



Type: Book Chapter

The Coronation of Kings

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Source: *Reexploring the Book of Mormon: The F.A.R.M.S. Updates*

Editor(s): John W. Welch

Published: Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon
Studies; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992

Page(s): 124–126



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Mosiah 2:30 "I should declare unto you this day, that my son Mosiah is a king and a ruler over you."

Closely associated with the ideology of kingship is the coronation of the king. It is the central ritual act connected with kingship. In Mosiah 1–6 is found a fascinating text surrounding the coronation of Benjamin's son, Mosiah. A comparison of that text with the coronation ceremonies recorded in the Old Testament and with enthronement rituals among other peoples of the ancient Near East reveals striking parallels. For example:

1. *The Sanctuary as the Site of the Coronation.* Sacred space is the natural and necessary location for the sacral act of regal coronation. Following the construction of the temple in ancient Israel, the temple site always served as the site of coronations. Thus, during his coronation, Joash is mentioned as standing in the temple "by a pillar, as the manner was" (2 Kings 11:14). Similarly, the temple at Zarahemla was the site chosen for Benjamin's address to the people and for the "consecration" of his son Mosiah as king (Mosiah 1:18).

2. *Investiture with Insignia.* In ancient Israel, various tokens of kingship seem regularly to have been given to the new monarch at the coronation. These included such things as the law the king was required to have and read (see Deuteronomy 17:18–19), the diadem, and other material symbols of power. Similarly, Benjamin, in the course of transferring power to his son Mosiah, "gave him charge concerning the records which were engraven

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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" (Mosiah 1:15–16). Although not explicitly stated, these things were clearly given to Mosiah because of his responsibility as king and because they were symbols of law, power, and leadership.

3. *Anointing*. Anointing the king with oil is a significant element in the coronation ceremonies in ancient Israel and in the ancient Near East generally. The Bible records the anointings of six Israelite kings: Saul, David, Solomon, Jehu, Joash, and Jehoahaz. In the Book of Mormon, following Benjamin's address and the renewal of the covenant by the people, Benjamin "consecrated his son Mosiah to be a ruler and a king over his people" (Mosiah 6:3). The text does not indicate whether this "consecration" included anointing. However, some ritual act was clearly involved. Other instances in Nephite history indicate that the coronation included anointing. Jacob records that his brother Nephi "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).

4. *Receipt of a Regnal Name*. At the time of his accession to the throne, the king usually also received a new name, either a title or a name possessed by a predecessor. Examples of this abound in Egypt, Mesopotamia, and ancient Israel. Similarly, in the Book of Mormon, Jacob describes the giving of regnal names in his day: "Whoso should reign in [Nephi's] 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). Whether Mosiah similarly had a regnal name is difficult to determine. He is invariably referred to as "Mosiah" (i.e., Mosiah 6:4–7), so it is unknown if this was a given name or a coronation name. The latter is possible, since the name Mosiah may be a title meaning "savior, deliverer."¹ Evidently between the time that Jacob made his record and Mosiah acceded to the throne, the practice of using Nephi as a regnal name had been changed,

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perhaps because the kingdom was no longer located in the land of Nephi. It is also possible that Mormon, the editor of this particular part of the history, used only one name for Mosiah in order to eliminate further confusion about multiple "Nephis."

5. *Other Elements.* Other factors in Mosiah's enthronement that were typically present at coronations of ancient Israelite kings can also be mentioned: for example, sacrifices of thanksgiving (see Mosiah 2:3–4); acceptance of the new monarch by the people agreeing to obey him and God (see Mosiah 2:31; 5:5); and the reappointment of priests and reconstitution of officers under the new regime (see Mosiah 6:3).

From the evidence at hand, we can see that the Nephite coronation ceremony quite appropriately consisted of elements similar to those used in ancient Israel. This aspect of kingship is fully and properly represented in the royal record of the Nephites.

Based on research by Stephen D. Ricks, July 1989.

Note

1. See chapter 28, pp. 105–7, in this book.