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Benjamin's Sermon as a Traditional Ancient Farewell Address

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CHAPTER 4

BENJAMIN'S SERMON AS A TRADITIONAL ANCIENT FAREWELL ADDRESS

John W. Welch and Daryl R. Hague

In many ways, Benjamin's speech (Mosiah 1–6) is bound up with ancient and venerable literary and religious traditions, drawing heavily on and conforming extensively to customary Israelite patterns and practices. To our understanding of Benjamin's speech can be added yet another significant dimension. It involves the literary pattern that can be seen in the farewell speeches that were given by several ancient political and religious leaders near the end of their lives. William S. Kurz has studied a large number of farewell speeches found in the Bible and in classical literature from the Greco-Roman world.¹ Kurz has abstracted from his collection of speeches twenty elements that appear regularly in most of these addresses. Because Benjamin's speech was also written and delivered in contemplation of Benjamin's own approaching death, the invitation seems natural, if not irresistible, to analyze Benjamin's discourse and several other farewell speeches in the Book of Mormon in terms of Kurz's list of typical farewell speech elements. The results of this study show that Benjamin's speech possesses as many or more of the characteristics of a traditional

ancient Israelite farewell address than any other similar speech on record.

Ancient Farewell Speeches from the Old World

The Old Testament contains many reports of aging prophet-leaders who, at a time when it was obvious that they were about to die, called all or some of their people together one last time to teach them, to exhort them to righteousness, and to confer the responsibilities of leadership on their successors. Four of these accounts, which vary considerably in length, preserve what is known of the farewell speeches of Moses (Deuteronomy 31–34), Joshua (Joshua 23–24), David (1 Kings 2:1–10; compare 1 Chronicles 28–29), and Samuel (1 Samuel 12:1–25). In addition, several other farewell speeches were delivered by prominent religious and political leaders in the New Testament, the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, and Greco-Roman literature. Certain themes appear regularly in all these farewell addresses, as if the speakers were consciously striving to conform their words to a customary prototype or to the traditional expectations of their audiences.

Furthermore, these ancient farewell addresses may be divided into two groups, each with their own distinctive patterns: (1) the Greco-Roman speeches and (2) the biblical addresses. In comparing these two groups, Kurz has found that, in the Greco-Roman literary tradition, the dying speaker was usually a philosopher or statesman, such as Socrates in Plato's *Phaedo*, whose speeches "are concerned with suicide, the meaning of death, questions about noble deaths, and life after death."² This emphatic preoccupation with death and dying, however, is absent in the biblical speeches. In biblical farewell addresses, the speaker is a man of God and his speech typically focuses on "God's

plan, people and covenant, or on theodicy and theological interpretations of history.”³ David’s instructions to Solomon (see 1 Kings 2:1–10) and Mattathias’s last words to his sons (see 1 Maccabees 2:49–70) provide strong examples of the biblical tradition in this regard.

Despite this one fundamental difference in focus between these two main groups of texts, Kurz has found that twenty elements can be identified in these speeches and that many of these elements are generally common to all farewell addresses. While no single speech contains all twenty elements, most contain many of them. For example, Moses’ speech contains sixteen of these elements (see Deuteronomy 31–34), Paul’s fourteen (see Acts 20), Mattathias’s ten, and David’s nine.

Kurz’s analysis creates a useful literary tool for dissecting, comparing, and assessing the components of farewell speeches. While other scholars might wish to point out further elements in this genre or might place different degrees of emphasis on the various features, Kurz’s treatment offers a serviceable description of the standard literature that has emerged in farewell speeches in general. His descriptions of the attributes typical of these kinds of speeches can be summarized as follows:

1. *The summons.* The speaker calls his successors and followers together so they can receive his last instructions.
2. *The speaker’s own mission or example.* A description of the speaker’s life and calling is followed by a commandment that his followers should do as he has done.
3. *Innocence and discharge of duty.* The speaker declares that he has done his best and has fulfilled his obligations. He has accomplished what he intended to do and cannot be held liable for his people’s actions in the future.
4. *Impending death.* The announcement of the speaker’s impending death reveals no fear of death. Rather, the speaker

shows courage and an acceptance of his fate. Sometimes he commends his soul to God or the gods.

5. *Exhortation.* The listeners are encouraged to remember the teachings that the speaker has given previously and to obey the commands that he will give during his address. The people are also counseled to have courage during times of trial or difficulty. Exhortations help to solidify the lessons of the past and provide comfort for the future.

6. *Warnings and final injunctions.* Warnings about disobedience and its consequences are given. There may also be warnings concerning false teachers who will try to lead the people astray. Commandments and final instructions, designed to aid the people, accompany these warnings.

7. *Blessings.* The speaker usually pronounces or promises blessings in conjunction with his warnings and final instructions.

8. *Farewell gestures.* While the speaker may make some gesture to bid farewell, as seen especially in the Greco-Roman literature, only one of the twelve biblical addresses cited by Kurz mentions a farewell gesture. That instance occurs when Paul knelt down and prayed with the disciples at the end of his speech, after which the disciples fell on his neck and kissed him (see Acts 20:36–38).

9. *Tasks for successors.* Final orders may confer specific responsibilities to successors. Jesus, for example, gave final charges to the apostles at the last supper (see Luke 22:25–38); David commanded Solomon to take vengeance on Joab and Shimei (see 1 Kings 2:5–6, 8–9).

10. *Theological review of history.* A theological review of the past is given, often rehearsing events going back to the beginning of the world, the purpose of which is to emphasize the guidance, protection, and chastisement of God. Moses, for example, recounted the history of Israel and acknowledged God's hand in the protection and development of the children of Jacob (Deuteronomy 32).

11. *Revelation of the future.* Often the speaker is aware of future events that could threaten his reputation or might involve his followers. Jesus, for instance, predicted Judas's betrayal and Peter's denial (see Luke 22:21, 34).

12. *Promises.* Biblical farewell speeches typically promise the prospect of eternal glory. Thus both Jesus (Luke 22) and Mattathias (1 Maccabees 2) promised glory to their followers after teaching them about the importance of serving one another. This element does not appear in the speeches from the Greco-Roman tradition.

13. *Appointment of or reference to a successor.* The appointment of a successor is a very common feature of farewell speeches in the biblical tradition, and this designation serves to legitimize the authority of the new leader. For example, David's farewell address specifically endorsed Solomon's leadership (see 1 Kings 2:1–4).

14. *Bewailing the loss.* Often the account describes the mourning by the friends and followers of the speaker.

15. *Future degeneration.* Predictions and warnings concerning future heresies and disobedience often appear in biblical farewell speeches. Such predictions transfer responsibility for adverse developments in the future from the speaker to the coming generations. Moses, for example, declared that Israel would reject the Lord and turn to idolatry.

16. *Covenant renewal and sacrifices.* The listeners are enjoined to renew their covenant with God. David's instructions to Solomon ensured the fulfillment of David's covenant with God, and Jesus' actions at the last supper signaled a new covenant symbolized by the bread and wine. The covenant element is unique to the biblical tradition, and in Old Testament times sacrifices would generally accompany the covenant renewal.

17. *Providing for those who will survive.* Since the followers of the aged leader will require guidance and comfort after his death, instructions are given for providing such

help. Jesus' command that Peter strengthen the brethren (see Luke 22:23) is an example of this element.

18. *Consolation to the inner circle.* Often, the speaker attempts to comfort his closest associates. Jesus did this at the last supper, when he and his most beloved followers were alone.

19. *Didactic speech.* The speaker may review certain principles to help the followers remember what they should do.

20. *Ars moriendi or the approach to death.* This element relates to the leader's approach to death itself. Kurz finds this element present only in Plato's *Phaedo*, although he suggests that it may also be implied in Josephus.

Benjamin's Farewell Speech

At least as complete as any farewell address that Kurz has analyzed is King Benjamin's speech.⁴ This speech and the events related directly to it comprise a lengthy primary account. It is longer and more detailed than any of the biblical farewell speeches; only the speech of Moses comes close to it. In Benjamin's speech, sixteen elements of the farewell address typology are directly present, with two others clearly implied. Only the elements of bewailing the loss and *ars moriendi* (the least common factor and one evidenced only in the Greco-Roman tradition) fail to appear in Mosiah 1–6. No other single speech manifests more features of Kurz's pattern, and thus Benjamin's speech may well be the best example on record of this ancient rhetorical form of speech.

Kurz has singled out four of his twenty elements as fundamentally characteristic of addresses in the Old Testament and the Old Testament Apocrypha, as opposed to the Greco-Roman tradition: (1) the speaker's assertion of innocence and fulfillment of his mission, (2) the designation of

tasks for successors, (3) a theological review of history, and (4) the revelation of future events. All four of these characteristically Israelite elements appear prominently in Benjamin's speech. Furthermore, Benjamin emphasizes the covenant relationship between God and man, and his text ends with an express covenant renewal. No preoccupation with death occurs here, as it does in the Greco-Roman texts. Benjamin's speech is not only one of the most complete ancient farewell addresses known anywhere, but it also strongly manifests those elements that are most deeply rooted in early biblical tradition.

Benjamin delivered his address about three years before his death (see Mosiah 6:5). He called all the Nephites and Mulekites together to impart his final teachings and appoint his son king (see Mosiah 1:10–18). The following overview summarizes and illustrates the elements in Kurz's analysis of ancient farewell addresses as those factors appear in Benjamin's speech:

1. *The summons.* The text begins by telling how Benjamin summoned his people together:

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. Therefore, he had Mosiah brought before him. (Mosiah 1:9–10)

Following Benjamin's instructions, Mosiah "made a proclamation throughout all the land," and "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" (Mosiah 2:1; see also 2:9). Benjamin's stated purposes were to appoint his successor, give his people a new covenantal name, remind them that God had preserved them by his matchless power,

and unfold to their view the mysteries of God (see Mosiah 1:10–13; 2:9).

2. *The speaker's own mission or example.* Near the beginning of his speech, Benjamin pointed to his own life as an example of brotherly service that should be followed by those who would survive him. Having faithfully served many years as their king, Benjamin declared that he had spent his days in the service of his people. He further stressed that he had not sought riches but had worked with his own hands so he would not be a burden to them, and he affirmed that he had not allowed his people to break the law, but had fulfilled his mission and taught them to keep the commandments of God (see Mosiah 2:12–14). He was explicit that his people should follow his example: “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?” (Mosiah 2:18).

3. *Innocence and discharge of duty.* After Benjamin reported his activities as king, he openly declared his innocence before God: “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” (Mosiah 2:15). In the same spirit, Benjamin revealed that one of his purposes in calling his people together was that he might “be found blameless,” “rid [his] garments of [their] blood,” and die peacefully (Mosiah 2:27–28).

4. *Impending death.* Benjamin plainly acknowledged that he was close to death: “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 . . . at this period of time when I am about to go down to my grave” (Mosiah 2:26, 28; see also 1:9).

5. *Exhortation.* Benjamin's speech is filled with imperatives and strong exhortations. For example:

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. 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. (Mosiah 4:9–10; see also 2:9, 40–41, and 5:12)

6. *Warnings and final injunctions.* Mosiah chapter 4 concludes with the following general warnings of this aged leader:

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. 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. (Mosiah 4:29–30)

Similarly, the words of the angel in Mosiah chapter 3 end with severe warnings and woes: "And if they be evil they are consigned to an awful view of their own guilt and abominations; . . . therefore they have drunk damnation to their own souls, . . . and their torment is as a lake of fire and brimstone" (Mosiah 3:25, 27). Several other sections in Benjamin's speech contain equally stern warnings (see Mosiah 2:32, 36–37, 39; 3:12; and 5:10–11).

In addition, Benjamin gave various injunctions to his people, especially including commands to care for the poor,

the hungry, and the naked, both spiritually and temporally (see Mosiah 4:16–26). As a just king in ancient Israel, Benjamin had a particular responsibility to see that the weak and the poor in his society were cared for and not oppressed (see Psalm 72:1–4), and this helps to explain Benjamin’s deep concern that his successors not ignore the needs of these vulnerable people. He also implored the assembly to care for their children’s physical needs and to teach them to walk in the ways of the Lord (see Mosiah 4:14–15). His last words combined a final instruction with a message of comfort: “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” (Mosiah 5:15).

7. *Blessings.* On several occasions, Benjamin mentioned or pronounced the blessings of God on his people (see Mosiah 2:22, 24, 31, 36, 41; 3:16). He promised that God would immediately bless and prosper his people for their righteousness (see Mosiah 2:22, 24), he exhorted his people to walk “in wisdom’s paths that [they] may be blessed” (Mosiah 2:36), and he invited them to reflect 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” (Mosiah 2:41).

8. *Farewell gestures.* Benjamin declared that he had called the assembly so that he might rid his garments of the people’s blood (see Mosiah 2:28). It is possible that Benjamin ritually shook or cleansed these garments; Jacob, one of Benjamin’s spiritual predecessors, actually took off his garment in front of a similar assembly and shook his clothes to

rid himself symbolically of the blood of his people (see 2 Nephi 9:44).

9. *Tasks for successors.* In the course of his speech, Benjamin assigned future tasks and roles to his son, his people, and the priests in his kingdom. For example, before delivering his address, Benjamin gave his son Mosiah “charge concerning all the affairs of the kingdom” (Mosiah 1:15), and he entrusted to Mosiah the care of the plates of brass, the plates of Nephi, the sword of Laban, and the Liahona (see Mosiah 1:16). Then, during his speech, Benjamin pronounced his son Mosiah to be king, publicly charging him with the task of teaching the law to the people; he also enjoined the people to “keep the commandments of my son, or the commandments of God which shall be delivered unto you by him” (Mosiah 2:31). After his address, Benjamin consecrated Mosiah as king, formally giving him “all the charges concerning the kingdom”; he then appointed priests to teach the people to “know the commandments of God and to stir them up in remembrance of the oath which they had made” (Mosiah 6:3).

10. *Theological review of history.* At two points in his speech, Benjamin briefly discussed historical topics. He reviewed the recent past by summarizing the character and history of his administration. Furthermore, after reminding the assembly that God had always sent prophets to the children of men, he recounted some of the more distant experiences of the early Israelites, describing how Moses showed the Israelites “many signs, and wonders, and types, and shadows” concerning the coming of Christ (Mosiah 3:15), as also did the prophets, but how the Israelites hardened their hearts. As Benjamin explained, the Israelites did not understand that the law of Moses availed nothing without the atonement of Christ (see Mosiah 3:13–15).

11. *Revelation of the future.* In Mosiah 3, Benjamin revealed things to come. He called special attention to his prophetic words:

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*. And the things which I shall tell you are made known unto me by an angel from God. . . . 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. (Mosiah 3:1-2, 5)

Verses 5–10 contain further revelations about the future mission of Jesus Christ.

12. *Promises.* Benjamin gave his people many promises. For instance, he promised that if they would remember the greatness and goodness of God and their own nothingness, if they would humble themselves and pray continually, and if they would remain strong in their faith in the advent of Christ, then they would “always rejoice, and be filled with the love of God, and always retain a remission of [their] sins; and [they should] grow in the knowledge of the glory of him that created [them], or in the knowledge of that which is just and true” (Mosiah 4:12). Furthermore, he told the people that as a result of their righteousness and belief in God, they would “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” (Mosiah 4:13), and that parents would teach and care for their children and the needy in a righteous manner (see Mosiah 4:11–16). In Mosiah 2:22, 31, Benjamin promised his people that if they would obey Mosiah, the new king, they would receive the blessings of peace and prosperity; and in Mosiah 5:9, 15, he promised

them salvation and eternal life. Such promises are conditioned upon obedience, and they are typical of literary formulations found in Moses' farewell speech in Deuteronomy.

13. *Appointment of or reference to a successor.* Before his farewell address, Benjamin privately announced that Mosiah would become his successor (see Mosiah 1:15–16), and during the speech he proclaimed his son the new king and commanded the people to keep Mosiah's commandments (see Mosiah 2:31). After the speech, Benjamin formally consecrated Mosiah as king (see Mosiah 6:3).

14. *Bewailing the loss.* The record makes no mention of mourning over Benjamin's death, probably because he was not on his deathbed at the time he delivered his speech. Perhaps, however, one may see in the response of the people another form of mourning: fearing for their own eternal lives, the people fell to the earth, overwhelmed, having "viewed themselves in their own carnal state, even less than the dust of the earth. And they 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" (Mosiah 4:2). Perhaps these cries reflected not only the people's sorrow for sin, but also their lament over the prophesied death of the Lord God Omnipotent, their awareness of Benjamin's approaching death, and their own mortality.

15. *Future degeneration.* Benjamin's speech, though serious and sober, is positive and optimistic. No pessimistic predictions about impending degeneration among his people as a whole are found. Benjamin does, however, implicitly acknowledge that future degeneration is possible. He realized that some of the individuals listening to him would not obey him but rather would obey the evil spirit and remain in a state of open rebellion against God. For them, judgment and punishment is in store:

And thus saith the Lord: [These words] shall stand as a bright testimony against this people, at the judgment day. . . . 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. (Mosiah 3:24–25)

Moreover, in Mosiah 4:14–15, Benjamin also spoke concerning the need to teach children properly, presumably in order to prevent future degeneration among his people.

16. *Covenant renewal and sacrifices.* These two factors are clearly visible in Mosiah 1–6. Shortly before Benjamin’s address commenced, the people offered sacrifices and burnt offerings to God (see Mosiah 2:3). At the conclusion of his speech, Benjamin asked the people if they believed his words, and they replied that they desired to make a covenant with God: “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” (Mosiah 5:5; see 5:1–7).

17. *Providing for those who will survive.* In Mosiah 4, Benjamin commanded his people to care for the children and for the poor, both spiritually and temporally. He imposed these duties on all those who would survive him, and he made the act of providing for the poor a mandatory condition which the people must satisfy in order to retain a remission of their sins (see Mosiah 4:14–26). His reappointment of priests also provided for the spiritual needs of all those who could survive him (see Mosiah 6:3).

18. *Consolation to the inner circle.* In his preparations for transferring the kingdom to his son Mosiah, Benjamin met first with all his sons, his closest circle of family associates

(see Mosiah 1). Benjamin extended comfort to the entire assembly at several points in his speech; he viewed his entire audience as family, as his “friends” and “kindred” (Mosiah 4:4), and as an eternal family, the sons and daughters of God (see Mosiah 5:7). In his closing words, Benjamin gave comfort and encouragement to all his people, assuring them that great blessings would be theirs if they lived as he had taught them (see Mosiah 5:15).

19. *Didactic speech.* Many didactic elements are present in Benjamin’s speech. Benjamin taught the importance of such things as service, humility, charity, obedience, faith, the atonement of Jesus Christ, and many other practical and spiritual virtues.

20. *Ars moriendi or the approach to death.* This element is not found in Benjamin’s speech, though it might be seen in Mosiah 2:28–30.

Based on this data, a strong case can be made in support of the fact that the pattern of ancient farewell addresses that has been detected by scholars in recent years was illustriously carried out by Benjamin in his classic farewell address. Almost every element found and enumerated by Kurz in a wide array of ancient sources—but especially the aspects pertinent to the biblical tradition—was included by Benjamin.

Was Benjamin Following Prior Patterns?

A logical inference from the foregoing data is that Benjamin was aware of the ancient farewell speech tradition and followed its pattern consciously. This raises the question: which prior precedents did Benjamin know about as he designed and orchestrated his final farewell sermon? Three possibilities present themselves: (1) precedents from

previous Book of Mormon prophets and leaders; (2) biblical examples known to him from the plates of brass; and (3) cases in additional texts found on the plates of brass.

Several farewell speeches are contained in the Book of Mormon. Indeed, it seems that it became almost mandatory for a Book of Mormon prophet near the time of his death to deliver his parting words to his posterity, his people, or to future readers. It exceeds the scope of this study to compare all the elements of these farewell speeches in depth, but even a cursory survey shows that most of Kurz's farewell speech elements are present in these seven final statements or discourses in addition to Benjamin's: Lehi (2 Nephi 1–4), Nephi (2 Nephi 31–33), Jacob (Jacob 4–6), Enos (Enos 1:27), Mosiah (Mosiah 28–29), Mormon (Mormon 6:17–7:10), and Moroni (Moroni 10:34).

Benjamin would have been aware of the farewell texts of Lehi, Nephi, Jacob, and Enos. After Benjamin, the tradition continued in the Book of Mormon, though it became much less distinct. Benjamin's speech must be viewed as a part of this longstanding, venerable Nephite literary and rhetorical tradition, which very likely drew much of its strength from biblical sources. Two tables show the elements of the farewell speech protocol included by both Book of Mormon and Old Testament prophets. Four Old Testament accounts are old enough to have been on the plates of brass: Moses (Deuteronomy 31–34), Joshua (Joshua 23–24), David (1 Kings 2:1–10; compare 1 Chronicles 28–29), and Samuel (1 Samuel 12:1–25). Table 1 examines Book of Mormon speeches, and table 2 compares Old Testament speeches with that of Benjamin.⁵ From the information on these tables we can examine the similarities and patterns found in the different records.

It is also possible that Benjamin was aware of other farewell speeches contained on the plates of brass that are not

Table 1
Farewell Speeches in the Book of Mormon

Kuruz's Attributes of Typical Ancient Farewell Addresses

	Lehi	Nephi	Jacob	Enos	Benjamin	Mosiah	Mormon	Moroni
1	◐	○	●	○	●	◐	○	●
2	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	○
3	●	●	●	●	●	○	●	●
4	●	●	●	●	●	●	◐	●
5	●	●	●	◐	●	●	●	●
6	●	●	●	◐	●	●	●	●
7	●	●	◐	◐	●	◐	●	●
8	○	◐	◐	○	◐	○	○	●
9	●	●	○	◐	●	●	○	○
10	●	○	●	○	●	●	●	○
11	●	●	●	◐	●	◐	◐	●
12	●	●	●	◐	●	●	●	●
13	●	○	○	○	●	●	○	○
14	○	○	○	○	○	◐	○	○
15	◐	●	●	○	◐	●	◐	◐
16	○	○	○	○	●	○	○	○
17	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	●
18	●	○	●	○	●	○	○	○
19	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
20	●	●	●	●	○	○	◐	●

● present
◐ implied
○ absent

Table 2
Farewell Speeches in the Old Testament and
Benjamin's Speech

	Moses	Joshua	David	Samuel	Benjamin
1	●	●	●	○	●
2	●	●	○	●	●
3	●	●	○	●	●
4	●	●	●	○	●
5	●	●	●	●	●
6	●	●	●	●	●
7	●	○	○	○	●
8	○	○	○	○	●
9	●	○	●	○	●
10	●	●	○	●	●
11	●	●	○	○	●
12	●	●	●	○	●
13	●	○	●	●	●
14	●	○	○	○	○
15	●	●	●	●	●
16	●	●	●	○	●
17	●	○	○	○	●
18	○	○	○	○	●
19	●	○	○	○	●
20	○	○	○	○	○

Kurz's Attributes of Typical Ancient Farewell Addresses

15/2/3

6/7/7

● present
● implied
○ absent

11/11 6/4/3

found in the Bible today. In a Hebrew text recorded at least as early as the time of Christ—and quite possibly containing materials that are considerably older—an account appears of a farewell speech delivered by an Israelite leader named Cenez.⁶ Without necessarily arguing that this precise text was found on the plates of brass, the speech of Cenez (which was not included by Kurz) provides an excellent example of yet another ancient Israelite farewell sermon and perhaps is the kind of additional material Benjamin might have known about and used as a model.

The history of Cenez tells of a prophet-warrior-leader who succeeded Joshua as the first judge in Israel. The precise spelling of his name is shrouded in obscurity, and versions of it such as Cenez, Zenez, and Zenec have been used in various Latin manuscripts. D. J. Harrington, translator of the text in Charlesworth's *Pseudepigrapha*, spells the name as Kenaz. The traditions about him were known well enough that he is mentioned by Josephus, who knew him as Keniazos.⁷ We shall call him Cenez, following the Latin manuscript (A).

According to *Pseudo-Philo*, Cenez ruled the Israelites for fifty-seven years—about the length of time that Benjamin probably reigned. During Cenez's lifetime he purged his people by burning all the self-confessing covenant-breakers. When the time came for him to die, Cenez called his people together in a large assembly and spoke to them about what the Lord was prepared to do for his people in the last days. Cenez reestablished God's covenant with the Israelites, and his priest Phinehas revealed to the people sacred things that had been shown one night to Phinehas's father in a dream.

In this text, the modern reader gets a close look at what an ancient Israelite farewell and covenant renewal assembly might have been like, or at least what one Jewish historian long ago understood it to have been. Because of the

numerous points of similarity it has to the farewell and covenant-renewal assembly convened by Benjamin,⁸ this text is worth examining in detail. The following consists of chapter 28 of *Pseudo-Philo* as translated by D. J. Harrington in the Charlesworth volume, with a few of the ancient Latin phrases included and explained. The italicized phrases indicate points of contact with Benjamin's speech and are discussed following the text itself:

And when the days of Kenaz drew *near for him to die*, he *sent and summoned all* of them and Jabis and Phinehas the two prophets and Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest, and he said to them, "Behold now the Lord has shown to me all his wonders that he is *ready to do for his people in the last days* (literally "the newest days," in *novissimis diebus*). And now I will *establish my covenant* (or "last will," *testamentum*) *with you today* so that you do not abandon the Lord your God after my departure. For you have seen all the wonders that came upon those who sinned and what they declared in *confessing their sins* voluntarily, or how the Lord our God destroyed them because they transgressed against his covenant. Now therefore *spare those of your household and your children*, and stay in the paths of the Lord your God lest the Lord destroy his own inheritance."

And Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest said, "If Kenaz the leader and the prophets and the elders command it, I will speak the word that I heard from my father when he was dying, and *I will not be silent* about the command that *he commanded me* while his soul was being taken away." And Kenaz the leader and the prophets said, "Speak, Phinehas. Should anyone speak before the priest who guards the commandments of the Lord our God, especially since truth goes forth from his mouth and a shining light from his heart?"

And then Phinehas said, "While my father was dy-

ing, he commanded me, saying, 'These words you will say to the sons of Israel, "When you were gathered together in the assembly, *the Lord appeared to me three days ago in a dream by night* and said to me, 'Behold you have seen and also your father before you how much I have toiled among my people. But after your death this people will rise up and corrupt its ways and turn from my commands, and I will be very angry with them. But I will recall that time that was before the creation of the world, the time when man did not exist and there was no wickedness in it, when I said that the world would be created and those who would come into it would praise me. And *I would plant* (or "I shall plant for myself," *plantabo mihi*) *a great vineyard*, and from it I would choose a plant (or "planting," "cutting," *plantationem*); and I would care for it (or "put it in different places," *disponam*) and *call it by my name*, and it would *be mine forever* (or "always," *semper*). When I did all the things that I said, nevertheless my plant that was called by my name did not recognize (or "perceive, or acknowledge as genuine," *agnoscet*) me as its planter, but it destroyed its own fruit (or "corrupted its fruit," *corrumpet fructum suum*) and did not yield up its fruit to me (or "did not bring forth its fruit," *non proferat fructum eius*).'" And this is what my father commanded me to say to this people."

And Kenaz and the elders and *all the people lifted up their voices and wept* ("together," *unanimiter*) with great lamentation until evening and said, "Will the Shepherd destroy his flock for any reason except that it has sinned against him? And now he is the one who will *spare us according to the abundance of his mercy*, because he has toiled so much among us."

And when they had sat down, a holy spirit ("the Holy Ghost," *spiritus sanctus*) came upon Kenaz and dwelled in him and put him in ecstasy, and he began to prophesy, saying, "Behold now I see what I had not

hoped for, and I perceive that I did not understand. Hear now, you who dwell on the earth, just as those staying a while (or “dwelling, or tarrying,” commorantes) on it prophesied before me and saw this hour even before the earth was corrupted (corrumperetur; compare nine appearances of *corrupt* or *corrupted* in Jacob 5), so all of you who dwell in it may know the *prophecies that have been fixed in advance* (or “decided, determined at a previous time,” *predestinatas*). Behold now I see flames that do not burn, and I hear springs raised up out of a sleep for which there is no foundation, and I perceive neither the tops of the mountains nor the roof of the firmament, but everything has no appearance and is invisible and has no place whatsoever. And although my eye does not know what it sees, my heart will find what to say. Now from the flame that I saw not burning, I saw and behold a spark came up and, as it were, laid for itself a platform. And the floor was like what a spider spins, in the pattern of a shield. And when this foundation had been set, behold there was stirred up from that spring, as it were, boiling foam; and behold it changed itself into another foundation, as it were. Now between the upper foundation and the lower there came forth from the light of that invisible place, as it were, the images of men; and they were walking around. And behold a voice was saying, ‘These will be a foundation for men, and they will dwell in between them for 7,000 years.’ And the lower foundation was solid material, but the upper was of foam. And those who went forth from the light of the invisible place, they will be *those who will have the name ‘man’*” (or “of a man,” *eius hominis*). And when he will sin against me and the time will be fulfilled, the spark will be put out and the spring will stop, and so they will be transformed.”

And when Kenaz had spoken these words, he was awakened, and his senses came back to him, but he did not know what he had said or what he had seen. But this

alone he said to the people: "If the repose of the just after they have died is like this, we must die to the corruptible world so as not to see sins." And when he had said these words, Kenaz died and slept with his fathers. And the people mourned for him thirty days.⁹

The farewell speech of Cenez seems to manifest twelve of Kurz's elements, as enumerated below:

1. *The summons.* Cenez himself summoned all his people, along with two prophets and the son of the priest.

4. *Impending death.* His assembly occurred at a time when it was "near for him to die."

5. *Exhortation* and 17. *Providing for those who will survive.* Cenez also admonished his people to spare those of their household and their children and to stay in the paths of the Lord.

6. *Warnings and final injunctions.* His people acknowledged his warning that the shepherd would destroy his flock only if it had sinned against God.

9. *Tasks for successors* and 13. *Appointment of or reference to a successor.* Phinehas's dying father commanded his son (successor) to speak his final words. His father commanded him to tell the people certain things.

10. *Theological review of history.* Only those who remain diligent in keeping the commandments and covenant of the Lord will be preserved. Cenez recalled in his speech the wonders that came upon those who had sinned and those who had fallen into idolatry and adultery. When they voluntarily confessed their sins, the Lord destroyed them by burning 6,110 transgressors, according to events mentioned earlier in *Pseudo-Philo's* history of the time of Cenez.

11. *Revelation of the future.* Following this response by the people, Cenez began to prophesy, saying, "Behold now I have seen what I had not hoped for, and I perceive that I did not understand. Hear now you who dwell on the earth." In

the middle of Cenez's assembly, Phinehas, the son of Eleazar the priest, reported an extraordinary vision received by Eleazar as he was about to die. Phinehas had been commanded by his father to reveal these things to Israel, and Phinehas did so at a special time when the people were "gathered together in the assembly." Otherwise, Phinehas was to remain silent about this revelation until commanded to speak. Cenez announced that his purpose was to tell that which the Lord had shown to him, particularly all the Lord's wonders and that which he was ready to do for his people "in the last days."

14. *Bewailing the loss.* After his death, Cenez's people mourned for thirty days. Also, as in the allegory of the olive tree in Jacob 5, Eleazar was told that the plant would not recognize God as its planter and would destroy its own fruit and not yield up fruit to God. Upon hearing these things the people of Cenez "lifted up their voices and wept with great lamentation until the evening."

16. *Covenant renewal and sacrifices.* Cenez was concerned to establish the covenant of God with the people on that day so they would not abandon the Lord after Cenez's departure.

19. *Didactic speech.* Much of his address takes on a didactic tone.

In addition to Cenez's conformity to the biblical tradition, many similarities can be found between the account of Cenez and the speech of Benjamin, including the following, which do not necessarily fit into any of Kurz's categories in particular:

- The command of Eleazar was a command given by a father to his son, just as Eleazar entrusted his son with sacred knowledge to be preserved and transmitted to subsequent generations. Commands from fathers also play a prominent role in the protection and transmission of sacred knowledge in the Book of Mormon. Fol-

lowing this same pattern, Benjamin commands his sons and gives them charge concerning the affairs of the kingdom and the sacred treasures as he is about to die.¹⁰

- The vision of Eleazar is extraordinary. The occasion of an annual assembly, when the people were “gathered together in the assembly,” triggered a vision in which the Lord appeared to Eleazar “in a dream by night.” Likewise, Benjamin reveals the very sacred words made known unto him “by an angel from God” who woke him up and stood before him and delivered a message (Mosiah 3:2).
- The words of the Lord to Eleazar began by acknowledging that the Lord had toiled long among the people. Benjamin also recognizes the great goodness of God to his people (see Mosiah 4:6).
- Eleazar was told that even though the Lord would be angry with his people because of their corruption, he would recall both the things that were planned before the creation of the world and the world’s purpose as a dwelling place for those who would praise God. Of course, praising God occupies a prominent and important position in Mosiah 4:1–11.
- Eleazar was told how God would plant a vineyard and choose a particular plant that would become special to him. God would care for it and call it by his name and it would be God’s forever. These words distinctively recall the allegory of the olive tree in Jacob 5. Moreover, Benjamin echoes the theme that his people are a “highly favored people of the Lord” (Mosiah 1:13), would be kept and preserved by God (see Mosiah 1:13; 2:31), and would specifically be called by his name (see Mosiah 1:12; 5:9–12), through all of which the Lord would seal them his (see Mosiah 5:15).
- Cenez declared that he had been privileged to see those

things which had been seen and established “even before the earth was corrupted,” which were “fixed in advance,” and also to know those things as they had been “prophesied [by others] before” him. In a similar way, Benjamin asserts that the substance of his prophecies had been shown to previous generations, to Moses and his people, and also to all the “holy prophets” who spoke concerning the Lord’s coming (Mosiah 3:15).

- The prophecy of Cenez foresaw the millennial day when, in his view, the world would become invisible.¹¹ From a spark there was laid a foundation and from a spring there emerged a firmament; between these two—the new heaven and the new earth—there came forth from the light of that place the images of men who would dwell there for 7,000 years. These are they who will have the name “man” or, according to a variant text, “they will be those who will dwell and [will have] the name of that man” (*habitabunt et nomen hominis illius*). For Benjamin, this is the name that should never “be blotted out, except it be through transgression” (Mosiah 5:11). Parenthetically, the blotting out of names was vividly a part of Cenez’s early ministry, since Cenez wrote the names of sinners on books that were then blotted out of Israel when the books were consumed by divine fire.¹²
- The final statement of Cenez was that his people must “die to the corruptible world so as not to see sins.” Benjamin’s central admonition is that people must put off the natural man and become saints and that this is the only way to be found blameless (see Mosiah 3:19–22).

Pseudo-Philo is a valuable text shedding light on the religious, cultural, and literary backgrounds of Benjamin’s speech. The valedictory words of Cenez and others capture the essence of the traditional Israelite farewell sermon,

through which the Western mind can more deeply appreciate yet another dimension of the salutatory words and deeds of King Benjamin. Some of the foregoing similarities may be coincidental, but taken together they form an impressive array. The items on this list—the theology, imagery, protocol, and ritual—point consistently in the same direction, to the Hebrew background and Palestinian provenance of *Pseudo-Philo*.¹³

This chapter has considered several ideas. Above all, Benjamin's speech is the most complete example of a typical Israelite farewell speech known today. Benjamin's address epitomizes this genre of traditional Israelite literature, as recently defined in scholarly studies. The account of the funeral speech of Cenez is probably the next best example in existence, followed by Moses' concluding words in Deuteronomy 31–34. Given the obscurity of this information in *Pseudo-Philo* before the turn of this century, the remarkable affinities between the farewell assembly and address of Cenez and the final speech of Benjamin become even more impressive and highlight even further the strong conformity and congruence between King Benjamin's speech and the farewell speeches found in the biblical tradition.

Notes

1. William S. Kurz, "Luke 22:14–38 and Greco-Roman and Biblical Farewell Addresses," *JBL* 104 (1985): 251–68. See also William S. Kurz, *Farewell Addresses in the New Testament* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1990).

2. Kurz, "Luke 22:14–38," 261.

3. *Ibid.*

4. This information was briefly reported in "Benjamin's Speech: A Classic Ancient Farewell Address," in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992), 120–22.

5. The data concerning the Old Testament prophets was found in Kurz, "Luke 22:14–38," 262.

6. An English translation of this work, which is titled *Biblical Antiquities* or *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum*, is available in James H. Charlesworth, ed., *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1985), 2:297–377. Its unknown author is called Pseudo-Philo because the work was collected and found among a number of books written by Philo of Alexandria. For more information comparing and distinguishing elements in Cenez's life and what is known about the ancient prophet Zenos who was known to the writers of the Book of Mormon, see John W. Welch, "The Last Words of Cenez and the Book of Mormon," in *The Allegory of the Olive Tree*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and John W. Welch (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1994), 305–21.

7. Josephus, *Antiquities* 5.3.3; compare Joshua 15:17.

8. Hugh W. Nibley first detected the fact that this account in *Pseudo-Philo* was relevant to the Book of Mormon; see *Since Cumorah* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988 [1st ed., 1967]), 286–89. He was interested in connecting Cenez (Zenez, Zenec, Kenaz, Cinez) with the Book of Mormon Zenos and with the author of the Thanksgiving Hymns from Qumran, but he does not mention Benjamin.

9. D. J. Harrington, "Pseudo-Philo: A New Translation and Introduction," in Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2:341–42.

10. The pattern in the Book of Mormon begins with Nephi's commands to his brother Jacob (see Jacob 1:2) and then is continued by the commands of Jacob to his sons and grandsons. After Benjamin, Alma and his posterity follow the same pattern (see, for example, Alma 37). See John W. Welch, "The Father's Command to Keep Records in the Small Plates of Nephi" (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1985).

11. Nibley, *Since Cumorah*, 288, understands the text otherwise. He sees the words of Cenez in 28:7 as "recall[ing] to his hearers' minds the state of things at the creation of the earth," whereas the response of Cenez's listeners in 28:10 strongly indi-

cates that this prophecy is describing the future “repose of the just after they have died.” Nibley, *Since Cumorah*, 288, explains the awkwardness of his reading by concluding that “much of the vision is missing.” Understanding the text from the outset as foreseeing the millennial or eschatological day seems more natural, however, and it is also consistent with the eschatology in the rest of *Pseudo-Philo*. See Harrington, “Pseudo-Philo,” in Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2:301.

12. *Pseudo-Philo* 26:3–4, 8.

13. See Harrington’s comments in Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2:298–300.