual peace through the land.

44 And thus commenced the reign of the judges throughout all the land of Zarahemla, among all the people who were called the Nephites; and Alma was the first and chief judge.

verse 44 “thus commenced the reign of the judges” There are three different chronological or dating systems built into the Book of Mormon text. The first involves the number of years since Lehi’s company left Jerusalem. The second begins here in 91 BC, the years of the judges. The third to be used will be the years since Christ’s birth.

We will learn that Mosiah’s great experiment with freedom will eventually fail. Nephite civilization will come to a tragic end because eventually the voice of the people will choose iniquity (see verse 27). One might well, then, ask the question: “Why did Mosiah recommend this change in the Nephite’s form of government?” It seems clear that the Lord is best able to test the mettle of a people here in mortality when the responsibility for moral decisions is placed squarely upon their own shoulders. Mosiah was clearly inspired by God to recommend this change. For this same reason centuries later, the Lord will inspire men to create the Constitution of the United States of America

(D&C 101:80) so that a people may be free to begin to prepare themselves for the second coming of the Savior.

45 And now it came to pass that his father died, being eighty and two years old, having lived to fulfil the commandments of God.

46 And it came to pass that Mosiah died also, in the thirty and third year of his reign, being sixty and three years old; making in the whole, five hundred and nine years from the time Lehi left Jerusalem.

47 And thus ended the reign of the kings over the people of Nephi; and thus ended the days of Alma, who was the founder of their church.