

## **Kingship, Coronation, and Covenant**

### **in Mosiah 1–6**

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The first six chapters of Mosiah contain King Benjamin’s farewell address—one of the most memorable sermons on record. These chapters also portray for us the succession of Mosiah<sub>2</sub> to the Nephite throne. Many features of this coronation ceremony reflect ancient Israelite culture. First is the significance of the office of king. Second is the coronation ceremony for the new king—the details of which have parallels in both Israel and other ancient Near Eastern societies and even in other parts of the world. Third, the order of events reported in these chapters reflect the “treaty-covenant” pattern well known in ancient Israel and the ancient Near East. Finally, an interrelated cluster of concepts in Israelite religion connects the themes of rising from the dust, enthronement, kingship, and resurrection. My discussion of these four sets of features will show how faithfully the Book of Mormon reflects these Old World practices and beliefs.

### **Kingship**

#### **The Meaning of Kingship**

Although kingship is a political institution whose origins are lost to history, nearly every ancient and medieval civilization had a king who was believed to have been appointed by heaven. The Egyptians held that kingship had existed as long as the world itself;<sup>1</sup> to the Sumerians, this form of rule was a gift of the gods.<sup>2</sup> The Israelites also

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<sup>1</sup> Henri Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), 15.

<sup>2</sup> Cyril J. Gadd, *Ideas of Divine Rule in the Ancient Near East* (London: Oxford University Press, 1949), 21.

believed that the king was appointed and adopted by God, and that “he mediated between God and the people and represented them before each other.”<sup>3</sup> Although the Nephite king was never viewed as a divine being (which would be inconsistent with Deuteronomy 17:15), he was closely connected with God in the sense that, as an intermediate, he too modeled and represented God to his people (as in Mosiah 2:19).

In the ancient view of God’s conferral of governmental power upon the king, the traditional code of royalty, which stipulates that the monarch receive sacred names and powers, allows him to stand in the place of God before his people. That ceremony “contained in particular the ancient titles and sovereign rights and duties conferred on Pharaoh by the god, in brief, the king’s authority to rule as the surrogate of the god.”<sup>4</sup> In the case of Benjamin’s speech, a similar ideology is to an extent operational: Benjamin conferred upon Mosiah, and also upon the people, a new name (Mosiah 5:8); he entrusted Mosiah with other insignia of his royal office (Mosiah 1:15–16), and he mentioned Mosiah’s right and duty to deliver to his people the commandments of God and to lead them in the ways of peace and well-being (Mosiah 2:31; see also 5:5).

If the king represented the person of God, *a fortiori*, he also embodied the will and word of God, or in other words, the law of God. According to Moshe Weinfeld, “law is embodied in the person of the king. The king is ‘the living law.’”<sup>5</sup> Similarly, a strong element in Benjamin’s discourse is his role as an example. At several important junctures in the speech, Benjamin cites his own behavior or function as a role model to the people, thus embodying the principles of divine righteousness which were incumbent upon his

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<sup>3</sup> Ze'ev W. Falk, *Hebrew Law in Biblical Times: An Introduction* (Jerusalem: Wahrman, 1964), 45.

<sup>4</sup> Gerhard von Rad, “The Royal Ritual in Judah,” in *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays*, trans. E. W. Trueman Dicken (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), 225.

<sup>5</sup> Moshe Weinfeld, “The King as Servant of the People: The Source of the Idea,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 33/1–2 (1982): 189.

people to obey. For example, if Benjamin had labored to serve other people, then how much more had they an obligation to do likewise (Mosiah 2:18).

#### The role of king in Hebrew times

was based on two covenants which defined the duties of the crown towards God and towards the people. The king's relationship to the divinity was conceived as that of a vassal towards his overlord. He was installed in the office by divine election, on condition that he remain loyal to God and keep his laws (II *Sam.* xxiii 5; *Ps.* cxxxii 12). The other covenant defined the king's obligations towards the nation and fulfilled the function of a modern constitution (II *Sam.* iii 21, v 3; II *Chron.* xxiii 3). The various conditions were probably recited at the accession to the throne.<sup>6</sup>

In the case of Benjamin's and Mosiah's kingship, we see clearly that they both stood between God and the people (Mosiah 2:31; 5:5) and that the king was one who acted as a vassal or steward over God's people (Mosiah 1:10) and who accepted the king's commands by way of covenant (Mosiah 5:5).

In Israel, kingship came to be a vital element of the society's organization through the four hundred years leading up to Lehi's departure from Jerusalem. In the American promised land, among the Nephites, Lamanites, and people of Zarahemla, kings were again an essential part of political life for many centuries. Mosiah 1–6 gives us some of the clearest information on the ideals of royal government in the Book of Mormon. For example, as a practical matter, the ancient king had two fundamental obligations: namely, to maintain peace and to establish justice. "Clearly, the function of the king was twofold: to ensure the safety of his people by 'force of arms' against [the] internal threat of rebellion or external threat of invasion and to ensure the 'well-being' of the nation through the establishment of justice. This dual function of the king as both warrior and judge is evident throughout the ancient Near East."<sup>7</sup> These two roles transcended the

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<sup>6</sup> Falk, *Hebrew Law*, 45–46.

<sup>7</sup> Keith W. Whitelam, *The Just King: Monarchial Judicial Authority in Ancient Israel* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1979), 17.

particular form of rulership in Israel or in the ancient world and endured from era to era: Whether an early judge or a later monarch in Israel, the ruler “was the leader in the Holy War chosen by Yahweh. He was also the man who had been given wisdom to act as a Judge of the people: to see that honesty flourishes in the kingdom.”<sup>8</sup> As Falk has further observed, the Hebrew king was responsible for the “functions of judicial and political administration”; he acted as judge, and was also “called upon to fulfill a political task, in the course of which he also took upon himself the religious functions”; he was “commissioned by God to administer justice.”<sup>9</sup> Benjamin clearly filled these perennial roles: as warrior, he had led the Nephites into victorious battle against invading troops and quelled rebellion in his own lands (Words of Mormon 1:12–16); as judge, it is evident that he had established justice and enforced the laws against slavery, murder, theft, adultery, and “any manner of wickedness” (Mosiah 2:13); as religious leader, he received revelation from God and inspired his people in righteousness.

Especially prominent in the ancient meaning of kingship was the king’s domestic role as the one in society who was primarily responsible for the internal peace, fairness, and equity within his realm. This royal function stands out in several Old Testament texts. For example, as Keith Whitelam remarks on Psalm 72: “The whole psalm is a testimony to the importance of the ideal of monarchical judicial administration which guarantees both the cosmic harmony, fertility and prosperity of the nation.” Thus to Benjamin is attributed primary credit for the condition of peace in his land: “by laboring with all the might of his body and the faculty of his whole soul,” he and his prophets were able to “establish peace in the land” (Words of Mormon 1:18).

Whitelam identifies three additional points as being common to the ancient Near Eastern and Israelite royal ideologies: (1) the king’s administration of justice was seen as essential for cosmic harmony; (2) this ensured the fertility and prosperity of the nation;

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<sup>8</sup> Hamish F. G. Swanston, *The Kings and the Covenant* (London: Burns & Oates, 1968), 169.

<sup>9</sup> Falk, *Hebrew Law*, 43–45.

and (3) the ideal king was often concerned with providing for the needs of the poor and the underprivileged.<sup>10</sup> While Benjamin recognizes these characteristics of kingship, he attributes them primarily to God and participates only secondarily in the third point himself. For Benjamin, the order of the world depends, not on himself as king, but solely on God's sustaining power that maintains life and the world order from day to day (Mosiah 2:21). Likewise, Benjamin affirms that the eternal well-being of mankind is solely contingent upon the atonement of Jesus Christ and the omnipotent goodness of God—not on the king's power as ruler (Mosiah 3:18; 4:8–11). It is on the third point that Benjamin focuses his personal emphasis: just as God is kind and generous to all individuals, who are impoverished beggars in the sight of God (Mosiah 4:21), so too Benjamin expresses his deep concern and takes specific steps to see that the poor and the underprivileged in his kingdom are cared and provided for (Mosiah 4:14, 22–23).

### **Choosing the King**

The Book of Mormon presents a pattern of choosing kings that matches customs in ancient Israel. In Israel, as in the ancient Near East generally, kingship was a divine election.<sup>11</sup> It was considered necessary that God choose the man to be king. Thus Solomon, not his older brother Adonijah, succeeded his father David as king, since, as Adonijah himself said, “it [the kingship] was [Solomon's] from the Lord” (1 Kings 2:15).<sup>12</sup> De Vaux observes that “accession to the throne (of Judah) implies a divine choice: a man is ‘king by the grace of God’ not only because God made a covenant with

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<sup>10</sup> Whitelam, *The Just King*, 29.

<sup>11</sup> On the ideology of kingship in the ancient Near East and in Israel, see John M. Lundquist, “The Legitimizing Role of the Temple in the Origin of the State,” in *Temples of the Ancient World*, 181; Ricks and Sroka, “King, Coronation, and Temple,” 236–38.

<sup>12</sup> Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961), 100. Adonijah's statement in 1 Kings 2:15 should be compared with David's in 1 Chronicles 28:5: “And of all my sons, (for the Lord hath given me many sons), he hath chosen Solomon my son to sit upon the throne of the kingdom of the Lord over Israel.”

the dynasty of David, but because his choice was exercised at each accession.”<sup>13</sup>

Following this pattern of divine election of the king, King Benjamin believed that God had called Mosiah, his son: “On the morrow I shall proclaim . . . that thou art a king and a ruler over this people, *whom the Lord our God hath given us*” (Mosiah 1:10).

In Israel, the eldest son of the king usually became the next ruler, though the king was not obligated to choose him if he believed God desired otherwise. Jehoshaphat gave the kingdom to Jehoram “because he was the firstborn” (2 Chronicles 21:3). However, at a later time Joachaz succeeded Josiah even though Joachaz had an older brother (see 2 Kings 23:31, 36). The Book of Mormon does not say whether Mosiah was Benjamin’s firstborn son, though this was probably the case since his name is given first in the list of names of Benjamin’s sons (see Mosiah 1:2).

In Israel, both Solomon and Jotham became king while their fathers were still alive, because their fathers were old or ill (see 1 Kings 1:32–40; 2:1–10; 2 Kings 15:5). This is also apparently why Benjamin installed Mosiah when he did: “[Benjamin] 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” (Mosiah 1:9). After he “had consecrated his son Mosiah to be a ruler and a king over his people, . . . king Benjamin lived three years and he died” (Mosiah 6:3, 5).

### **Conflicting Views of Kingship**

In Mesopotamia and Egypt, kingship was the only form of government, as far as we know. There the king was viewed as having descended from a god, or he had at least been adopted as an offspring of deity.<sup>14</sup> To the writers of history in those lands, no other

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<sup>13</sup> De Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 100.

<sup>14</sup> As was the case during the whole history of Mesopotamian kingship, until the New Kingdom the Egyptian king was seen as the offspring of deity rather than deity itself. Thus Dietrich Wildung, *Egyptian Saints: Deification in Pharaonic Egypt* (New York: New York University Press, 1977), 1–3, compares the

type of rule was conceivable. Some ancient Israelites took a very positive view of kingship, seeing the king as a necessary and elevated representative of God, even as an adopted son of God; other writers took a limited view of monarchy, seeing the king as “ultimately subject to the law given to the people by Yahweh. . . . The king represents more than just his person, he also represents the future of the nation and more especially his own dynasty.”<sup>15</sup>

On the other hand, some people in Israel objected to kingship categorically on the ground that God alone was to rule over his people. For this reason, Gideon refused the invitation to become a hereditary monarch in Israel: “And Gideon said unto them, I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you: the Lord shall rule over you” (Judges 8:23).

Others considered kingship permissible, but warned against it. Samuel recognized the dangers of kingship. When the Israelites demanded of the prophet Samuel, “Make us a king to judge us like all the nations,” Samuel painted a grim picture of what would happen under a king:

He will take your sons, and appoint them for himself, for his chariots, and to be his horsemen; and some shall run before his chariots. And he will appoint him captains over thousands, and captains over fifties; and will set them to ear [plant] his ground, and to reap his harvest, and to make his instruments of war, and instruments of his chariots. And he will take your daughters to be confectionaries, and to be cooks, and to be bakers. And he will take your fields, and your vineyards, and your oliveyards, even the best of them, and give them to his servants. And he will take the tenth of your seed, and of your vineyards, and give to his officers, and to his servants. And he will take your menservants, and your maidservants, and your goodliest young men, and your asses, and put them to his work. He will take the tenth of your sheep: and ye shall be his servants. And ye shall cry out in

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pharaohs to saints in the normative Christian tradition; see also Georges Posener, *De la divinité du Pharaon* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1960).

<sup>15</sup> Victor H. Matthews, “The King’s Call to Justice,” *Biblische Zeitschrift* 35/2 (1991): 206.

that day because of your king which ye shall have chosen you; and the Lord will not hear you in that day. (1 Samuel 8:11–18)

In dealing with kingship, biblical authors, like people everywhere, were torn by the divergence between theory and practice. What a king was supposed to be and what a king in reality became were not often one and the same: “In general, the ideal position is presented in the Psalms and Prophets, whereas the historical books often witness to the practical problems involved in the administration of monarchical judicial authority and the failures to attain this ideal.”<sup>16</sup>

The Nephites were also torn between conflicting views of kings. The Book of Mormon presents a similar variety of perspectives on kingship. The descendants of Nephi<sub>1</sub> found kings to be desirable, declaring that “whoso should reign in [Nephi’s] stead were called by the people, second Nephi, third Nephi, and so forth, according to the reigns of the kings” (Jacob 1:11). Zeniff and his people willingly recognized the Lamanite king of the land (Mosiah 9:5), and then proceeded to set up their own kingdom nearby; when Zeniff died, he conferred his kingdom upon his son, Noah (Mosiah 11:1). Though Noah “did not walk in the ways of his father,” he was still recognized and obeyed as king by the people. There was rarely a time when there was not a king of the Lamanites.

A second view presented by the Book of Mormon is that kingship is undesirable. After Lehi died, Nephi’s supporters desired him to rule over them. However, Nephi declined, saying: “I, Nephi, was desirous that they should have no king” (2 Nephi 5:18). Other Nephites developed this stance even further, declaring that kings are trouble:

Because all men are not just it is not expedient that ye should have a king or kings to rule over you. For behold, how much iniquity doth one wicked king cause to be committed, yea, and what great destruction! . . . Ye cannot dethrone an iniquitous king save it be through much contention, and the shedding of much blood. For behold, he has his friends in iniquity, and

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<sup>16</sup> Whitelam, *The Just King*, 18.

he keepeth his guards about him; and he teareth up the laws of those who have reigned in righteousness before him; and he trampleth under his feet the commandments of God; and he enacteth laws, and sendeth them forth among his people, yea, laws after the manner of his own wickedness; and whosoever doth not obey his laws he causeth to be destroyed; and whosoever doth rebel against him he will send his armies against them to war, and if he can he will destroy them; and thus an unrighteous king doth pervert the ways of all righteousness. (Mosiah 29:16–17, 21–23)

Benjamin's description of how he ruled could hardly contrast more with Samuel's or Mosiah's description of the problems caused by wicked kings:

I . . . 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. . . . And even I, myself, have labored with mine own hands that I might serve you, and that ye should not be laden with taxes, and that there should nothing come upon you which was grievous to be borne. (Mosiah 2:12–14)

Mosiah followed his father Benjamin in farming “the earth, that thereby he might not become burdensome to his people” (Mosiah 6:7). He took great pains to avoid abusing the royal power. Yet, near the end of his reign, Mosiah gives the most damning criticism to be found anywhere in scripture on the perils of kingship: “Because all men are not just it is not expedient that ye should have a king or kings to rule over you. For behold, how much iniquity doth one wicked king cause to be committed, yea, and what great destruction!” (Mosiah 29:16–17; see all of 29:5–36).

The Nephites had many different models of rulership to choose from as they consulted the precedents in the records they had brought with them from Jerusalem. Many types of rulers were found in Israel over the centuries: priest-kings like Melchizedek, patriarchs like Abraham and Jacob, family and tribal leaders of various types, lawgivers like Moses, high priests like Aaron, prophets like Samuel, military leaders like Joshua and Sampson, judges like Gideon and Deborah, powerful kings like Saul, David, and Solomon, and reform-minded kings like Hezekiah and Josiah. From this

wide array of options, it is little wonder that no single theory of kingship or rulership emerges among the Nephites, who at diverse times and under changing circumstances found themselves led by rulers such as Nephi, hereditary kings such as Nephi's successors, good kings such as Benjamin, wicked kings such as Noah, chief judges such as Nephiah, military captains such as Moroni, governors such as Lachoneus, and prophets such as Alma. All of this generated conflicting ideologies of kingship and leadership among the Nephites and helps explain the dichotomy in Benjamin's kingship, which featured both power and humility.

### **The King as Guardian of the Covenant of the Lord**

The king in the ancient Near East was obliged to maintain justice generally and to protect the rights of the weakest members of society.<sup>17</sup> King Benjamin did not discuss this responsibility directly, but it is implied at several points in his sermon that he understood and observed the principle of protecting the rights of the weak (for example, see Mosiah 2:17–18; 4:13–16, 24).

The king in Israel had an added responsibility of acting as guardian of the covenant between the Lord and his people—a concept that seems to have no parallel among neighboring peoples. He was expected to be an obedient follower of God and to lead his people in obeying this covenant.<sup>18</sup> Accordingly, “both Joshua and Josiah mediate covenants between Israel and God, [and] promise obedience to the book of the Torah.”<sup>19</sup> As guardian of the covenant and of the law, the Israelite king took “special measures in his capacity of teacher of the torah, being the highest responsible authority in all matters appertaining to the department of the law.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> F. Charles Fensham, “Widow, Orphan, and the Poor in Ancient Near Eastern Legal and Wisdom Literature,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 21/1 (1962): 129–39; Whitlam, *The Just King*, 17–37.

<sup>18</sup> Compare Helen A. Kenik, “Code of Conduct for a King: Psalm 101,” *JBL* 95/3 (1976): 391, 395.

<sup>19</sup> Ray K. Sutherland, “Israelite Political Theories in Joshua 9,” *JSOT* 53 (1992): 70.

<sup>20</sup> Geo Widengren, “King and Covenant,” *JSS* 2/1 (1957): 17.

Kingship and covenant are also closely connected in Mosiah 1–6. Benjamin’s command to his son to prepare for this grand occasion had two parts to it—to proclaim the son the new king, and to “give this people a name” (Mosiah 1:10–11). The name was “the name of Christ”; this was to be accepted by all “that have entered into the covenant with God that ye should be obedient unto the end of your lives” (Mosiah 5:8). The association of the two concepts in King Benjamin’s agenda indicates that they were linked in Nephite thinking. In Mosiah 2:13, Benjamin clearly declares ways in which he had discharged his obligations as teacher and administrator in all matters of law.

Kingship and the covenant of the people with God are again combined in Mosiah 6:3. After Mosiah had been consecrated king, he appointed priests “to teach the people, that thereby they might hear and know the commandments of God, and to stir them up in remembrance of the oath [or covenant] which they had made.” The record notes that following Benjamin’s death, Mosiah very strictly observed the covenant and the commandments that his father had passed on to him (see Mosiah 6:6).

### **Coronation**

The coronation of the king is the most important ritual act associated with kingship in the ancient Near East. A comparison of Mosiah 1–6 with coronation ceremonies recorded in the Old Testament and with such rites among other ancient Near Eastern peoples reveals striking parallels.<sup>21</sup>

#### **The Sanctuary as the Site of the Coronation**

A society’s most sacred spot is the location where the holy act of royal coronation takes place. For Israel, the temple was that site. So we read that during his coronation

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<sup>21</sup> The full pattern of common elements in the coronation rites in various cultures of the world was worked out in detail by Arthur Hocart, *Kingship* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), especially 70–71, who includes in his comparison twenty-six features, which I give in a somewhat different order, with brief explanations of each of the features, and with the addition of one feature, in Ricks and Sroka, “King, Coronation, and Temple,” 236–71, esp. 260–63.

Joash stood “by a pillar [of the temple], as the manner was” (2 Kings 11:14). However, the temple had not been built when Solomon became king, so he was crowned at Gihon (see 1 Kings 1:45). Although Gihon may have been chosen because water was available for purification rites,<sup>22</sup> it was made sacred by the presence of the Ark of the Covenant

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<sup>22</sup> It is still uncertain whether ablutions—ceremonial washings that were believed to avert evil, give life and strength, and symbolize rebirth—were part of the ancient Israelite coronation ceremonies; thus Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, trans. William R. Trask (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1959), 130; cf. also Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion* (Cleveland: World, 1963), 188–89, 193–94; Maurice A. Canney, *Newness of Life* (Calcutta: University of Calcutta Press, 1928), 67; W. B. Kristensen, *The Meaning of Religion* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1960), 446–47; A. J. Wensinck, “The Semitic New Year and the Origin of Eschatology,” *Acta Orientalia* 1 (1923): 166, 186; Robert A. Wild, *Water in the Cultic Worship of Isis and Sarapis* (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 125, 153. However, since purification in water is mentioned in Exodus 29:4 in connection with the anointing and investment of Aaron and his sons (cf. Exodus 40:12), Geo Widengren, “Royal Ideology and the Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs,” in *Promise and Fulfillment*, ed. F. F. Bruce (Edinburgh: Clark, 1963), 207, thinks that “it is probable that certain water-purifications had a place in the Israelite royal consecration.” In the fourth century A.D., Cyril of Jerusalem, “Catachesis XXI Mystagogica III de Chrismate 6 (Catechetical Lecture on the Chrism),” in *Patrologiae Graecae*, ed. J. P. Migne (Paris: Garnier, 1892), 33:1093, may have based his comments on an extrabiblical tradition when he wrote: “When the High Priest raised Solomon to the kingship, he anointed him after washing him in the waters of Gihon.” Although there is no explicit mention in 1 Kings 1:38–39 of a ritual ablution in connection with King Solomon’s coronation rites, TB *Horayoth* 12a records that “our Rabbis taught: The kings are anointed only at a fountain.” The presumption in favor of the existence of ablutions in the Israelite coronation ceremony is strengthened by the symbolic placement of the temple—the site of many Israelite coronations (e.g., the coronation of Joash, 2 Kings 11:4–14)—over the center of the world, where the “Water of Life” flowed; see Geo Widengren, “Israelite-Jewish Religion,” in *Historia Religionum*, ed. C. J. Bleeker and Geo Widengren (Leiden: Brill, 1969), 1:258–59. Such ablutions were a part of the coronation ceremonies in Egypt and the ancient Near East. According to Samuel A. B. Mercer, *The Pyramid Texts* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1952), 4:55; cf. Aylward M. Blackman, “An Ancient Egyptian Foretaste of the Doctrine of Baptismal Regeneration,” *Theology* 1 (1920): 140–41; even as a child the Egyptian crown prince was sprinkled with water by officials in order that he might be endowed with divine qualities and be reborn. In his daily preparations for entrance into the temple, the pharaoh was sprinkled with holy water, an act that endowed him with life, good fortune, stability, health, and happiness. For the purpose of performing these ritual acts of ablution, a pool or lake was connected with many Egyptian temples. Blackman, “An Ancient Egyptian Foretaste,” 135, 137–38; cf. Aylward M. Blackman,

(which contained the sacred objects from Moses' day) in the special tabernacle that David had made to shelter it at Gihon. The priest Zadok took "out of the tabernacle" the horn containing oil from which he anointed Solomon (1 Kings 1:39). Thus scholars have concluded that the covenants made in connection with Israelite coronations were "made in the Temple. . . . The king went up into the House of Yahweh, he had his place by, or on, the pillar . . . and he concluded the covenant before Yahweh."<sup>23</sup>

In the specifically Nephite case of Mosiah, all the people gathered at the temple at Zarahemla, the site chosen for Benjamin's address to the people and for the consecration of his son Mosiah as king (see Mosiah 1:18). The Nephite formalities, as had been the case in ancient Israel, took place in stages: "the coronation ceremony was divided into two parts, the anointing in the sanctuary and the enthronement in the royal palace."<sup>24</sup> Mosiah was first designated king in a private setting, presumably at the royal palace (Mosiah 1:9–12), and then presented to the people in the public gathering at the temple (Mosiah 2:31).

### **The Royal Dais**

Benjamin had a tower constructed from which he spoke and, presumably, presented Mosiah to the people (Mosiah 2:7). Not only was the king crowned in the temple, but in a specific place within the temple complex. In 2 Kings 11:14 we read that at the time of his coronation, King Joash "stood *by a pillar* (Heb. *>al ha->āmmûf*), as the manner was."

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"Some Notes on the Ancient Egyptian Practice of Washing the Dead," *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 5 (1918): 124; Samuel A. B. Mercer, *The Religion of Ancient Egypt* (London: Luzac, 1949), 348–50; Wild, *Water in the Cultic Worship of Isis and Sarapis*, 145. According to Aylward M. Blackman, "The House of the Morning," *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 5(1918): 155; Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods*, 83; and Eva L. R. Meyerowitz, *The Divine Kingship in Ghana and Ancient Egypt* (London: Faber and Faber, 1960), 159, during the Sed festival, the recurring feast celebrating the pharaoh's kingship, the pharaoh would have his feet ceremonially washed.

<sup>23</sup> Geo Widengren, "King and Covenant," *JSS* 2/1 (1957): 3.

<sup>24</sup> Von Rad, "The Royal Ritual in Judah," 223.

According to Welch and Szink, “The preposition *>al* can be translated ‘by,’ but it is much more often rendered ‘on’ or ‘upon.’”<sup>25</sup> Similarly, in 2 Kings 23:3, when King Josiah rededicates the temple he gathers all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem and reads the law before all the people. He then stands “by” or “on the pillar”—*>al ha->âmmûf*—and makes a covenant to keep all the commandments.<sup>26</sup> De Vaux connects these pillars with the “brassen scaffold” that Solomon built (2 Chronicles 6:13), upon which he stands and kneels “before all the congregation of Israel,” and from which he offers the dedicatory prayer for the temple; further, de Vaux suggests that the phrase *near the pillar* be translated “on the dais.”<sup>27</sup>

Another such structure is mentioned in Nehemiah 8:4. On the occasion of the reading of the law by Ezra the scribe, the religious leader of the people, we are again told that, during the *Sukkot* feast, Ezra “stood upon a pulpit of wood” in order to read the law to the people who were living “in booths for seven days following their return to Jerusalem from Babylon.”<sup>28</sup> Commenting on the pillars in 2 Kings, Gerhard von Rad wrote, “It is certainly to be understood in any case that the place where the king stood was a raised one. The king would have had to be visible to the crowd which had gathered for the solemnities, so that one may probably think of some sort of pillar-like platform.”<sup>29</sup> Widengren added, “We therefore conclude that at least towards the end of the pre-exilic

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<sup>25</sup> John W. Welch, Terrence L. Szink, et al., “Upon the Tower of Benjamin,” *FARMS Update, Insights* (August 1995): 2.

<sup>26</sup> The Jewish historian Josephus also placed King Joash “by” or “on a pillar” at the time of his coronation. Josephus, *Antiquities* IX, 7, 3.

<sup>27</sup> De Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 102–3; The preposition involved here (*>al*) certainly allows for such a translation, *BDB*, 752; T. Raymond Hobbs, *2 Kings* (Waco: Word Books, 1985), 142, suggests that the object stood on or was by “some kind of column, podium, or platform”; Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Worship in Israel: A Cultic History of the Old Testament* (Richmond: Knox, 1966), 224, notes that “in the ceremonies of enthronement the king was lifted on to a *>âmmûf* where he received the homage of the congregation.”

<sup>28</sup> Welch and Szink, “Upon the Tower,” 2; compare Widengren, “King and Covenant,” 11.

<sup>29</sup> Von Rad, “The Royal Ritual in Judah,” 224.

period, but possibly from the beginning of that period, the king when reading to his people on a solemn occasion from the book of the law and acting as the mediator of the covenant making between Yahweh and the people had his place on a platform or a dais.”<sup>30</sup>

In confirming the Old Testament documentation of the use of the dais, the Mishnah also supports the evidence found in the Book of Mormon. Together these illustrate that platforms are (1) located in the temple precinct, (2) associated with the coronation of new kings, (3) used by the king or another leader to read the law to the people, (4) used to offer dedicatory prayers for the temple, and (5) associated with the Festival of Booths. In view of these considerations one can conclude that Benjamin’s tower was more than just a way to communicate to the people—it was part of an Israelite coronation tradition in which the king stands on a platform or pillar at the temple before the people and before God.

### **Installing in Office with Insignia**

At the coronation of Joash, Jehoiada the priest conferred upon him two objects, called the *nezer* and the  $\text{אֲזָמָה}$ . “It would seem that the diadem and the protocol were the two items of sacral and legal insignia, conferment of which constituted the essential act of coronation.”<sup>31</sup> The meaning of the first term is certain; it means “crown” (2 Kings 11:12). What  $\text{אֲזָמָה}$  means is far less certain. Von Rad connected the  $\text{אֲזָמָה}$  with the idea of covenant and also with the Egyptian protocol which were given to the Pharaoh upon his ascent to the throne.<sup>32</sup> In other words it refers to a list of laws or regulations by which the

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<sup>30</sup> Widengren, “King and Covenant,” 10. Later testimony of this structure is indicated by certain rabbis in the Mishnah *Sotah* 7:8: “After the close of the first Festival-day of the Feast of Tabernacles, in the eighth year, after the going forth of the Seventh Year, they used to prepare for him in the Temple Court a wooden platform on which he sat, for it is written, ‘At the end of every seven years in the set time . . .’” (compare Deuteronomy 31:10–13). M *Sotah* 7:8.

<sup>31</sup> Von Rad, “The Royal Ritual in Judah,” 228–29.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 224–29.

king was to govern.<sup>33</sup> Geo Widengren, on the other hand, believes that the  $\text{אֲשֶׁר־עָלָיו}$  refers to the whole law. He notes: “It is highly important that according to all traditions the leader of the people of Israel, in older times chieftains of the charismatic type, like Moses and Joshua, in the period of the monarchy the king—and this right down into Hellenistic-Roman times—*always* had the law handed over to him, and thus was the real possessor of the Torah, in the concrete meaning of the word.”<sup>34</sup> Ringgren cites Psalm 132:12 to support this claim: “If thy children will keep my covenant and my testimonies ( $\text{אֲשֶׁר־עָלָיו}$ ) which I shall teach them, their children shall also sit upon thy throne for evermore.”<sup>35</sup> The king, as possessor of the law, would then “read out to the assembly the commandments of the book of the covenant and then . . . make the covenant between Yahweh and his people.”<sup>36</sup> The medieval Jewish commentator Rashi opined that the  $\text{אֲשֶׁר־עָלָיו}$  was a law, connecting it with the injunction in Deuteronomy 17:18–20, which specifies that the king should keep a copy of the law with him, that he might always remember the commandments of God, “to the end that he may prolong his days in his kingdom.”<sup>37</sup> In like manner, Benjamin told his sons, including Mosiah, his successor, “I would that ye should keep the commandments of God, that ye may prosper in the land according to the promises which the Lord made unto our fathers” (Mosiah 1:7). Thus not

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<sup>33</sup> Hobbs, 2 Kings, 141; *BDB*, 730. Tryggve N. D. Mettinger, *King and Messiah: The Civil and Sacral Legitimation of the Israelite Kings* (Lund: Gleerup, 1976), 286–89, acknowledges this possibility and offers a quite speculative, alternative one: he suggests that the  $\text{אֲשֶׁר־עָלָיו}$  was an inscription on the crown indicating the king’s close relationship with God.

<sup>34</sup> Widengren, “King and Covenant,” 21, emphasis in original. He also connects the king’s receiving the law to the reception of the law by Moses and the Mesopotamian tradition that the king received the “tablets of the gods,” or “tablets of destiny” upon his heavenly enthronement,” 17.

<sup>35</sup> Helmer Ringgren, *Israelite Religion*, trans. David E. Green (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), 223–24; Aubrey R. Johnson, *Sacral Kingship in Ancient Israel* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1967), 67 n. 2.

<sup>36</sup> Widengren, “King and Covenant,” 7.

<sup>37</sup> See *Miqraot Gedolot* vol. 3, note Rashi’s comment on 2 Kings 11:12.

only may Mosiah's receipt of the law as part of the regalia of kingship be similar to the procedure at the coronation of the kings in Israel, but the purpose for which it was given was also similar.

The royal documents were the most important records in the kingdoms of the ancient world, and a sword was a frequent sign of kingship in Europe and Asia. In addition, from early modern times at least back to the Roman Empire, an orb or ball was commonly held in the hand of Old World rulers; although the Bible does not mention such an object, it still might have been part of the Israelite set of artifacts copied from their neighbors.<sup>38</sup>

With the transfer of power, Benjamin gave Mosiah similar objects.<sup>39</sup> He passed on the official records of the people (the plates of brass and the plates of Nephi), the sword of Laban, and the miraculous ball (also called the director or Liahona; see Mosiah 1:15–17).

Moreover, the king donned sacred garments. “His sacral garment, his ecclesiastical garb, so to speak, meant that he wore the breast-plate of judgement, and in the pouch of judgement carried the Urim and Tummim, the symbols of the tablets of the law, corresponding exactly to the tablets of destiny worn by the ruler in Mesopotamia.”<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> On this compare Gordon C. Thomasson, “Mosiah: The Complex Symbolism and the Symbolic Complex of Kingship in the Book of Mormon,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 2/1 (1993): 21–38, and Stephen D. Ricks, “Olive Culture in the Second Temple Era and Early Rabbinic Period,” in *The Allegory of the Olive Tree: The Olive, the Bible, and Jacob 5*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and John W. Welch (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1994), 466–67, 474–75 n. 26.

<sup>39</sup> See Brett L. Holbrook, “The Sword of Laban as a Symbol of Divine Authority and Kingship,” and Daniel N. Rolph, “Prophets, Kings, and Swords: The Sword of Laban and Its Possible Pre-Laban Origin,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 2/1 (1993): 39–72, 73–79, for a rich and detailed discussion of the religious and ceremonial significance of swords in the Book of Mormon and the ancient Mediterranean. The kings evidently kept the large plates; beginning only with Mosiah<sub>1</sub> did the small plates also go through the royal line.

<sup>40</sup> Widengren, “King and Covenant,” 21; see also John van Seters, “The Creation of Man and the Creation of the King,” *ZAW* 101/3 (1989): 335–36.

Benjamin's concern about his garments (Mosiah 2:28) and the fact that king Mosiah was known to possess "two stones" by means of which he could translate the twenty-four plates of Ether (Mosiah 28:13) may be evidence that similar items were present in the Nephite coronation.

### **Anointing**

To anoint the king with oil was a significant part of coronation ceremonies in ancient Israel and in the ancient Near East generally. The Bible records the anointing of six of the kings: Saul, David, Solomon, Jehu, Joash, and Jehoahaz.<sup>41</sup> "The anointing is a ritual religious act, which marks the candidate for kingship as the Lord's elected."<sup>42</sup> Indeed, the name *Messiah*, which was used to refer to several of the kings of Israel, means "anointed," no doubt referring to the rite of anointing the king during his installation as ruler.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Saul: 1 Samuel 10:1; David: 2 Samuel 5:3; Solomon: 1 Kings 1:39; Jehu: 2 Kings 9:6; Joash: 2 Kings 11:12; Jehoahaz: 2 Kings 23:30. In addition, it is recorded in 2 Samuel 19:11 that the upstart Absalom was anointed to be king.

<sup>42</sup> Zafirra Ben-Barak, "The Mizpah Covenant (I Sam 10:25)—The Source of the Israelite Monarchic Covenant," *ZAW* 91/1 (1979): 38.

<sup>43</sup> Ernst Kutsch, *Salbung als Rechtsakt im Alten Testament und im Alten Orient* (Berlin: Töpelmann, 1963), 52–63; cf. also J. A. Soggin, "maelaek," in *Theologisches Handwörterbuch zum Alten Testament*, ed. Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann (Munich: Kaiser, 1971), 1:914–20. According to later Jewish legend, *Apocalypse of Moses* 9:3, cited in R. H. Charles, ed., *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament in English*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 2:143, the idea of anointing began with the first man. According to this story, when Adam was 930 years old, he knew that his days were coming to an end. He therefore implored Eve, "Arise and go with my son Seth near to paradise, and put earth upon your heads and weep and pray to God to have mercy upon me and send his angel to paradise, and give me of the tree out of which the oil floweth, and bring it (to) me, and I shall anoint myself and shall have rest from my complaint.

The Hittites, a northern neighbor of the Israelites, also had a ceremony that included anointing the king with oil.<sup>44</sup> Although there is no clear evidence that the Egyptian king was anointed when he became king, he apparently was anointed every morning before entering the temple where he performed daily chants.<sup>45</sup>

Following Benjamin's address and the renewal of the covenant by the people, Benjamin "consecrated his son Mosiah to be a ruler and a king over his people" (Mosiah 6:3). In the Book of Mormon the verb *to consecrate* occurs mostly in connection with priests or teachers (2 Nephi 5:26; Mosiah 11:5; 23:17; Alma 4:4, 7; 5:3; 15:13; 23:4), but also appears in three instances in association with kings. (1) Benjamin says that he was "consecrated" to be king by his father (Mosiah 2:11), (2) Mosiah was "consecrated" by Benjamin his father (Mosiah 6:3), and (3) Amlici was "consecrated" by his followers to be their king (Alma 2:9).

The verb *to anoint* is more commonly used in the Book of Mormon record with the setting apart of kings. Nephi "anointed" his successor (Jacob 1:9); interestingly, the word is used nine times in the Jaredite record, perhaps in a formulaic fashion (Ether 6:22, 27; 9:4, 14–15, 21–22; 10:10, 16). In the Bible, only the verb *anoint* (from the root \*MÓ) is used exclusively with reference to kings.<sup>46</sup> In the enthronements of both Solomon (1 Kings 1:34) and Joash (2 Kings 11:12) an anointing occurs. Furthermore, Saul, David, Jehu, and Jehoahaz were all anointed.<sup>47</sup> The verb *to consecrate* (from the root \*QD) is confined to priests. The two terms are similar but not identical in meaning. *To anoint* means to set apart by applying oil to the body, specifically the head, and *to consecrate*, a

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<sup>44</sup> Oliver R. Gurney, "Hittite Kingship," in *Myth, Ritual, and Kingship*, ed. S. H. Hooke (Oxford: Clarendon, 1958), 118.

<sup>45</sup> Kutsch, *Salbung als Rechtsakt*, 41–52; Mercer, *The Religion of Ancient Egypt*, 348.

<sup>46</sup> Baruch Halpern, *Constitution of the Monarchy in Israel* (Chico: Scholars, 1981), 14, has proposed that anointing was not directly associated with the king's coronation but rather with his divine election; for further on anointing, see de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 103–6.

<sup>47</sup> See n. 42.

more general term, means to make holy. Consecrating could be done by anointing, but is not limited to it. It is possible that the consecration of Mosiah included anointing, which would have been in accordance with the practices in ancient Israel and the ancient Near East.

### **Presentation of the New King**

Mosiah is presented to the people as their king in Mosiah 2:30. In 1 Kings 1:34, 39, Solomon is presented to the people “and they blew the trumpet; and all the people said God save king Solomon.” At the coronation of Joash “the princes and the trumpeters [were] by the king, and all the people of the land rejoiced, and blew with trumpets” (2 Kings 11:14). The blowing of the trumpet *shôfâr* bears an interesting connection with the New Year festival discussed above. Returning to the enthronement of the Assyrian king Esarhaddon cited above, we find that he too was presented to the people:

He (Sennacherib, Esarhaddon’s father) heeded their (the god’s) important pronouncement and called together the people of Assyria, young and old, my brothers (and all) the male descendants of (the family of) my father and made them take a solemn oath in the presence of (the images of) the gods of Assyria: Ashur, Sin, Shamash, Nebo, (and) Marduk, (and) of (all) the (other) gods residing in heaven and in the nether world, in order to secure my succession.<sup>48</sup>

It should also be noted that Esarhaddon’s enthronement took place during the Babylonian month of Nisan which, being the first month of the year, was the month when the Babylonian New Year festival was celebrated. Similarly, presentation and acclamation were formal parts of the enthronement in Israel and the ancient Near East.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> James A. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts relating to the Old Testament* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 289.

<sup>49</sup> See de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 106; Geo Widengren, *Sakrales Königtum im Alten Testament und im Judentum* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1955), 49.

One reason for the public proclamation of the new king was to avoid disputes over the throne. In fact, it is most likely that we have detailed accounts concerning the coronation of Solomon and Joash specifically because both kingships were challenged.<sup>50</sup> Despite his father's efforts, the Assyrian Esarhaddon had serious problems with his brothers who also wanted to be king. With this in mind, Benjamin's statements immediately following the presentation of his son take on new meaning: "If ye shall keep the commandments of my son, or the commandments of God which shall be delivered unto you by him, ye shall prosper in the land, and your enemies shall have no power over you. 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" (Mosiah 2:31–32). The use of the word *contention* is significant. A quick study of its context in the Book of Mormon reveals that it is often tied to wars and that the principal cause of those wars was dissension and rebellion against the king by individuals. Hence the need for public designation of the king.

As Nibley has pointed out, there is a twist in the Nephite enthronement ceremony, for although Mosiah was proclaimed king, more attention is devoted to God as king.<sup>51</sup> Benjamin repeatedly reminds the people that he too is human (Mosiah 2:11, 26) and that God is the real king (Mosiah 2:19). The idea of God-as-king is frequently found in the Old Testament, especially in Psalms.<sup>52</sup> As a final part of the proclamation of the

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<sup>50</sup> Solomon's by his half-brother Adonijah (1 Kings 1:5–10), and Joash's by his grandmother Athaliah (2 Kings 11:1–3).

<sup>51</sup> Hugh W. Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, 3rd ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988), 300–301.

<sup>52</sup> On this see Halpern, *Constitution of the Monarchy in Israel*, 61–109; Herman L. Jansen, "The Consecration in the Eighth Chapter of Testamentum Levi," in *The Sacral Kingship, Contributions to the Central Theme of the VIIIth International Congress for the History of Religions*, Rome, April 1955 (Leiden: Brill, 1959), 361–62. More recently see John H. Eaton, *Kingship and the Psalms*, 2nd ed. (Sheffield: JSOT, 1986), for a comprehensive discussion of the issue. But this theory is not without its critics. See de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 504–6; Kraus, *Worship in Israel*, 205–8. Mowinckel and Widengren

coronation of the new king, “in a fresh act of the drama,” the king himself would next speak; “claiming the authority of a divine revelation made to him, he proclaims to the city and to the world (in a more or less threatening speech) the nature of the overlordship which has been conferred upon him.”<sup>53</sup> At this point, the people respond by accepting the king’s declarations (see Mosiah 4:2; 5:2–4), and their acclamation “signals the people’s approval and contributes to the reciprocal feeling of closeness between the king and his citizens.”<sup>54</sup> The public proclamation of the kingship of Mosiah evidently follows the ancient pattern closely.

### Receiving a Throne Name

In many societies, a king received a new name or throne name when he was crowned king.<sup>55</sup> Several Israelite kings had two names, a “birth name” and a throne name. It may be that all the kings of Judah received a new name when they came to the throne.<sup>56</sup> During the “royal protocol Yahweh addresses the king in direct speech, calls him his son, invests him with sovereign rights, confers upon him his coronation name, and so on.”<sup>57</sup> During the Middle Kingdom period, each king of Egypt had no less than five names and

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themselves have been discussed in J. de Fraine, “Mowinckel (Sigmund Olaf Plytt),” in *Dictionnaire de la Bible*, ed. Henri Cazelles and André Feuillet (Paris: Letouzey, 1957), 5: 1387–90; Arvid S. Kapelrud, *God and His Friends in the Old Testament* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1979), 53–78; Arvid S. Kapelrud, “Sigmund Mowinckel 1884–1965,” *Svensk Exegetisk årsbok* 49 (1984): 66–73; John W. Jonsson, “Reflections on Geo Widengren’s Phenomenological Method: Towards a Phenomenological Hermeneutic of the Old Testament,” *Scriptura*, special issue S 2 (1986): 21–39.

<sup>53</sup> Von Rad, “The Royal Ritual in Judah,” 229.

<sup>54</sup> Ben-Barak, “The Mizpah Covenant,” 38.

<sup>55</sup> Arthur M. Hocart, “Initiation,” *Folklore* 35 (1924): 312; compare Bruce H. Porter and Stephen D. Ricks, “Names in Antiquity: Old, New, and Hidden,” in *By Study and Also by Faith: Essays in Honor of Hugh W. Nibley*, ed. John M. Lundquist and Stephen D. Ricks (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990), 1:501–22, and Truman G. Madsen, “‘Putting on the Names’: A Jewish-Christian Legacy,” in *By Study and Also by Faith*, 1:458–81.

<sup>56</sup> De Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 108.

<sup>57</sup> Von Rad, “The Royal Ritual in Judah,” 229.

received a throne name at the time he became king.<sup>58</sup> Kings in Mesopotamia also received a new name. All Parthian kings (in ancient Iran) assumed the same throne-name, “Arsak,” at their crowning—a fact that has made it hard for historians to identify one ruler from another.<sup>59</sup>

Use of the same royal title marks the early Nephite kings. Jacob wrote that, “The people having loved Nephi exceedingly . . . wherefore, the people were desirous to retain in remembrance his name. And whoso should reign in his stead were called by the people second Nephi, third Nephi, and so forth, according to the reigns of the kings; and thus they were called by the people, let them be of whatever [original] name they would” (Jacob 1:10–11). While it is true that we do not know that this new name was given to the rulers over the Nephites as part of the coronation rite, there is every reason to expect that it was.

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<sup>58</sup> Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods*, 46–47; compare also John A. Wilson, *The Culture of Ancient Egypt* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 102.

<sup>59</sup> Widengren, “The Sacral Kingship of Iran,” in *The Sacral Kingship/La regalità sacra* (Leiden: Brill, 1959), 253–54. On the practice of assigning a new name at the time of the king’s enthronement see Ricks and Sroka, “King, Coronation, and Temple.” Of course, kings were not the only ones to receive new names. Biblical history is full of examples of men (and in one case, a woman) who received new or changed names, frequently in association with a transition (usually, though not invariably, of a spiritual nature) in their lives. Thus Abram became Abraham (Genesis 17:5), his wife Sarai became Sarah (Genesis 17:15), Jacob was renamed Israel (Genesis 32:28), and Joseph became Zaphnath-paaneah (Genesis 41:45). In the New Testament, Jesus gave Simon the name Cephas (whose Greek reflex is Peter—see John 1:42; Matthew 16:17–18), while Saul took on the Latin name Paul, indicative of his role as missionary to the Gentiles. The name Paul is first mentioned at Acts 13:9, at the beginning of his first missionary labors among the Gentiles. The receipt of a new name is promised to all the faithful in Revelation: “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it” (Revelation 2:17).

### Divine Adoption of the King

Based on relating various Psalms (2, 89, 110) or passages in Isaiah (9:6–7) to the coronation, many scholars include as part of the enthronement procedure the divine adoption of the king.<sup>60</sup>

As [a] “son” of God, the king belongs to the sphere in which God in a specific manner manifests his fatherly concern and exercises fatherly authority. Both a privilege and an obligation are thus involved. As “son”, the king enjoys divine protection and help. This feature is found in all the most important texts. As “son”, the king also participates in the power of God and exercises delegated divine power. His sovereignty on earth is a replica of that of God in heaven (Psalms 89 and 110). But divine sonship also implies filial obedience, although this obedience is not a *sine qua non* for the legitimacy of the king.<sup>61</sup>

Typically, Latter-day Saints have interpreted these passages as referring to Christ. In them the king is called a son of God. In one passage, however, the Lord through Nathan the prophet, referring directly to Solomon, declares, “I will be his father, and he shall be my son” (2 Samuel 7:14). Benjamin’s actual bestowal of the name on the people is recorded in Mosiah 5:6–12. Note particularly verse 7: “And now, because of the covenant which ye have made ye shall be called the children of Christ, his sons, and his daughters; for behold, this day he hath spiritually begotten you; for ye say that your hearts are changed through faith on his name; therefore, ye are born of him and have become his sons and his daughters.” Again we can find a similar idea in the enthronement of Joash. “And Jehoiada made a covenant between the Lord and the king and the people, that they should be the Lord’s people” (2 Kings 11:17). What was once

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<sup>60</sup> See for example Ringgren, *Israelite Religion*, 225–27; Kraus, *Worship in Israel*, 181, 224; Halpern, *Constitution of the Monarchy in Israel*, 128–29; von Rad, “The Royal Ritual in Judah,” 230–31; Eaton, *Kingship and the Psalms*, 146–49; on divine election in ancient Babylonia see René Labat, *Le caractère religieux de la royauté assyro-babylonienne* (Paris: Maisonneuve, 1943), 53–69; on divine adoption in ancient Egypt, see Wildung, *Egyptian Saints*, 1–3.

<sup>61</sup> Mettinger, *King and Messiah*, 291–92.

reserved for kings at coronation has now been extended in Nephite culture to the people generally. These last two themes—new name and divine adoption—are included in the coronation ritual and further confirm the ancient antecedents of King Benjamin’s address.

### **The Assembly of Mosiah 1–6 as a Covenant Renewal**

Mosiah 1–6 mentions three notable features of this assembly: the pilgrimage of whole families to the temple site, the sacrifice of animals, and the people’s dwelling in tents. These elements are so typical of the Israelite Feast of Tabernacles that they strongly suggest that the events recorded in these chapters took place during a Nephite observance of that festival.<sup>62</sup> From the Old Testament it appears that the Feast of the Tabernacles was the time when the Israelites renewed their covenant with God,<sup>63</sup> which is what the Nephites appear to have been doing in the assembly reported in Mosiah 1–6.

Six elements of covenant renewal can be found in Exodus, Deuteronomy, and Joshua: the record (1) gives a preamble in which God is introduced as the one making the covenant or in which his prophet is introduced as spokesman for God; (2) gives a brief review of God’s relations with Israel in the past; (3) notes the terms of the covenant, listing specific commandments and obligations that God expected Israel to keep; (4) records that the people bear witness in formal statements that they accept the covenant; (5) gives a list of blessings and curses for obedience or disobedience to the covenant; and

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<sup>62</sup> Von Rad, “The Problem of the Hexateuch,” in *The Problem of the Hexateuch*, 35. In a similar vein, John Bright writes in *A History of Israel* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981), 171: “It is exceedingly probable . . . that there was a regular ceremony of covenant renewal—whether annually or every seven years (Deuteronomy 31:9–13)—to which the tribesmen would come with their tribute to the God-King, to hear his gracious deeds recited and his commandments read, and then with blessings and curses to take anew their oath of allegiance to him.”

<sup>63</sup> “The idea of a covenant between a deity and a people is unknown to us from other religions and cultures [of the ancient Near East].” Moshe Weinfeld, “b#rith,” in *TDOT* 2:278. Covenant renewal also appears to be unique to ancient Israel.

(6) records that provisions are made for depositing a written copy of the covenant in a safe and sacred place and for reading its contents to the people in the future.

In addition, the ideal was that the new king take office before the death of the old one,<sup>64</sup> and this transfer of power was connected with the ceremony in which the people make or renew their covenant with God. Interestingly, each of these features is found in Mosiah 1–6 (see Table 1 and its comparisons of Mosiah 1–6 and Old Testament covenant passages). This basic structure of the covenant is further nuanced by a comparison with Hittite treaties composed in the fourteenth and thirteenth centuries B.C., approximately the same period of time as the Israelite exodus from Egypt.<sup>65</sup> The fundamental elements common to both the Hittite treaties and the covenant passages in the Old Testament include the preamble, the antecedent history, individual stipulations, witness formulas or oaths of acceptance, blessings and curses, and provisions for the recital and deposit of the treaty/covenant.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Klaus Baltzer, *The Covenant Formulary*, David Green, tr. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), 82–83.

<sup>65</sup> The constituent elements of the Hittite treaty were first isolated and analyzed by Viktor Koroјec, *Hethitische Staatsverträge* (Leipzig: Weicher, 1931), 12–14. The structural link between the Hittite treaties and the Old Testament covenant passages was first suggested by Elias Bickerman in “Couper une alliance,” *Archives d’histoire du droit oriental* 5 (1950–51): 153, reprinted with an additional note in Elias Bickerman, *Studies in Jewish and Christian History*, Part One (Leiden: Brill, 1976), 23, and later developed and expanded by George Mendenhall in “Covenant Forms in Israelite Tradition,” *Biblical Archaeologist* 17/3 (1954): 50–76. The literature on the treaty/covenant in the Bible and the ancient Near East since Bickerman and Mendenhall has been considerable; see Dennis J. McCarthy’s thorough analysis of ancient Near Eastern treaties and their structural relationship to the covenant pericopes in the Old Testament (as well as an extensive bibliography) in his recent *Treaty and Covenant* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1978).

<sup>66</sup> The specific names for these categories are, to an extent, my own, but they are similar to those in other treatments of the treaty/covenant pattern in the Bible, for example, J. A. Thompson, “The Near Eastern Suzerain-Vassal Concept in the Religion of Israel,” *Journal of Religious History* 3 (1964): 4, and Mendenhall, “Covenant Forms in Israelite Tradition,” 57–60, all of which are based ultimately on the analysis of the constituent elements of the Hittite treaty in Koroјec, *Hethitische Staatsverträge*, 12–14. The

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biblical covenant passages which will be studied here include Exodus 19:3b–8, 20–24; Deuteronomy 1–31; and Joshua 24. Other passages may also be analyzed in the light of this pattern, for example, 1 Samuel 12.

Table 1 here

## 1. Preamble

In the Hittite treaties, the preamble contains the name, as well as other titles and attributes, of the suzerain making the treaty: “These are the words of the Sun, Muwatallis, the Great King, King of the land of Hatti, Beloved of the Weather–God.”<sup>67</sup> The passages in the Bible that deal with the renewal of the covenant sometimes introduce God as the maker of the covenant: “And God spake all these words saying . . .” At other times, a prophet is introduced to act for God: “And Joshua said unto all the people, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel. . . .” Similarly, Benjamin’s covenant assembly in the book of Mosiah begins: “And these are the words which [Benjamin] spake and caused to be written, saying. . . .” (Mosiah 2:9). Although Benjamin is speaking, he is clearly acting as the mouthpiece of God. In fact, a sizable part of his address consists of words that had been made known to him “by an angel from God” (Mosiah 3:2–3).

## 2. Review of God’s Relations with Israel

This part of the typical Hittite treaty acknowledges the past kindnesses that had been shown by the suzerain toward his vassal, providing the rationale for the great king’s appeal (in the following section, which contained specific stipulations) to his vassal to render future obedience in return for past benefits: “When, in former times Labarnas, my grandfather, attacked the land of Wilusa, he conquered [it]. . . . The Land of Wilusa never after fell away from the land of Hatti but . . . remained friends with the king of Hatti.”<sup>68</sup> At this point in the covenant renewal, according to the Bible, the people hear of God’s mighty acts on behalf of his people Israel. For example, “Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagle’s wings, and brought you unto myself” (Exodus 19:4; compare Exodus 20:2; Joshua 24:12–13). The Mosiah passage includes a long account of the past relations between King Benjamin and his people and uses the

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<sup>67</sup> McCarthy, *Treaty and Covenant*, 1.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

thanks the people owe him for his contributions to their welfare as an *a fortiori* argument for the greater thanks they owe to God:

And behold also, if I, whom ye call your king, who has spent his days in your service, . . . do merit any thanks from you, O how you ought to thank you heavenly King!

. . . who has created you from the beginning, and is preserving you from day to day, by lending you breath, . . . and even supporting you from one moment to another. (Mosiah 2:19, 21)

### 3. Terms of the Covenant

In the Hittite treaties, this section includes the specific obligations that the vassal had to his overlord: “Thou, Alaksandus, shalt protect the Sun as a friend. . . . If anyone says an unfriendly word about the Sun and you keep it secret from the Sun . . . then thou, Alaksandus, sinnest before the oath of the gods; let the oath of the gods harry [thee]!”<sup>69</sup> Each of the biblical covenant passages stipulates the commandments that God expects his people Israel to keep. A prime example is in Exodus 20–23 where God first briefly lists the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:3–17) and then spells out in greater detail what the people are to obey (Exodus 21:1–23:19). Benjamin’s address also contains numerous commandments; for example, “Believe in God. . . . 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” (Mosiah 4:9–10).

### 4. Formal Witness

The Hittite treaties contain clauses in which the gods are invoked to witness and act as guarantors of the treaties: “The Sun God of heaven, lord of the lands, Shepherd of men, the Sun Goddess of Arinna, the Queen of the lands, the Weather-God [are called to witness this treaty].”<sup>70</sup> Clearly, such a clause would have been unacceptable in a

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

covenant in monotheistic Israel. At one time in the Old Testament, an object, a particular stone, is made witness to the covenant, “for it hath heard all the words of the Lord which he spake unto us: it shall be therefore a witness unto you, lest ye deny your God” (Joshua 24:27). In general, though, the people themselves were the witnesses; for instance, they say “All that the Lord hath spoken we will do” (Exodus 19:8). Following King Benjamin’s address, the people express their desire “to enter into a covenant with [their] God to do his will, and to be obedient to his commandments” (Mosiah 5:5). They further witness their willingness to obey by allowing their names to be listed among those who have “entered into a covenant with God to keep his commandments” (Mosiah 6:1).

### **5. Blessings and Cursings**

The end of a biblical covenant ceremony often contains a list of curses and blessings for those who enter into the covenant:

Cursed be the man that maketh any graven or molten image. . . . And all the people shall answer and say, Amen. Cursed be he that setteth light by his father or his mother. And all the people shall say, Amen. (Deuteronomy 27:15–17)

Blessed shalt thou be in the city, and blessed shalt thou be in the field. Blessed shall be the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy ground, and the fruit of thy cattle. (Deuteronomy 28:3–4)

More often the Old Testament just implies the curses and blessings:

And Joshua said unto the people, . . . If ye forsake the Lord, and serve strange gods, then he will turn and do you hurt, and consume you, after that he hath done you good. (Joshua 24:19–20)

The curses and blessings in Benjamin’s speech are also implied rather than stated outright:

And . . . whosoever doeth this shall be found at the right hand of God. . . . And now . . . whosoever shall not take upon him the name of Christ must be called by some other name; therefore, he findeth himself on the left hand of God. (Mosiah 5:9–10)

## 6. Reciting and Depositing the Covenant

The Bible frequently mentions that the covenant was read aloud: “And he [Moses] took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people” (Exodus 24:7). Other passages mention that the covenant was written and put in a safe and sacred place: “And Joshua wrote these words in the book of the law of God, and took a great stone, and set it up there under an oak, that was by the sanctuary of the Lord” (Joshua 24:26). The words of King Benjamin were written and sent out among the people, not only so they could study and understand what had gone on, but also as a permanent record of the assembly (see Mosiah 2:8–9). At the end of Benjamin’s address, when all the people expressed a willingness to take upon themselves Christ’s name, their names were recorded (Mosiah 6:1).

### From Dust to Exaltation

The ideology of kingship in ancient Israel extended beyond coronation rituals and covenant patterns. Biblical scholars have found that the ideas associated with becoming a king or a queen also came to serve as religious images, symbolizing the ascent of mortal beings from dust to exaltation.

“Recent studies,” according to Walter Brueggemann, “have suggested an intersection in the motifs of covenant-making, enthronement, and resurrection.”<sup>71</sup> For example, the resurrection of Jesus was conjoined in early Christianity with his messianic enthronement, and descriptions of his glorification were substantiated through Old Testament passages about Davidic kingship. And just as mortal kings were created out of the dust of the earth and yet could be elevated by God to become a leader in Israel, so all human beings could be raised from their mortal state to resurrected glory.

Thus, in Israelite thought, “the motifs of covenant-renewal, enthronement, and resurrection cannot be kept in isolation from each other but they run together and serve to

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<sup>71</sup> Walter Brueggemann, “From Dust to Kingship,” *ZAW* 84/1 (1972): 1.

illuminate each other.”<sup>72</sup> And with this matrix in mind, it becomes all the more significant that Benjamin intertwines the themes of dust, kingship, covenant, enthronement, and resurrection throughout his speech.

The use of the word *dust* is a first important indicator of the possible presence of royal language. In a telling declaration, God told the Israelite king Baasha that divine power had raised him to kingship from the dust: “Since I exalted you out of the dust and made you leader over my people Israel . . .” (1 Kings 16:2; see also the combination of dust and kingship in 1 Samuel 2:6–8; Psalm 113:7). Brueggemann argues that the creation account and Adam’s elevation from the dust should be understood as having enthronement overtones, for Adam “is really being crowned king over the garden with all the power and authority which it implies.”<sup>73</sup> Thus it is significant that King Benjamin began his royal speech by reminding his people that he too was “of the dust” (Mosiah 2:26) and was dependent on God for his power, that he had been “suffered by the hand of the Lord . . . [to] be a ruler and a king over this people” (Mosiah 2:11).

The operative vehicle that takes any man from the dust and installs him in a position of authority or favor is the power of covenant, according to Brueggemann. Hence, texts that speak of being in the dust can refer to situations in which the covenant relationship between Jehovah and the king or his people has been broken (Psalm 7:6), while its opposite, coming to life, is connected with making and keeping the covenant. For instance, in Psalm 104:29–30, covenant and creation “are closely related.”<sup>74</sup> In the case of Benjamin’s people, they first viewed themselves as “even less than the dust of the earth” (Mosiah 4:2), but through the force and effect of their covenant they became spiritually begotten, born, free, and positioned on the right hand of God (Mosiah 5:7–10). It was the covenant that raised them from the dust, both ceremonially and spiritually.

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 7.

The idea that God elevates the righteous king from the dust brings with it two counter sides. First is the realization that if the king is wicked the Lord will utterly sweep away the ruler who breaks the covenant, returning him to the dust and sweeping him out of the house (1 Kings 16:3). Although Benjamin does not turn explicitly to dust imagery when he warns his people against breaking their covenant, he takes it for granted throughout his speech that mortals owe to God everything that they have and are (Mosiah 2:20–25), and therefore it is to be expected that they will be returned to the dust, utterly blotted out, driven away, and cast out if they are not true and faithful to their God (Mosiah 5:11, 14).

The second counterpoint is a motif that frequently occurs in connection with the ascension of a righteous king, namely the logical presumption that, conversely, one king “can be raised from the dust to power only when the alternative rulers are sent to the dust.”<sup>75</sup> Thus the Psalmist prays in a royal setting, “May his foes bow down before him, and his enemies lick the dust” (Psalm 72:9; see also Micah 7:17; Isaiah 49:23). This imagery is sometimes “extended so that the whole people now share in the promise and hope of the royal tradition,” as when Isaiah prophesies that the people of Israel will be raised to power as their enemies are brought low in the dust (Isaiah 25:10–12; 26:4–5).<sup>76</sup> Benjamin seems attuned to this motif as well when he assures the ascendance of his son Mosiah by promising and instructing his people that “your enemies shall have no power over you,” and that “the enemy to all righteousness” shall have “no place in you,” if they would obey Mosiah as king (Mosiah 2:31, 36).

The ultimate victory over one’s enemy, of course, is found in overcoming death through the resurrection of the dead. Here, also, the theme of rising from the dust becomes important in scripture: “Awake and sing, ye that dwell in the dust” (Isaiah 26:19); “those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life and some to shame and everlasting contempt” (Daniel 12:2). John H. Hayes has argued that

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 11.

New Testament texts about resurrection draw on enthronement imagery.<sup>77</sup> Brueggemann extends that argument into the Old Testament: “The resurrection of Israel is in fact the enthronement of Israel among the nations”; by building “an anthropology out of royal ritual,” the ancient prophets affirmed “that man is bound for kingship.”<sup>78</sup> With equal confidence, King Benjamin took the symbols and promises of royal ritual and extended them to the common people in his domain. He delivered to them great promises of joy and confidence (Mosiah 3:3–4), assuring them that the dead will rise (Mosiah 3:5, 10), and that the righteous will be lifted up and “brought to heaven” (Mosiah 5:15).

No one seems to dispute Brueggemann and others in their assertion that the themes of kingship, covenant-making, rising from the dust, coronation, and resurrection were closely linked in the minds of ancient Israelites and early Christians, even though their findings have been detected and assembled only from bits and pieces in scattered texts throughout the Bible. Thus it may come as an unexpected verification that all their findings are illuminated and strongly exemplified in a single text—the Book of Mormon. Indeed, Benjamin’s speech may be the best royal and religious text that shows both king and common folk in relation to each of the elements in the precise set of interconnected themes of kingship, coronation, covenant, and being raised from the dust to eternal life.

### Conclusion

As Hugh Nibley has noted on numerous occasions, one of the best means of establishing a text’s authenticity lies in examining the degree to which it accurately reflects in its smaller details the milieu from which it claims to derive.<sup>79</sup> The Book of

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<sup>77</sup> John H. Hayes, “The Resurrection as Enthronement and the Earliest Church Christology,” *Interpretation* 22 (1968): 333–45.

<sup>78</sup> Brueggemann, “From Dust to Kingship,” 13, 17.

<sup>79</sup> See, for example, Hugh W. Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert, The World of the Jaredites, There Were Jaredites* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988), 263, 378–79; Hugh W. Nibley, *Since Cumorah*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988), 152–53, 464 n. 121.

Mormon claims to derive from ancient Israel. The extent to which it correctly mirrors the culture of the ancient Near East in matters of religious practice, manner of life, methods of warfare, as well as other topics (especially those that were either unknown or unexamined in Joseph Smith's time), may provide one of the best tests of the book's genuineness. In this study, we have found numerous elements in the ancient ideology of kingship that are reflected accurately in Benjamin's speech. Indeed, the full ceremonial life setting of the covenant renewal festivals in the books of Exodus, Deuteronomy, and Joshua and coronation ceremonies have been identified with the Feast of Tabernacles and its form (going back to what must have been a far more ancient Near Eastern pattern) has only in the past several decades been analyzed to include a preamble, antecedent history, stipulations, witness formulas, blessings and curses, and provisions for the recital and deposit of the text. That the covenant assembly in the book of Mosiah has been found—possibly—to have the same ritual setting (the Feast of Tabernacles) as the covenant renewal festivals and coronation assemblies in the Old Testament is remarkable; that the covenant ceremonies in both the Old Testament and the book of Mosiah reflect an ancient Near Eastern pattern prescribed for such occasions may provide another control for establishing the genuineness of the Book of Mormon.

Mosiah 1–6 reflects in considerable detail the Israelite customs and beliefs that are part of the process of choosing and seating a new king on the throne. This sermon ranks as one of the most important in scripture. It serves to fulfill one of the primary purposes of the Book of Mormon by placing central focus and highest importance on the life, mission, atonement, and eternal reign of the heavenly King, Jesus Christ, the Lord God Omnipotent.