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Robert L. Millet

# Benjamin: King, Prophet, Theologian (Parts 1 & 2)

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## Summary:

Robert Millet begins by reviewing what we know of King Benjamin's life prior to his great sermon and covers some of the highlights of what he taught. Millet explains what the name Jesus Christ means according to the Hebrew background, and delineates the importance of that name. He explains some of the benefits of the atonement, including that it covers those who have sinned in ignorance.

Transcript  
Book of Mormon, Christ

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## **Benjamin: King, Prophet, Theologian (Part 1)**

Robert L. Millet

I am pleased to be with you today and to be able to continue this series on the Book of Mormon figures and characters, the prophets, and their messages. Today we will consider the great prophet, King Benjamin. We'll talk briefly about who he is from the text, what he did, what he was famous for, and we'll lead into the things that prepared for his final sermon. We'll devote most of our time to the sermon itself.

Let's begin by turning to Omni 1:23–24:

Behold, I, Amaleki, [there have been long line of record keepers when we come to Amaleki] was born in the days of Mosiah; and I have lived to see his death; and Benjamin, his son, reigneth in his stead.

And behold, I have seen, in the days of king Benjamin, a serious war and much bloodshed between the Nephites and the Lamanites. But behold, the Nephites did obtain much advantage over them; yea, insomuch that king Benjamin did drive them out of the land of Zarahemla.

This next verse is quite revealing about Benjamin and his times.

And it came to pass that I began to be old; and, having no seed, and knowing king Benjamin to be a just man before the Lord, wherefore, I shall deliver up these plates unto him, exhorting all men to come unto God, the Holy One of Israel, and believe in prophesying, and in revelations, and in the ministering of angels, and in the gift of interpreting languages [that is, speaking in tongues], and in all things which are good; for there is nothing which is good save it comes from the Lord: and that which is evil cometh from the devil. (Omni 1:25)

Let's say a little bit, then, about Benjamin. As Benjamin receives the records—and we will read a little more about that in a minute—what we will see is that in this point of time, there seems to be a merging of the spiritual and the secular as far as the records are concerned. You will recall that Nephi and Jacob draw the distinction between the large plates, which dealt with secular matters, such as the kings and their reigns, their wanderings, their battles, and the small plates, which dealt with the spiritual, such as the revelations, the visions, the prophecies—the things of Nephi's soul. With Benjamin, there is a merging, and both records now are being combined into



one. We now begin to have a record, beginning with Mosiah, that will be both spiritual and secular.

Look in the Words of Mormon. Let's go to verse 9. The detail from verses 9–18 is necessary detail as we now begin to move into Mormon's abridgment of the large plates, starting with the book of Mosiah. The record we know as the small plates did not cover all. It brought us up to Benjamin, and so it is necessary for Mormon to cover a few details to make the story begin properly with the book of Mosiah. Let's start, then with verse 9:

And now I, Mormon, proceed to finish out my record, which I take from the plates of Nephi; and I make it according to the knowledge and the understanding which God has given me.

Wherefore, it came to pass that after Amaleki had delivered up these plates into the hands of king Benjamin, he took them and put them with the other plates, which contained records which had been handed down by the kings, from generation to generation until the days of king Benjamin. (Words of Mormon 1:9–10)

There we see that the small plates are added to the larger pile of plates that will now be stored. Please continue:

And they were handed down from king Benjamin, from generation to generation until they have fallen into my hands. And I, Mormon, pray to God that they may be preserved from this time henceforth. And I know that they will be preserved; for there are great things written upon them, out of which my people and their brethren shall be judged at the great and last day, according to the word of God which is written.

And now, concerning this king Benjamin—he had somewhat of contentions among his own people.

And it came to pass also that the armies of the Lamanites came down out of the land of Nephi, to battle against his people. But behold, king Benjamin 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.

And in the strength of the Lord they did contend against their enemies, until they had slain many thousands of the Lamanites. And it came to pass that they did contend against the Lamanites until they had driven them out of all the lands of their inheritance. (Words of Mormon 1:11–14)

So we see Benjamin as something more than just prophet and spokesman; we see Benjamin as a military leader as well. In verses 15–18 we learn that

Benjamin and other holy men who worked with him deal with false Christs, false prophets, false teachers, and so on. Look at verses 17–18:

For behold, king Benjamin was a holy man, and he did reign over his people in righteousness; and there were many holy men in the land, and they did speak the word of God with power and with authority; and they did use much sharpness because of the stiffneckedness of the people—

Wherefore, with the help of these, king Benjamin, by laboring with all the might of his body and the faculty of his whole soul, and also the prophets, did once more establish peace in the land.

So, let's go to chapter 1, then, of the book of Mosiah. We are now making preparations for the great sermon. In the first four verses of chapter 1, Benjamin begins to teach his sons. Verse 2 mentions the names of his sons: Mosiah, Helorum, and Helaman. He gives them a charge concerning, for example (in verse 3), the plates of brass and how significant it is to care for and study those plates of brass. Look at verse 4 of chapter 1:

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.

This verse is interesting because 'the language of the Egyptians' is mentioned again, as it is in the first chapter of 1 Nephi. My guess is that if you stood up any hundred Latter-day Saints and asked them about the plates of brass and asked them what language the plates of brass were written on, my guess is that eighty or ninety would say, "Hebrew." Why? Well, because we think of the brass plates as a record like unto the Bible, more extensive, but like unto the Bible. But, notice, 'the language of the Egyptians.' I don't know if that means the plates were written entirely in Egyptian, or if parts were written in Egyptian. We certainly know that two key figures, Moses and Joseph, who were great record keepers, would have spent the bulk of their time in Egypt. Nevertheless, because of Lehi's knowledge of the Egyptians, he was able to read the plates.

In the same chapter (Mosiah 1), let's go to verse 9. Benjamin now begins to announce that he is going to retire and step down as king: "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." So he calls his son Mosiah to him and tells him that he plans to make a proclamation. Verse 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 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.

He indicates that he wants to do several things: (1) He wants to announce his retirement; (2) he wants to announce his son as successor; (3) he wants to give to the people a new name, a name by which they will be known, a name that can only be blotted out by transgression (it is, of course, the name of Christ); and (4) he wants to account for his own reign and ministry as well. The end of verse 11 indicates how Benjamin feels about his people. Notice, he says, "They have been a diligent people in keeping the commandments of the Lord." The other thing that he does is in verse 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.

Chapter 2 begins, in the first eight verses, with a discussion of the preparation for the sermon—*more* preparation. Notice, for example, how they prepare. Let me note that the preceding chapter, Mosiah 1:18, and the second chapter, verse 1, mentioned gathering to the temple. So, as far as I can tell, this is the first mention of a temple in Zarahemla. Where was the other temple? Who built a temple before? Nephi! It is built in the land of Nephi (2 Nephi 5).

But as far as I can tell, this is the first mention of a temple in Zarahemla. Verse 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;

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. (Mosiah 2:3-4)

Verse 6 says: "They pitched their tents round about the temple, every man having his tent with the door thereof towards the temple," and so forth. We are actually prepared for the sermon by the end of verse 8. Let's turn our attention to the sermon, starting with verse 9. Would someone like to read for us just verse 9? This verse 9 is a very interesting verse and indicates what we are going to receive:

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.

What is he trying to say? "Open your ears that you may hear, your hearts that you may understand, your minds"—this was a very experiential thing. He wants them to be wide open, but notice, "that the mysteries of God may be unfolded unto you." I think that most of us have read the sermon of Benjamin many times. What is it about the sermon of Benjamin that is so mysterious? What do you usually think of when you think of a mystery? How is the word normally used in conversation in the Church? What is a mystery?

[Student answer:] Something you don't quite understand.

Yes! In fact, it is often used in a negative way if someone says, "Isn't that a mystery?" which means almost out of the range of the appropriate. But that is

never the way it is used in scripture. Benjamin is going to reveal the mysteries.

I have read this sermon a few times, and there is nothing mysterious in the sense of out of the way, odd, unusual, or overly deep. Harold B. Lee said that a mystery is that which can only be known by the Spirit of God, through revelation.<sup>1</sup> Now, the fact is, people can read the sermon of Benjamin without the Holy Ghost and make good sense of it, but they won't be touched and moved and strengthened as will those who have the power of the Holy Ghost.

The first major sermon I would like to stress that comes through, or the first major subsermon, the first message, is the importance of service and Benjamin's accounting. I would have you read that, beginning about verse 12 and going through about verse 17:

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;

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 14 says he has labored with his hands. What is he trying to say? This is his accounting. I was interested, if you'll open your Bibles, in a similar accounting in the Old Testament. If you will go to 1 Samuel 12:1–4. This is Samuel, giving a similar sermon. We are on page 396 in the Old Testament:

And Samuel said unto all Israel, Behold, I have hearkened unto your voice in all that ye said unto me, and have made a king over you.

And now, behold, the king walketh before you: and I am old and gray-headed; and, behold, my sons are with you: and I have walked before you from my childhood unto this day.

Behold, here I am: witness against me before the Lord, and before his anointed: whose ox have I taken? or whose ass have I taken? or whom have I defrauded? whom have I oppressed? or of whose hand have I received any bribe to blind mine eyes therewith? and I will restore it you.

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<sup>1</sup> See Harold B. Lee, *Ye Are the Light of the World* (Salt Lake City: Deseret, 1974), 211.

And they said, Thou hast not defrauded us, nor oppressed us, neither hast thou taken ought of any man's hand.

Similar situation, isn't it? Samuel is explaining how he has tried his best to keep the commandments and never lord it over them, as we would say. This is the same thing King Benjamin is doing in Mosiah 2. Let's go back to the Book of Mormon now. Let's have someone read verses 15, 16, and 17. These, of course, are the more famous verses in Mosiah 2 about Benjamin and service:

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.

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.

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.

Verse 17 is one of the more famous verses in the Book of Mormon.

Someone restate the principle in verse 17. Say it a different way. What principle is involved in verse 17?

[Student answer:] Service is the price we pay for the space we occupy.

Good. Does any New Testament passage come to mind when you think of this?

[Student answer:] Jesus said, inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me (Matthew 25:40).

The great parable of the sheep and the goats. What separated the sheep from the goats? That one thing—service. It is amazing that the more you learn, the more you develop in doctrinal understanding, the more you begin to appreciate that the things that really matter are people. A friend of mine was told by a General Authority on one occasion—my friend was a very efficient man, very effective, occasionally officious—and the General Authority pulled him aside and said, "Bill, always remember that people are more important than truth." My friend did what I think I would have done at the time. He recoiled and said, "Well, no Elder so-and-so, truth is everything." The General Authority said, "No, Bill, people matter more than truth." It seems to me that God is in the people business, and so must we be.



Another way of saying this is, and we won't turn to it, but in the 93rd section of the Doctrine and Covenants, verses 12–20, it talks about Christ's pathway to godhood, how he became what he was. Those are verses that talk about him growing from grace to grace, line upon line, as it were. "He received not of the fulness at first," (v. 13) but received the fulness in and after the Resurrection. The clincher is among the last verses, where it says: "I give unto you these sayings that you may understand and know how to worship, and know what to worship, that you may come unto the Father in my name, and in due time receive of his fulness" (v. 19). We worship the Father, who is the ultimate object of our worship. We worship the Son to the degree that we emulate the Son and imitate his actions. I think Benjamin is uttering a great and profound teaching here in a simple verse: The more Christ-like we become, the more people-centered we become.

Who is reading for us? Pick up on verse 18: "Behold, ye have called me your king; and if I, whom ye call your king, do labor to serve you, than ought not ye to labor to serve one another?"

Let me interrupt there and give two other quick examples that come to mind for me. The way we assess our spiritual growth may not be the degree to which we are enjoying what the scriptures call the "gifts of the Spirit." It is often the case that the gifts of the Spirit are things that are granted unto us. They are gifts, whether they be discernment, prophecy, revelation, teaching, or speaking or knowing knowledge, that are often given for the blessing or benefit of the Church. You will notice, when they come up in 1 Corinthians 12 and Moroni 10 and Doctrine and Covenants 46, that they are always presented in context with the Church.

So, if a man or woman gets up and is able to just wow a congregation with the way he or she speaks, if a man or woman can take the scriptures and just unfold them so that people are deeply moved or touched, but that person leaves the classroom and treats people with disrespect, or is not kind, or is not giving, or is not charitable, that person would make a serious mistake to suppose that gift of the Spirit is an obvious evidence of God's acceptance of his or her life. Probably, the fruits of the Spirit, as Paul called them in

Galatians 5:22, are love and patience, longsuffering, gentleness, kindness—these would be much more appropriate as a sign that we are on track, rather than the degree to which we exercise the gifts given to us in spite of ourselves, for a minimal worthiness, but a blessing of others.

Some years ago, Elder McConkie told a story of his grandmother. He said:

My father writes this:

“Mother was president of the Moab Relief Society. J— B— [a nonmember who opposed the Church] had married a Mormon girl. They had several children; now they had a new baby. They were very poor and Mother was going day by day to care for the child and to take them baskets of food, etc. Mother herself was ill, and more than once was hardly able to get home after doing the work at the J— B— home.

“One day she returned home especially tired and weary. She slept in her chair. She dreamed she was bathing a baby which she discovered was the Christ Child. She thought, Oh, what a great honor to thus serve the very Christ! As she held the baby in her lap, she was all but overcome. She thought, who else has actually held the Christ Child? Unspeakable joy filled her whole being. She was aflame with the glory of the Lord. It seemed that the very marrow in her bones would melt. Her joy was so great it awakened her. As she woke, these words were spoken to her, ‘Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me’ ”<sup>2</sup>

President Lee tells of an occasion where, just prior to the dedication of the Los Angeles temple back in the fifties, he had an experience:

Something new happened in my life when, along about three or four o’clock in the morning, I enjoyed an experience that I think was not a dream, but it must have been a vision. It seemed that I was witnessing a great spiritual gathering, where men and women were standing up, two or three at a time, and speaking in tongues. The spirit was so unusual. I seemed to hear the voice of President David O. McKay say, “If you want to love God, you have to learn to love and serve the people. That is the way to show your love for God.”<sup>3</sup>

From above verse 19–25 we enter into what we call a second subsermon or message about what might be called ‘divine indebtedness.’ Let’s pick up now with Mosiah 2:19:

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<sup>2</sup> Mark L. McConkie, ed. and comp., *Doctrines of the Restoration: Sermons and Writings of Bruce R. McConkie* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1989), 388.

<sup>3</sup> Harold B. Lee, *Stand Ye in Holy Places* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1975), 189.



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!

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—

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.

That could be a very depressing verse. You think about that. If you do everything in your power to do good, you do everything in your power to accomplish the purposes for which you were sent to earth, yet you would be an unprofitable servant. Why? Wouldn't that be enough? Why unprofitable? What does that imply? What does the word *profit* imply.

[Student answer:] Get to the point where we are paying back.

Okay, good! Yet, you would be an unprofitable servant. Look at Luke 17. This is an unusual passage, but I think it's a great cross-reference to what we are reading here. Let's pick up with verse 7 and we'll go through 10:

But which of you, having a servant plowing or feeding cattle, will say unto him by and by, when he is come from the field, Go and sit down to meat?

And will not rather say unto him, Make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird thyself, and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken; and afterward thou shalt eat and drink?

Doth he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I trow not.

Meaning, I think not. Does he thank that servant that did those things? I think not. Go ahead.

So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do.

Very interesting, isn't it? It's like the young man in one of my classes who came in toward the middle of the semester and said, "Brother Millet, I need to talk to you about cheating on the first exam." I said, "Okay, tell me about it," and he told me about it. And he said, "Okay, fine. What are you going to do?"

I said that I'd have to think about it. He said, "What do you mean, you will have to think about it?" I said, "I'll have to decide what your situation and fate will be." He said, "What do you mean, my fate? I told you the truth." And my answer was interesting. I said to him that at this university, honesty is a given. We don't reward honesty; we *expect* honesty. I think it is the same principle. Gerald Lund, in his book *Jesus Christ, Key to the Plan of Salvation*, discusses not only Luke 17, but Mosiah 2. He says this:

In some ways, this parable is no less troublesome than King Benjamin's statement. However, focusing on the word *profit* will help us better understand the concept of unprofitable servants. The word implies personal gain or benefit. *Profit* means an increase in assets or status or benefits.

That is the crux of the concept of man being an unprofitable servant. God is perfect—in knowledge, power, influence, and attributes. He is the Creator of *all* things! What could any person—or all people together for that matter—do to bring profit, (that is, an increase in assets, status, or benefits) to God?

A nineteenth-century scholar, commenting on this parable, stated that concept eloquently, when he noted that no man "can work righteousness, in the smallest degree, beyond those powers which God has given them; and justice and equity require that they should exert those powers to the uttermost in the service of their Maker; and, after having acted thus, it may be justly said, *They have done only what it was their duty to do*. The nature of God is illimitable, and all the attributes of that nature are infinitely glorious: they cannot be *lessened* by the *transgressions* of his creatures, nor can they be *increased* by the uninterrupted, eternal *obedience*, and unceasing *hallelujahs*, of all the intelligent creatures that people the whole vortex of nature."<sup>4</sup>

Brother Lund continues: "That we are his children and he loves us is undeniable, and that situation puts us in a status far above any of his other creations. But we must somehow disabuse ourselves of any notion that we can bring personal profit to God by our actions. That would make God indebted to men, which is unthinkable."<sup>5</sup> So this explains Benjamin's ringing 'ifs'. Even if we were to serve him with all the power of our souls, even if we should

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<sup>4</sup>Gerald N. Lund, *Jesus Christ, Key to the Plan of Salvation* (Salt Lake City: Deseret, 1991), 120, quoting Adam Clarke, "Matthew to Acts," in *The New Testament of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*, vol. 5 of *Clarke's Bible Commentary*, 6 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, n.d.), 5:468; italics in original.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

render thanks with that same power, which few of us if any ever do, we would still be unprofitable servants. It is a principle of what we might call “eternal thankfulness.” The Lord, in the Doctrine and Covenants, counsels us to first thank the Lord in all things and then, later in that same section 59, to know this principle: He is upset with us when we do not acknowledge his hand in all things. Not that he needs the credit, but we need to attribute the glory, the honor, the majesty, to him for our own benefit. Eternal thankfulness!

Let’s look at Mosiah 2:24–25: “And secondly, he doth require that ye should do as he hath commanded you; for which if ye do, he doth immediately bless you”—what’s the point of that line? In other words, “Hey look, I’ll just keep a commandment, and I’ll keep another commandment, then what? Then He’ll owe me.” That is not true, because God blesses you along the way. We don’t wait until the next life. We don’t wait for some distant by and by date for blessings. We get them all the time. “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?

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 you were created of the dust of the earth; but behold, it belongeth to him who created you.

This doctrine wouldn’t exactly fly well in modern-day pop psychology. *You are not even as much as the dust of the earth.* What is he trying to say there? Do we believe in a kind of human depravity? You are not even as much as the dust of the earth. Well, one thing it tells us is that He created it! Hold your place here and go back with me to the book of Helaman, chapter 12. This is sort of Mormon’s musings, Mormon reflecting on the difficulties men and women have in keeping the commandments. Look at verses 7 and 8: “O how great is the nothingness of the children of men; yea, even they are less than the dust of the earth” (v. 7). There is that same idea, but with a little more explanation. “For behold, the dust of the earth moveth hither and thither, to the dividing asunder, at the command of our great and everlasting God” (v.

8). So why are people less than the dust of the earth? At least the dust is obedient. When the Lord speaks, it moves. People often don't move.

Okay! Back to Mosiah 2:32. I have sort of divided verses 32–41 into another message or subsermon of King Benjamin: Sinning against Light is the same as rebelling against God. Benjamin approaches sinning against Light in a very direct and harsh manner. He speaks, for example, of that process making us enemies to God and enemies to all righteousness. Let's pick up with verse 32 (notice some of the language in verse 32 and thereafter): "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." Notice the kind of equation he makes there. Entering into contentions equals what? Obeying the evil spirit. This is pretty dramatic stuff. Benjamin is black and white, saying, "You are with us or you're not." Notice that? Verse 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.

Okay, let's stop there for a second. "If he listeth [that is, chooses] to obey him, and remaineth and dieth in his sins"—let's talk about that. Turn with me in the Book of Mormon, to 2 Nephi 9:38–39. We are in the middle of Jacob's wo section. "Wo unto the liar, . . . wo unto the murderer, . . . wo unto those who commit whoredoms" (vv. 34–36). Let's pick up with verse 37 to get it in context.

Yea, wo unto those that worship idols, for the devil of all devils delighteth in them.

And, in fine, wo unto all those who die in their sins; for they shall return to God, and behold his face, and remain in their sins.

O, my beloved brethren, remember the awfulness in transgressing against that Holy God, and also the awfulness of yielding to the enticings of that cunning one. Remember, to be carnally-minded is death, and to be spiritually-minded is life eternal.

Okay! Back to Mosiah 2:34:

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.

Go to verse 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—

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 for him, for he dwelleth not in unholy temples.

Look in verse 36: "If you should transgress and go contrary to that which has been spoken [this is a wonderful way of saying this], that ye do withdraw yourselves from the Spirit of the Lord." We generally speak of the Lord's Spirit being withdrawn from us. Perhaps, more properly, *we withdraw ourselves* from his Holy Spirit and, verse 37, we become an enemy to righteousness. Now verse 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.

Let's talk about this *like an unquenchable fire*. The Prophet Joseph Smith, on more than one occasion, spoke of this matter of unquenchable fire—fire and brimstone and so forth. Let me read a statement from him, two statements, actually: "The great misery of departed spirits in the world of spirits, where they go after death, is to know that they come short of the glory that others enjoy that they might have enjoyed themselves, and they are their own accusers."<sup>6</sup> Then over to page 357: "A man is his own tormenter and his own condemner. Hence the saying, They shall go into the lake that burns with fire

and brimstone. [Then comes this great definition:] The torment of disappointment in the mind of man is as exquisite as a lake burning with fire and brimstone. I say, so is the torment of man."<sup>7</sup>

So we would see that verse as symbolic of the tortuous condition of those who die in their sins, remain in their sins, remain, as it were, an enemy of God, in terms of having sinned against Light and not repented.

Verse 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." Why does mercy have no claim on that person? Isn't mercy extended to all? Well, presumably this person is sinning against Light, fighting against the truth, refusing to repent—this is the incorrigible sinner, as it were. (Let's see, did you read verse 39?) Never-ending torment! How would we, as Latter-day Saints, make sense of that? What do you know about our theology that would explain that principle? Is the person who dies without repentance going to suffer everlastingly torment?

[Student answer:] I can't remember where I read this, but eternal punishment is God's punishment, because God is eternal. So it doesn't mean that they will stay in hell forever.

Good! The comment here is an appropriate one. Section 19 of the Doctrine and Covenants makes reference to the fact that the kind of punishment God inflicts upon his children is a qualitative punishment in regard to what they must suffer. Thus, endless torment is God's torment. Eternal damnation is God's damnation. This is descriptive of what it takes to bring that person to wholeness.

Let's turn our attention, now, to Mosiah 3. Chapter 3 is perhaps the most famous chapter within the entire sermon. This chapter entails great teachings from Benjamin, most of which he learned from an angel. Notice verses 1–4:

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.

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<sup>6</sup> Joseph Fielding Smith, comp., *The Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret, 1976) 310–11.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 357.



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.

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. [Where else have you heard that phrase? The shepherds! Glad tidings of great joy they were told they would receive concerning the coming of Jesus.]

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.

I call verses 1–6, the next message, ‘the condescension of God.’ Where do we first encounter that phrase? It is not used in Mosiah, but where is it used? Nephi’s vision, isn’t it? The same vision his father, Lehi, had. In fact, the question of the angels, or the question of the ages, was, ‘Knowest thou the condescension of God?’ Now, having read that, what was the angel asking Nephi? “Do you understand God, or Jesus Christ, coming down in the flesh? Can you fathom the majesty and wonder of it all?” the angel was asking. Can you comprehend that someone will leave his throne divine, come down to earth, assume a physical body? But it was not just assuming a physical body! It was going forth subjecting itself to the taunts, temptations, and trials of this life, and eventually, as Nephi sees in vision, the Atonement, the suffering, the agony, the death, the crucifixion—all part of the great condescension. *To condescend* is not only “to come down,” but “to leave a higher station and come to a lower station.”

Now, the word is not used, but the doctrine is the same here. Notice the language in verse 5: “For behold, the time cometh, and is not far distant, that with power, the Lord Omnipotent who reigneth”—I want to stop there for a second. One of the things you would have great difficulty finding in the Book of Mormon is the concept of Jesus as elder brother. He is, but it is not taught. In the Book of Mormon, Christ is God. Yes he is the Son of our Heavenly Father, but he is God. We go to great lengths to draw the distinction between the two, to say there is a Father and a Son, and there certainly is, but the Book of Mormon teaches clearly and unmistakably that he is God. And if he weren’t God, he couldn’t do what he came to earth to do. He isn’t just a nice advisor.

He isn't just kind of a spiritual consultant. He is the Lord Omnipotent. We are talking here about the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. We are talking about the God of Enoch and Moses, and so on. Continue in verse 5:

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 [an interesting phrase, descriptive of the physical body], 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.

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

And so, first of all we have the condescension, the coming down of the great God—a great act not only of mercy, but a tremendous act of love. Verses 7–17 give us the next great message. He comes to earth to do what? To perform the great Atonement. So another subtheme or message of Benjamin is the message of atonement. Let's pick up in verse 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 abominations of his people."

There is a lot in that verse, so let's take a few moments. If you have your Bible, let's go to the book of Hebrews in the New Testament, Hebrews 4, in which Paul also describes the Lord's condescension, His suffering, and the nature of what He went through in this life. Hebrews 4:14–16: "Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession." Hold fast our profession! *Profession* is being used here in a different way than we usually use it. We think of profession as our job, but what is he talking about? Our witness, our testimony, our statement. Jesus Christ is the high priest of our profession. "For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." What is the purpose of these verses?



What was Paul teaching? Why would it be valuable to know what is in 14, 15, and 16? Is there anything that we could take to the Lord by the way of burden, by way of suffering, by way of concern, by way of question, by way of heartache, by way of agony, that he would not understand? No, we are saying, as it does in the Doctrine and Covenants, he passes “below all things” (Doctrine and Covenants 88:6).

Now go to chapter 12 of Hebrews. Let’s read verses 1–4:

Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us.

Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. [Notice this next verse:]

For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.

I wanted us to read those verses because of the light they shed on verse 7 of Mosiah 3. He suffers temptations. Paul takes it a step farther. Why? Everything we would suffer by way of temptation, but without sin—

Verse 7: “And lo, he shall suffer temptations, and pain of body, hunger, thirst, and fatigue, [and notice the language here:] even more than man can suffer”—what is the purpose of that line? He is *more* than man. This isn’t just a man. He is *more* than a man, receiving his mortal endowment from his mother, Mary, but his immortal endowment from his Father, our Heavenly Father—“even more than man can suffer, except it be unto death [that is, all people would die under such a burden]; for behold, blood cometh from every pore, so great shall be his anguish for the wickedness and the abominations of his people.”

I want to make two quick comments about that verse, one about the language that Paul used in Hebrews about contradiction. The Prophet Joseph Smith, in *Lectures on Faith*, made a very interesting statement about Christ and his sufferings. He said:

He is also the express image and likeness of the personage of the Father, possessing all the fullness of the Father, or the same fullness with the Father; being begotten of him, and ordained

from before the foundation of the world to be a propitiation for the sins of all those who should believe on his name, [now notice this language:] and is called the Son because of the flesh, and descended in suffering below that which man can suffer; or, in other words, suffered greater sufferings, and was exposed to more powerful contradictions than any man can be.<sup>8</sup>

Think of the contradictions of the Atonement, think of the irony. He who brought life and light to the world was subjected to death and darkness. He who had never known sin now became, as it were, in the language of the Apostle Paul, the great sinner. He who had brought comfort to the world was now devoid of comfort, and so on. It was a night of great irony, a night of nights, Jesus' suffering in Gethsemane and the suffering that continues on the cross.

As to the shedding of blood, let me just read this and we'll draw this to a close. President Brigham Young simply said this:

The light, knowledge, power, and glory with which he [Christ] was clothed were far above, or exceeded that of all others who had been upon the earth after the fall, consequently at the very moment, at the hour when the crisis came for him to offer up his life, the Father withdrew Himself, withdrew His Spirit, and cast a veil over him. That is what made him sweat blood.<sup>9</sup>

If Christ had had the power of God upon him, he would not have sweat blood.

Let's end now by summarizing this first period on Benjamin's sermon as follows: I think we could begin with a grand message, the message of Benjamin's life: There is no end to the amount of good that can be accomplished by one righteous man. Second, we serve God through serving our fellow men. Third, we are forever indebted to God. Fourth, to sin against Light is to rebel against God. Fifth, the coming of Christ entails the great condescension of God. Sixth, the Atonement is the greatest act of mercy and grace in all eternity.

I testify as to the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon, particularly the great message of Benjamin concerning our Lord and His centrality and all that He is, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

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<sup>8</sup> N. B. Lundwall, comp., *Lectures on Faith* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, n.d.), 48.

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<sup>9</sup> *The Journal of Discourses* (February 17, 1856), 3:206.

## **Benjamin: King, Prophet, Theologian (Part 2)**

Robert L. Millet

We continue our study of Benjamin the prophet and his message. In the last hour, we covered some very important subthemes within Benjamin's life and his sermon. Let's go back and review about five or six ideas. First, the goodness of Benjamin himself is a great message about what we can become. There is no end to the amount of good that can be accomplished by one righteous man or woman. As we moved from the first to the second chapter, the second message was that we serve God through serving our fellow man. Benjamin reminds us that we are forever indebted to God. He reminds us that to sin against Light is to rebel against God and to become an enemy of all righteousness, an enemy of God. Benjamin learns, from an angel of God, of the coming of Christ and, as we discussed it last time, the condescension of the Lord Omnipotent. We had just begun to study in Mosiah 3:7. Let's turn to verse 7. The next major message is the Atonement, or the great central act of mercy and love on the part of God.

We had established in verse 7 one thing that Benjamin is trying to teach, a message he had learned from the angel: that Christ was more than man, that he will suffer more than man, and that the act of atonement is an act of irony and one of the great contradictions in eternity. That that great and noble man who never took a backward step, and never took a moral detour, should in Gethsemane and on Golgotha, be subjected to not only an ignominious death, but to suffering beyond our understanding. Let's reread verse 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."

We pointed out last time that, as President Brigham Young explained, that which caused Christ to sweat blood was the withdrawal of the Father's Spirit.<sup>1</sup> You and I, as we sin or move away from the ways of righteousness, lose that

Spirit, lose access to things and feelings of righteousness. Feelings that we might describe as emptiness or alienation all flow from, or follow from, transgression, until we repent. Jesus, of course, in Gethsemane and on the Cross, suffers it for all. As the Doctrine and Covenants teaches, it is not that we would not suffer, because there is suffering associated with sin and repentance, but that we might not suffer as he did (see Doctrine and Covenants 19).

Let's pick up now with verse 8. We are still describing this major message of the Atonement. Verse 8 reads: "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." Let's stop there for a second. He should be called *Jesus Christ*, the name meaning "Messiah." *Christ* certainly means "the anointed one." *Jesus* means "Jehovah," or "salvation," or "Jehovah saves." So his full name (title) means "Jehovah saves," or "Jehovah is salvation," "the anointed one." Notice, he is called "the Father of heaven and earth." We won't take the time to do it here, but we might talk about ways in which Christ serves as Father, by virtue of his creative activity, such as the creator of heaven and earth, the creator of all things from the beginning. And his mother shall be called Mary. She is named here.

Okay, go ahead to verse 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." There it is again. They shall consider him a man, merely a man, or only a man. Okay, read verse 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." You will find that in the Book of Mormon, every time the doctrine of the Resurrection is mentioned, the doctrine of eternal judgment is mentioned. Jesus is not only he who rises from the dead, but the Eternal Judge.

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<sup>1</sup> See Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses* (February 17, 1856), 3:206.

Verse 11 gives the dimension of the Atonement: "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." Here we introduce an important concept in regard to the Atonement. We are told that people are not held accountable for that of which they are ignorant, or they are not held accountable or punished for not observing a law that they couldn't observe, that was *beyond their power* to observe. Let's go back to 2 Nephi 9:25-26 where Jacob will teach something very similar:

Wherefore, he has given a law; and where there is no law given there is no punishment; and where there is no punishment there is no condemnation; and where there is no condemnation the mercies of the Holy One of Israel have claim upon them, because of the atonement; for they are delivered by the power of him.

For the atonement [and here is very similar language:] satisfieth the demands of his justice upon all those who have not the law given to them, that they are delivered from that awful monster, death and hell, and the devil, and the lake of fire and brimstone, which is endless torment; and they are restored to that God who gave them breath, which is the Holy One of Israel.

This category of not being punished for not living something you didn't have will include a subcategory, or a subset, for little children.

Back to Mosiah, chapter 3. Where are we? Verse 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." Here he is revisiting what he described and discussed last chapter, which was that people make mistakes, but there is a special warning that comes to those who sin against Light, who sin against God, knowing what they are doing. Verse 13:

And the Lord God hath sent his holy prophets among all the children of man, 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.

"Even as though he had already come among them." What is the message there? What is our date? Let's get a rough date from the bottom of the page.

Where are we? 125 B.C. What are they doing? They are repenting in the name of the Only Begotten Son, who will not come for 125 years and who will not offer his sacrifice for 155 years. This is a pretty significant message.

I have often been asked by people who are outside the faith, "What was Joseph Smith's most significant doctrinal message?" How do you answer that kind of question? I am not much on superlatives, but, if pushed, shoved, and threatened with death, I might come up with something. I think I might come close to saying that one of the most significant messages restored through Joseph Smith is the concept of dispensationalism, the concept of an eternal gospel, the concept that comes through the Book of Mormon again and again, through the Doctrine and Covenants, through the Pearl of Great Price, through the Joseph Smith Translation. What is it? That Christian prophets have taught Christian doctrine and have administered Christian ordinances since the days of Adam. Interestingly, our non-Latter-day Saint critics will often attack the Book of Mormon, in the name of it being too Christ-centered—too much Christ before Christ, they say. Well, that is the message—that Christ is revealed and the gospel is revealed from the days of Adam. Notice the language: They do all these things "even as though he had already come among them" (v. 13).

Hold your place, and go back with me to, notice, a book that we don't read much from, the book of Jarom 1:11:

Wherefore, the prophets, and the priests, and the teachers, did labor diligently, exhorting with all long-suffering the people to diligence; teaching the law of Moses, and the intent for which it was given; persuading them to look forward unto the Messiah, and believe in him to come as though he already was. And after this manner did they teach them.

Think about the challenge and the issue of living 125 years before Christ, it is a little different from our situation. We can call upon the name of a Being that we know lived two thousand years ago. He is a historical fact. But he has not yet come to these people. In fact, he won't come to these people as a mortal. All they knew is that he is coming to another place somewhere on earth, in the Old World. And so they have faith in the name of a Being who *will* come. A very interesting phenomenon.



Back to chapter 3 of Mosiah. (I am moved by the way you read.) Continue with verse 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." I remember that Sidney Sperry, years ago, referred to the law of Moses as a system of spiritual busywork. It was not only to point people to Christ through its myriad offerings and sacrificial ordinances, but it was to keep them busy, to keep them focused, to keep them out of trouble.

Continue with verse 15, please:

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.

That message—"the law of Moses availeth nothing except it were through the atonement of his blood"—remember that. Later in our story, as Abinadi—actually earlier, chronologically—stands before the priests with Noah, what is one of the criticisms? "Ye say that ye believe in the law, but you don't understand what it is for." Thus, in chapters 13 and 16 of Mosiah, Abinadi will say, essentially, "Please remember that the law is of no value except to the degree that it points their minds to Christ," in the same way that the Apostle Paul, in Hebrews, would say that the blood of bulls cannot forgive sins, but it is what the blood of bulls symbolized or pointed toward. Janelle, would you start reading verse 16, please. Here we are getting into a concept of the Fall: "And even if it were possible that little children could sin they could not be saved"—What's missing, there? "... Even if it were possible that little children could sin, they could not be saved." End of clause. There has to be some idea missing there: "if there were no atonement"]—"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." Here we come face to face with what I call 'the hard doctrine.' It is easier to avoid this one, but it is just that when you avoid it, you don't teach the Atonement very well. It is the doctrine of the Fall, and the effect of the Fall. Notice the language:



Speaking of little children, it says, "For behold, as in Adam, or by nature, they fall." Now, hold your place, and let's go back to 2 Nephi 2:21 and pick up on Lehi's interview with Jacob:

And the days of the children of men were prolonged, according to the will of God, that they might repent while in the flesh; wherefore, their state became a state of probation, and their time was lengthened, according to the commandments which the Lord gave unto the children of men. [Now notice this language:] For he gave commandment that all men must repent; for he showed unto all men that they were lost, because of the transgression of their parents.

Here's the question to ponder: How do you reconcile that phrase, "they were lost, because of the transgression of their parents," with our second article of faith? Let's see if we remember our second article of faith. What is it? We believe what? "We believe that men will be punished for their own sins, and not for Adam's transgression." How do you reconcile that with verse 21?

[Student answer:] Because you are not responsible for their sins, but you will suffer consequences.

Okay, good. We are not responsible for what Adam and Eve did, but that is not to say that the consequences are not entailed upon us. Though Latter-day Saints do not believe in a form of human depravity, though we do not believe that there is some sort of original sin that entails upon the posterity of Adam and Even, though Latter-day Saints do not believe in infant baptism, it is not to say that we do not believe that there was a Fall and that it takes a toll. So, men are "lost because of the transgression of their parents."

We won't take the time, but if we wanted to, we could go back and read what the Brother of Jared says in Ether 3:2, where he prays to the Lord to touch those stones. His language is very interesting. He says that "we are unworthy before thee [speaking to the Lord]; because of the fall our natures have become evil continually."

Back to Mosiah 3:16: "... For behold, as in Adam, or by nature, they [little children] fall, even so the blood of Christ atoneth for their sins." You see, we are confronted right away with this idea that little children are innocent. People say, "Are little children innocent?" That is not the right question. Of course they are innocent. The issue is *why*. It seems to me that a couple of

possibilities suggest themselves. Little children are innocent because they are that way by nature. They are kind and dear, sweet, attentive, and solicitous of others' welfare. They are willing to share, and they are never moody. Now, I don't know about you, but I had six, and none of them were like that. No! The other possibility is the scriptural possibility: They are innocent because they were decreed so by the Atonement. That is the message throughout scripture—not that they were that way by nature, but that they are made innocent by Christ. "Even so the blood of Christ atoneth for their sins," it says.

If we were to go to chapter 15, we would read that Abinadi said, "Little children . . . have eternal life" (Mosiah 15:25). What is our most famous chapter on the status of little children? Moroni 8, with Mormon's teachings, where Moroni indicates that there are some problems in the church, and Mormon writes back this scathing and very clear letter about how this is an abominable doctrine to baptize little children. What he says is that they don't understand accountability and that they don't understand atonement.

Let's continue with verse 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."

Let's talk for just a minute about the power that is in a name. What is in a name? Some years ago I stumbled all over this. Name, name, name—everything is name. The Twelve Apostles are called to be special witnesses of the name of Christ in the world. Only through the name of Christ—what's going on here? What does it mean to say that there is no salvation except through the name of Christ? What do we think of a name doing? What does a name do?

[Student answer:] It gives you a distinct individuality.

Good! A distinct individuality. So, if a name is that which designates or distinguishes, why the power in the name of Christ, *his* name? Well, his name often symbolizes his power, his priesthood. His name symbolizes the atoning sacrifice and the plan of redemption. Thus, the Twelve go into the world as

special witnesses of the name of Christ, meaning they testify not only of Christ, but of the plan that Christ advocates.

Think on this further. If you act in the name of Christ, there are certain things that you do and certain things that you don't do. What does the angel say to Adam early in earth's history when Adam is offering sacrifice and he knows not why? What does the angel say? "This thing is a similitude of the sacrifice of the Only Begotten of the Father, which is full of grace and truth. Wherefore, thou shalt do all that thou doest in the name of the Son, and thou shalt repent and call upon God in the name of the Son forevermore" (Moses 5:7-8). Thus, Adam was to do everything he did *in the name of Christ*.

Picking up with verse 18, we begin a new message, as it were. In verses 18-19, the message concerns putting off the natural man: "For behold he judgeth, and his judgment is just; and the infant perisheth not that dieth in his infancy"—and that is one of the first places we learn in the Book of Mormon about the salvation of little children who die before the age of accountability. It is confirmed by Abinadi, by Mormon, and two or three times in the Doctrine and Covenants 29, 74, and 137—"but men drink damnation to their own souls except they humble themselves and become as little children." Let me suggest something. Normally, when we say we need to become as little children, what do people think of? Well, they think of the things that follow in verse 19: "submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love." Those are all good. Children do those sometimes, but I suggest that becoming as little children also means, more importantly, becoming innocent. To be declared innocent through the atonement and blood of Christ.

While we are on that point, if you have your Bibles, I want to look at Matthew 18. This is one of those great, true plain and precious things that were taken from the scripture. This is just not clear in the Bible at all. Look at verses 10-11: "Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven [meaning their preexistent spirits]. For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost." Look at the setting. How does the chapter begin? The disciples ask, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" (v.

1). Do we see this differently, the way he is going to answer it? He takes a child and holds the child up. Then, normally, our answer is that we need to become as a little child because they are teachable. That is true! But they are innocent, as well. They are pure by virtue of the blood of Christ. "For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost."

Look at the bottom of your page at the Joseph Smith Translation. Do you have that? Read 11c: "... and to call sinners to repentance; but these little ones have no need of repentance, and I will save them." That is the part that was lost. Let's read it all together: "The Son of man is come to save that which is lost and to call sinners to repentance; but these little ones have no need of repentance, and I will save them."

Look over in Matthew 19:13:

Then were there brought unto him little children, that he should put his hands on them, and pray: and the disciples rebuked them.

But Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven.

And he laid his hands on them, and departed thence.

Now, let's note what the Joseph Smith Translation adds that is not in the King James Translation or in any other. Little children are brought to them (to Jesus) to be blessed. The disciples rebuke them (look at the bottom of the page [13b]), saying, "There is no need, for Jesus hath said, Such shall be saved." That puts a different twist to the story. They are not a bunch of hard-hearted types that don't want kids around. They are saying that you really don't need to do this because they are going to be saved. Jesus says let them come. We'll bless them anyway. Salvation of little children.

Back to Mosiah 3:19:

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 enticing 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.

Now notice that we are reintroduced to this concept of being an enemy to God, or enemy to righteousness, fighting against Light, rebelling against God.

The natural man is an enemy to God. Let's think of that word for a minute, *natural* man. Related of course to the word *nature*, the natural man (or the natural woman) is someone who is acclimated to the nature of things about them. He or she is a person who responds to the things about him or her. The natural man is an enemy to God. The apostle Paul said, "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him" (1 Corinthians 2:14).

This is an interesting category. This is not just one brand of person; it is a large continuum. On one hand we have the lying, raping, cheating, stealing, murdering type—the person who is so unregenerate that he is a beast. That is true. We have the person that just has no desire to change or improve. As we move along the continuum, we go to the other end, and we have a good man and/or a fine woman; however, they have no interest in spiritual things. Perhaps it is the man who is so caught up with being macho that he doesn't care about things of eternity. Perhaps it is the woman so caught up with social status or standing that she is not concerned at all with knowing the word of God, and certainly not with following it. The natural man is, first and foremost, the unredeemed and the unregenerate man or woman. The natural man has no interest, as Benjamin would say, in the kingdom of God and is an enemy to God.

There is another place, and I want to show you the language. Hold your place and go with me to Alma 41. The language Alma uses to describe the natural man is found in verse 10 (this is Alma's counsel to his wandering son, Corianton): "Do not suppose, because it has been spoken concerning restoration, that ye shall be restored from sin to happiness. Behold, I say unto you, wickedness never was happiness." This is in the middle of Alma's sermon on the law of restoration, or the 'plan of restoration,' as he calls it (see Alma 41). Paul called it the law of the harvest (see Galatians 6:7–8)—"whatsoever ye sow, that shall ye also reap" (D&C 6:33). This is the idea: Don't expect to be restored from A to B; don't expect to be restored from wild and crazy guy in mortality to celestial, dignified character hereafter. Wickedness never was happiness.

And now, my son, [notice this language (we are talking about the natural man):] all men that are in a state of nature, or I would say, in a carnal state, are in the gall of bitterness and in the bonds of iniquity; they are without God in the world, and they have gone contrary to the nature of God; therefore, they are in a state contrary to the nature of happiness.

Here we introduce this idea. We know already, because of what we read back with king Benjamin, that the person who sins against Light is an enemy to God and righteousness. Here we are told that the natural man is not just an enemy to God, but an enemy to himself. He is working against his own best good, his own happiness.

Back to king Benjamin in Mosiah 3. I want to make a couple of other comments about this natural man. Could we say it this way: There is a natural birth and there is a spiritual birth? The natural birth, in a sense, takes place when we sort of die as pertaining to premortality and are born as pertaining to mortality. A natural birth gives rise to the natural man. The natural man is not put off by living longer. He is not put off by going to church. The natural man is a part of us that must be put off, taken away, through the atonement of Christ, through regeneration, change.

President Brigham Young described one end of that continuum of the natural man this way. He said, "There is no doubt, if a person lives according to the revelations given to God's people, he may have the Spirit of the Lord to signify to him His will, and to guide and to direct him in the discharge of his duties, in his temporal as well as his spiritual exercises. I am satisfied, however, that in this respect, we live far beneath our privileges."<sup>2</sup> C. S. Lewis said it this way: "Fallen man is not just a person in need of improvement. He is a rebel that must lay down his arms."<sup>3</sup>

Here's another thought from President Brigham Young, in playing on this idea that the apostle Paul used, that the natural man cannot know the things of the Spirit. Listen to what President Young said:

How difficult it is to teach the natural man, who comprehends nothing more than that which he sees with the natural eye! How hard it is for him to believe! How difficult

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid. (November 3, 1867), 12:104.

<sup>3</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1960), 59.



would be the task to make the philosopher, who, for many years, has argued himself into the belief that his spirit is no more after his body sleeps in the grave, believe that his intelligence came from eternity, and is as eternal, in its nature, as the elements, or as the Gods. Such doctrine by him would be considered vanity and foolishness, it would be entirely beyond his comprehension. It is difficult, indeed, to remove an opinion or belief into which he has argued himself from the mind of the natural man. Talk to him about angels, heavens, God, immortality, and eternal lives, and it is like sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal to his ears; it has no music to him; there is nothing in it that charms his senses, soothes his feelings, attracts his attention, or engages his affections, in the least; to him it is all vanity.<sup>4</sup>

And so, the natural man.

There is one other place that I would like us to look, and then we'll move on. Let's compare this to the teachings of our great friend Ammon. Let's go back to Alma 26, where Ammon is rejoicing in the success he and his brethren have had. Let's start with verse 17, and we'll go through 21:

Who could have supposed that our God would have been so merciful as to have snatched us from our awful, sinful, and polluted state?

Behold, we went forth even in wrath, with mighty threatenings to destroy his church.

Oh then, why did he not consign us to an awful destruction, yea, why did he not let the sword of his justice fall upon us, and doom us to eternal despair?

Oh, my soul, almost as it were, fleeth at the thought. Behold, he did not exercise his justice upon us, but in his great mercy hath brought us over that everlasting gulf of death and misery, even to the salvation of our souls.

Now, here is the key verse. What did we say about the natural man? There are some things that he or she just cannot comprehend. Their mind, their mind-set, their worldview, precludes receiving spiritual things. Now Ammon is rejoicing in what they have experienced. Notice what he says in 21:

And now behold, my brethren, what natural man is there that knoweth these things? I say unto you, there is none that knoweth these things, save it be the penitent.

Yea, he that repenteth and exerciseth faith, and bringeth forth good works, and prayeth continually without ceasing—unto such is given to know the mysteries of God; yea, unto such it shall be given to reveal things which never have been revealed;

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<sup>4</sup> Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses* (January 16, 1853)1:2.

yea, and it shall be given unto such to bring thousands of souls to repentance, even as it has been given unto us to bring these our brethren to repentance.

Thank you! Back to Mosiah. Let's go to chapter 4 of Mosiah. Let's consider what Benjamin has preached on. He's preached on service and our relationship with God. He's preached on divine indebtedness. He has now delivered this powerful message, given to him by an angel of the Lord, on the need for putting off the natural man, putting on Christ, and the condescension of the great God. Now we turn to chapter 4.

The people are stunned, electrified by what they hear. I have often read this and thought of meetings I might have attended and the impact they had on me. I remember going to a general conference session and hearing President Harold B. Lee speak to the priesthood. He literally electrified the congregation. No one wanted to leave when it was over. I suppose that is after the fashion of what we have here. Mosiah 4:1: "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."

I think you would know that the word that is used so often is *fear*. The Hebrew word *yirah* actually has to do with "reverence" and "respect." "The fear of the Lord had come upon them." Now notice this: How were they described back in Mosiah 1:11? They were a very diligent people in keeping the commandments of God. But notice this in the next verse: "And they had viewed themselves in their own carnal state, even less than the dust of the earth" (Mosiah 4:2). Does that remind you a little about what Moses experienced? He has the experience of being with the Lord, seeing this mighty vision, beginning to end, every particle of the earth, and then the presence of the Lord withdraws from Moses, and what happens? He falls. He falls to the ground, and it is a space of many hours before he is able to move. What does he say? "Now, for this cause I know man is nothing, which thing I never had supposed" (Moses 1:10).



What is it they cry out in this next section? Mosiah 4:1–4 I call ‘the miracle of forgiveness.’ We are about to talk in some detail about rebirth, and I would suggest that one of the great evidences of rebirth, one of the great causes of rebirth, one of the great factors, or by-products of rebirth, is forgiveness. This is one of the first things we experience.

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. (Mosiah 4:2)

Several long years ago when I was on a mission—in fact, I had been out a grand total of two days—my companion and I were sitting and talking. I had great confidence in him. He had been out eight months, and so I knew that he knew all things. As we sat discussing things that day, we began talking about forgiveness and repentance. I remember him saying to me, “Elder Millet, always keep in mind that if you can still remember your sins, the Lord hasn’t forgiven you.” I said, “What?” and he repeated the statement. I said, “Is that right?” He said, “Of course that’s right. That is what the scripture teaches.” Well, I went into a deep depression for about five days because I suddenly began to remember my sins with great vividness—Technicolor. Then I discovered that he meant well. The only thing really wrong with what he was saying was that it wasn’t true—but he meant well. Look at verse 3. The question is, How do I know my sins are forgiven? I suppose I no longer feel the need to browbeat myself. I no longer feel the need to grovel and concern myself with my past. I feel the need to put it behind me and move on. But there are specifics as to how we may know we are forgiven. Verse 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.

It seems to me there are two or three things that are pretty significant. If, in fact, it is true that when we sin the Spirit of the Lord is withdrawn from us, then when we repent fully the Spirit of the Lord comes back to us. “The Spirit

of the Lord came upon them," it says. You see the principle? If the Spirit cannot dwell in an unclean tabernacle, then we would conclude that if the Spirit is dwelling with us, we are no longer unclean. That is one thing. They were filled with joy and what else? Peace of conscience. It is time to move on.

Next idea. Let's go look at verses 5-12 now. We'll put this as another doctrinal block. We'll call this 'retaining a remission of sins from day to day.' Let's have someone begin reading verse 5. Here is a people who have had a remission of sins. Each one of us has experienced that. We know what it is like to be forgiven and to know the peace of conscience. The question is, How do we keep the sins away? How do you stay clean? You may say, "Well, you repent every day." That is true. We could live in a state of repentance, but what else is involved. Let's pick up with verse 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—

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—

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.

I am going to interrupt. Let's ask some hard questions. You see, this is not unlike the doctrine of divine indebtedness that we studied in chapter 2. What is the value? What is the value for you and me to know the goodness of God and to know our nothingness? How can feeling that I am nothing help? It would seem that that would be depressing. What is the message? His goodness, his greatness, my nothingness. What is the value? Don't all answer at once! Janelle, why does it matter if I feel God's greatness and my nothingness?

[Student answer:] I would think it was the other way. First of all, it would be incorrect, and secondly, you would be tempted to do wrong because you were powerful or had control.

So if I am caught up with myself, I will make little progress. Can you see the value of looking to the Lord constantly? He (Benjamin) is going to tell us in some detail the value of knowing His greatness and our nothingness, and it has to do with dependence and surrender. Those are words that don't go over in our day, but they are true and they are right. The sign of my strength is my willingness to surrender. The sign of my power is my willingness to acknowledge my impotence before his omnipotence. Verses 8–10:

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.

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.

Okay. Thank you. Verse 9 and verse 10—think about the message coming through there. It is like the Prophet Joseph Smith said in the *Lectures on Faith*, unless someone has an understanding of God's greatness, God's total possession of all attributes and perfection, he or she cannot exercise saving faith in God. If every time I had to ask the Lord a question, ask for counsel, or ask for a blessing, I sat wondering if he had the power or knowledge to give it, I am going to have great difficulty exercising saving faith.<sup>5</sup>

What follows, and we won't detail this, but what follows is a fascinating discussion of service again. May I suggest that the layout or manner in which this is presented is not unimportant. We have learned about Christ and atonement, and now we are going to learn again about service and care of the poor, and that these things really can't be taught independent of one another.

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<sup>5</sup> See N. B. Lundwall, comp., *Lectures on Faith* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, n.d.).

Let me read something from Brother Bruce Hafen's wonderful book, *The Broken Heart*, and then we will comment on the layout here in Mosiah.

The ultimate purpose of the gospel of Jesus Christ is to cause the sons and daughters of God to become as Christ is. Those who see religious purpose only in terms of ethical service in the relationship between man and fellowmen may miss that divinely ordained possibility. It is quite possible to render charitable—even "Christian"—service without developing deeply ingrained and permanent Christlike character. Paul . . . warned against giving all one's goods to feed the poor without true charity. President [J. Reuben] Clark understood it when he warned against equating man-made systems of ethics with the gospel of Christ. We can give without loving, but we cannot love without giving. If our vertical relationship with God is complete, then, by the fruit of that relationship, the horizontal relationship with our fellow beings will also be complete. We then act charitably toward others, not merely because we think we should, but because that is the way we are.<sup>6</sup>

You see, once we know about Christ, once we receive the powers of the Atonement in our life, then what is going to follow in this chapter is going to follow naturally. You don't have to beat people over the head to get them to serve. You don't have to beat people over the head to get them to do this or that. You don't have to lay guilt trips on people to get them to get them to do home teaching and visiting teaching. You get the Spirit of the Lord in their life, you get conversion in their soul, and the works of righteousness flow. They follow.

And so it is with what king Benjamin mentions hereafter, about caring for the poor and doing deeds of service, acknowledging that we are all beggars. He is not giving us a list of do's here. He is telling us the kinds of things that faithful people do because they have been changed in Christ. Does that make sense? It just happens. So let's just read a verse or two of chapter 4, and then we will begin to pull this together.

Verse 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

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<sup>6</sup> Bruce C. Hafen, *The Broken Heart : Applying the Atonement to Life's Experiences*(Salt Lake City: Deseret, 1989), 196–7.

your substance to the poor”—This is very interesting. We just learned about retaining a remission of sins by acknowledging God’s greatness and goodness and our own nothingness before Him, and now we are learning another key to retaining or keeping a remission of sins. What is it? Care of 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.” This is a great message. If we want to enjoy the blessings of the Master, we must do the work of the Master. And as we said before, Jesus is in the business of people. It would never seem appropriate for me to be growing spiritually and for me to be growing ‘antipeople.’ It would never seem that if I grow spiritually, I would want to be off to myself studying, reading, being alone, and having nothing to do with people. No! The one thing that the Christian disciple is, is he or she is willing to be inconvenienced. They are into the business of people.

So Benjamin draws this all together beautifully by describing what the true disciples begin to do. They don’t just have a change of heart so that they are spiritual, understand scriptures, and say profound things, but they begin to manifest that change of heart through the fruit of the Spirit—love, patience, long-suffering, gentleness, meekness, and so on.

Let’s go to chapter 5 now. Just a thought or two about chapter 5. Verse 2 says that they have a “mighty change” that comes over them; they “have no more disposition to do evil, but to do good.” Let’s not misunderstand. This does not mean that they never made mistakes, or that they never sinned. But you know what? They didn’t want to. The heart was bent on righteousness.

Turn over the page to verse 7. They entered into a covenant—or renewed their covenant, as it were—that they would keep the commandments the rest of their days. And Benjamin says: “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” (v. 7). If the Fall entails alienation from things of righteousness, it also entails alienation from the family of God. Thus

the Atonement becomes not just a means of reinstating us in terms of righteousness, but reinstating us in terms of the family of God. We take his name, and we take that name reverently. We keep the commandments with fidelity and devotion, because we are members of his family. Then there is this great and final promise in verse 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 [so you get into his family, and then you live worthy of being a member of that family always], 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.

Well, how could we bring it to a conclusion any better than that? We acknowledge his greatness. We acknowledge our indebtedness. We acknowledge the fallen man. We put off the fallen man. We put off the natural man. We put on Christ. Our hearts begin to be changed. We begin to look to other people. We begin to look for opportunities to serve other people. And through it all, we begin to be born of the Spirit, in process, over time, until we become as Christ is. This is one of the great sermons in all history. It capsules what the gospel is all about—the making of men and women into men and women devoted to and committed to the cause of Christ. That we, like Benjamin, might become committed, that we might eventually be sealed to that Christ, our Lord and God, is my prayer, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.