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King Mosiah and the Judgeship

The immediate situation that prompted Mosiah to institute a system of judges to govern the Nephites was the departure of his four sons. The people asked that Aaron be appointed king, but he and his brothers had gone to the land of Nephi to preach to the Lamanites and had renounced their claims to the monarchy (see Mosiah 29:1–6).¹

Mosiah had other reasons for abolishing the monarchy. One of these was the iniquity that resulted from the reign of King Noah over the Nephites who lived in the land of Nephi and who had recently resettled in the land of Zarahemla, where Mosiah reigned (see 29:17–24). But most of the reasons Mosiah gave his people had no precedents in Nephite history. An examination of those reasons suggests that they were prompted by the Jaredite history that Mosiah had recently translated (see 28:11–19).

In his message to the people, Mosiah noted “that he to whom the kingdom doth rightly belong has declined, and will not take upon him the kingdom. And now if there should be another appointed in his stead, behold I fear there would rise contentions among you. And who knoweth but what my son, to whom the kingdom doth belong, should turn to be angry and draw away a part of this people after him, which would cause wars and

contentions among you” (29:6–7). Such a situation had never occurred among the Nephites, but it had been common among the Jaredites for brother to rebel against brother or father and to draw away part of the people to wage war (see Ether 7:4–5, 15–17; 8:2–3; 9:11–12; 10:3, 8–10, 14, 32; 11:4, 15–18). Indeed, the idea of “drawing away” supporters found in Mosiah 29:7 is known in the Book of Mormon only from the Jaredite record (see Ether 7:4, 15; 9:11; 10:32).²

Mosiah stressed that the wickedness of King Noah had caused the people to come into bondage (see Mosiah 29:18–19). This is also a common theme in the book of Ether. At the time kingship was first established among the Jaredites, the brother of Jared warned that it would lead to captivity (see Ether 6:22–23). Throughout Jaredite history, a number of kings were conquered by a son or brother and made to serve in captivity (see 7:5, 7, 17; 8:3–4; 10:14–15, 30–31; 11:9, 18–19, 23; 13:23).

One of Mosiah’s justifications for allowing the people to elect judges was that “it is not common that the voice of the people desireth anything contrary to that which is right” (Mosiah 29:26). But he noted that “if the time comes that the voice of the people doth choose iniquity, then is the time that the judgments of God will

come upon you; yea, then is the time he will visit you with great destruction even as he has hitherto visited this land” (29:27). Since the Nephites had not experienced such “great destruction” on “this land,” Mosiah must have had the destruction of the Jaredites in mind.

What is significant about these facts is that Joseph Smith did not dictate the story of the Jaredites until long after he dictated the book of Mosiah. Consequently, the historical details of Jaredite kingship could not have been known to Joseph at this early stage of the translation. This lends evidence to the authenticity of the account of Mosiah’s having translated the book of Ether and becoming acquainted with its contents.

Notes

1. See the discussion in Daniel C. Peterson, “Priesthood in Mosiah,” in Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr., eds., *The Book of Mormon: Mosiah, Salvation Only through Christ* (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1991), 205–8.
2. In Alma 52:13 the phrase has a different meaning, referring not to persuading people to join a cause but to luring away and entrapping a military force.

By John A. Tvedtnes