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Gary L. Kapp, *King Benjamin Preaches to the Nephites*. Courtesy of Intellectual Reserve, Inc.

Early editions of the Book of Mormon, including the printer's manuscript, contain the name "King Benjamin" in Ether 4:1 and not "King Mosiah."

Scripture Note—“For This Cause Did King Benjamin Keep Them”: King Benjamin or King Mosiah?

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In the 2013 edition of the scriptures published by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Ether 4:1 reads, “And the Lord commanded the brother of Jared to go down out of the mount from the presence of the Lord, and write the things which he had seen; and they were forbidden to come unto the children of men until after that he should be lifted up upon the cross; and for this cause did king Mosiah keep them, that they should not come unto the world until after Christ should show himself unto his people.” But the 1830 edition, as well as some other editions of this text, read King “Benjamin” instead of King “Mosiah.”¹ What is this passage about? Why has this change been made and perpetuated?²

What Is This Story About?

The brother of Jared had just seen a marvelous vision of the Lord and had learned that Jehovah would take on flesh and come to earth. He also had a vision in which he was shown “all the inhabitants of the earth which had been, and also that would be.”³ The brother of Jared was commanded to record the

things which he had seen and, since no other people could understand his language, to seal up with the record two stones to help interpret it.⁴ Ether 4:1, speaking of this record, says that these things were then forbidden to come forth to the world until after Christ should show himself unto his people.

What Did the Brother of Jared Write?

Many readers have assumed⁵ that his record is the same as, or part of, the twenty-four plates of gold discovered by the people of Limhi that we now call the book of Ether.⁶ The twenty-four plates found by Limhi were indeed brought to King Mosiah and were translated “because of the great anxiety of [King Mosiah’s] people; for they were desirous beyond measure to know concerning those people who had been destroyed.”⁷ He translated the plates and made known its contents among his people.⁸ Since Mosiah publicized the contents of the twenty-four plates before Christ showed himself unto his people, it cannot be the record spoken of in Ether 4:1. The record in Ether 4:1 was “forbidden to come unto the children of men,” and its contents were kept back until after the coming of Christ.

Moreover, during the initial conversation between King Limhi and Ammon, King Limhi tells Ammon that his people have discovered twenty-four mysterious plates and that he is anxious to translate them but does not know how. Limhi then asks Ammon if he knows anyone who can translate. Ammon responds by saying that the king of Zarahemla can translate.⁹

Ammon explains that the king of Zarahemla is able to translate because of something that he “has” that was a “gift from God”—not just a spiritual gift—but physical objects which are called “interpreters” that someone can look into in order to translate.¹⁰ This appears to be a reference to the stones that the Lord gave the brother of Jared to assist in the translation of the record discussed in Ether 4:1.¹¹ In sum, the king of Zarahemla had the stones but not the twenty-four plates of Ether that Limhi’s people had found, and the people of Limhi had the twenty-four plates but not the stones. Because the record discussed in Ether 4:1 was sealed up with the stones,¹² the twenty-four plates found by the people of Limhi most likely were not the same as the records discussed in Ether 4:1.

In fact, Moroni is quite clear that the twenty-four plates, which are called the book of Ether, were written by Ether.¹³ There is no evidence in the Book of Mormon that anyone else wrote anything on them. Since the information contained on the twenty-four plates covers matters “concerning the creation

of the world, and also of Adam, and an account from that time even to the great tower,”¹⁴ it is likely that Ether used sources to create his record (like Mormon did),¹⁵ but the authorship of the twenty-four plates belongs to Ether. However, the record being discussed in Ether 4:1 is a record written by the hand of the brother of Jared, and is thus a record independent of the twenty-four plates.¹⁶

The Record of the Brother of Jared

What we have learned so far is that Ether 4:1 discusses a record written by the brother of Jared—a record that should not come forth until after Christ should show himself unto his people. This record is distinct from the twenty-four plates of Ether. When did King Mosiah translate *Jared’s* record and decide to keep it back from the people? We suggest that he did not: King Benjamin did.



Jerry Thompson, King Mosiah. (c) IRI.

In the 1837 edition of the Book of Mormon the name “Benjamin” was changed to “Mosiah”.

Changing King Benjamin to King Mosiah

As noted above, early editions of the Book of Mormon, including the printer's manuscript, contain the name "King Benjamin" in Ether 4:1 and not "King Mosiah." Orson Pratt, the editor of the 1849 edition of the Book of Mormon, changed this name to read Mosiah.¹⁷ He probably did this because he assumed that the plates discussed in Ether 4:1 were the twenty-four plates of Ether. Since Pratt knew King Mosiah and not King Benjamin translated the twenty-four plates of Ether, he attempted to correct what he perceived as a mistake in the text—and he changed King Benjamin to King Mosiah. All subsequent LDS editions of the Book of Mormon have followed suit.¹⁸

King Benjamin and the Record of the Brother of Jared

Is there evidence to suggest that—at some point in Nephite history—King Benjamin (or his people) discovered the record of the brother of Jared and the interpreters buried with them? Do we have any evidence that King Benjamin made a translation using the interpreters? In fact, there is evidence. As we return to the story of Ammon and King Limhi, Ammon had told King Limhi in Mosiah 8 that the king of Zarahemla had the interpreters and could translate ancient records using them. When this story is retold in Mosiah 21, the 1830 edition reads:

And now Limhi was again filled with joy on learning from the mouth of Ammon that *king Benjamin* had a gift from God, whereby he could interpret such engravings; yea, and Ammon also did rejoice.¹⁹

In the 1837 edition of the Book of Mormon the name "Benjamin" was changed to "Mosiah." This was probably done because of confusion over the timeline of events: In Mosiah 6:4–5 it states that King Mosiah began ruling while his father, Benjamin, was still alive. It goes on to state that Benjamin lived three more years and then died. The narrative then returns to the reign of King Mosiah and discusses how he had peace for the first three years of his reign and that after those three years he sent Ammon to find the people of Limhi.²⁰ Many have assumed that King Benjamin must have been dead when Ammon left on his journey. Others, however, have rightly pointed out that this is not necessarily the case. One scholar noted:

The timing of these two events is so close that some overlap is possible. Perhaps Ammon and his men left not knowing that Benjamin had died, or perhaps he was still alive when they left.²¹

When updating the text of the Book of Mormon in 1837, it was decided that Mosiah 21:28 should read "King Mosiah" and not "King Benjamin." All subsequent LDS editions of the Book of Mormon have kept that change.²² But the original reading is perfectly intelligible: Ammon left on his journey after three years of Mosiah's reign but before knowledge of the death of King Benjamin had spread (possibly because he was not yet dead). Thus, Ammon told King Limhi that King Benjamin could translate using interpreters. How did Ammon know? The answer seems to be that Benjamin had done it before. King Benjamin had translated the record of the brother of Jared, as stated in Ether 4:1. He had made a translation, and it was known that he had made a translation, even if the contents of the translation had not yet gone forth among the people.

Restoring Benjamin for Mosiah

The original readings of the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon in these two instances could be preserving a forgotten story in the Book of Mormon—a story of the discovery and translation of the record of the brother of Jared during the reign of King Benjamin.²³ That this story is not obvious has caused some confusion and, in two instances, has led to changes in the text from "King Benjamin" to "King Mosiah" (first Mosiah 21:28, and later Ether 4:1). These changes are typical changes that occur in the transmission of texts—ancient and modern—when scribes, copyists, and sometimes even well-meaning editors attempt to improve or clarify perceived problems with an author's words. Thus, these emendations can (and, we would argue, should) be seen as evidence that the early Saints who changed the text were not the authors of the text; Joseph Smith did not write the Book of Mormon—he translated it. Thus we concur with Stanley Larson, who wrote, "It seems that some have been too hasty to 'correct' the Book of Mormon here."²⁴ All of this suggests that the Book of Mormon is an ancient text that contains historical accounts far richer than even some early (and modern) Church members have imagined. **RE**

Notes

1. Royal Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon, Part Six: 3 Nephi 19–Moroni 10 & Addenda*, 1st ed., The Critical Text of the Book of Mormon (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2009), 3765.

2. For an excellent discussion of the types of changes made to the Book of Mormon text over the years, see George Horton, "Understanding Textual Changes in the

Book of Mormon,” *Ensign*, December 1983, <https://www.lds.org/ensign/1983/12/understanding-textual-changes-in-the-book-of-mormon?lang=eng>.

3. Ether 3:25.

4. Ether 3:6–28.

5. For example, Hugh W. Nibley, *Since Cumorah*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, UT: FARMS, 1988), 128. Nibley conflates the record of the brother of Jared with the record of Ether: “In protohistoric times the Lord told the brother of Jared . . . ‘Write these things and seal them up; and I will show them in mine own due time unto the children of men’ (Ether 3:27). The patriarch did as he was told, and in due time his writings came into the hands of Ether, who ‘went forth, and beheld that the words of the Lord had all been fulfilled,’ and then added his part to the writing, ‘and he finished his record . . . and hid them in a manner that the people of Limhi did find them’ (Ether 15:33). Next the writings were brought to King Mosiah, who translated them but was commanded to hide them up until a later generation (Ether 4:1).” Nibley’s conflation (at least partly) proceeds from his apparently uncritical acceptance of the post-1830 emendation of “Benjamin” to “Mosiah.” This gives rise to at least two suppositions that have no other basis in the text itself: first, that “in due time [the brother of Jared’s] writings came into the hands of Ether,” and second, that King Mosiah translated the record of the brother of Jared with the twenty-four plates of Ether. See also Stanley R. Larson, “A Study of Some Textual Variations in the Book of Mormon Comparing the Original and the Printer’s Manuscripts and the 1830, the 1837, and the 1840 Editions” (master’s thesis, Brigham Young University, 1974), 272.

6. See Mosiah 8:8–18 about the story of the discovery of these plates.

7. Mosiah 28:12.

8. See Mosiah 28:17–19.

9. See Mosiah 8:13–14.

10. Mosiah 8:13.

11. In Ether 4:5, Moroni seals these interpreters back up again with his own writing of the vision of the brother of Jared.

12. Ether 3:28.

13. See Ether 1:2, 6.

14. Ether 1:3.

15. John W. Welch, “Preliminary Comments on the Sources behind the Book of Ether” (FARMS Preliminary Report, 1986), 4–5. Welch acknowledges that there was once an independent brother of Jared but then wonders whether this once independent record became part of the record of Ether: “There certainly existed an ancient record written by the brother of Jared, on which he recorded the things that he had seen and heard the Lord in his great vision (3:21). It is unclear whether Ether ever read that account with the aid of the two stones and then included his translation or a summary of it in his own writings, or if he simply attached this esoteric record to his own book, perhaps knowing only by tradition what it contained. Since the Lord had forbidden the brother of Jared to allow his words to go forth unto the world until after He had come in the flesh (3:21, 4:1), there is little reason why Ether may not have been privy to their content in detail.” However, if we take the original text of Ether 4:1 (and Mosiah 21:18, see below) at face value, there is no need to surmise *any* connection between the record of the brother of Jared and the book of Ether, since the former would stand independent from the latter, having been discovered or obtained independently.

16. See Ether 12:24 for Moroni’s testimony that the brother of Jared wrote his own record in his own hand. That the record of the brother of Jared is different from the

twenty-four plates is not a claim unique to this paper. Valentin Arts reached a similar conclusion using much of the same evidence. Valentin Arts, “A Third Jaredite Record: The Sealed Portion of the Gold Plates,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 11, no. 1 (2002): 50–59.

17. Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon, Part Six*, 3765.

18. Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon, Part Six*, 3765.

19. Mosiah 21:28, 1830 edition; emphasis added.

20. See Mosiah 6:6–7:3.

21. Royal Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon, Part Three: Mosiah 17–Alma 20*, 1st ed., *The Critical Text of the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2006), 1418.

22. *Ibid.*

23. This would not be the first Jaredite record discovered by this people (see Omni 1:20–21 for the story of a Jaredite record found and translated during the reign of King Benjamin’s father), nor would it be the last Jaredite record (see Mosiah 28 for the discussion of the translation of the twenty-four plates found by the people of Limhi and translated by King Benjamin’s son). With the inclusion of this “lost” story there is in fact a nice symmetry between the kingships of King Mosiah I, King Benjamin, and King Mosiah II, with each kingship being divinely sanctioned by the ability to translate.

24. Larson, “A Study of Some Textual Variations in the Book of Mormon,” 272; emphasis added.