

# TEACHINGS OF THE BOOK OF MORMON

HUGH NIBLEY

Semester 1, Lecture 27  
Omni; Words of Mormon; Mosiah 1  
The End of the Small Plates  
The Coronation of Mosiah

Well, now we've got to the point where in one verse they take care of the history of a larger people than the Nephites. It just simply says they crossed the ocean and landed here, and that was that. Why don't they talk about that? That's verses 15 and 16 of Omni here. Why doesn't he tell us more about a lot of people? We're going to get a lot of that here. Remember, the Book of Mormon is the religious history of one family, and that's all. They have told us that time and again. The kings and the wars are all there, but they're in other books—and they're small things. And so we go on here, and he's going to tell us about it. They had many wars and contentions. I'm not going to tell you about them, because I'm not even telling you about the Nephite wars, he says. Their language had become corrupted because they had no records. How corrupted had it become? Remember, they had come from Jerusalem, but they were a "mixed bag." When we talked about Lachish, we saw they were mixed that way. They picked up people from everywhere. We don't know to this day—there's no agreement—whether the language talked in Palestine in the time of Christ was Aramaic or whether it was Hebrew. Some even think it was Greek. But their language became corrupted. Well, what do they mean corrupted? Any language you speak is the language of the people. That's what the *lingua* is; it's the *lingua franca*, the language that everybody speaks. That's the official language, no matter how much has been changed. Every language has changed immensely. They had been separated from Jerusalem for 350 years, so they couldn't understand each other. It was a dialectical difference.

Two years ago we were visited by some cousins from the Hebrides. Those are islands off the west coast of Scotland, up north there. We drove around the valley and showed them the sights, and they chatted merrily among themselves. They went along looking at the sights, and we couldn't understand a single word they said. They spoke straight English, but we couldn't understand one word they said. They had to translate things for us. How could that be? Our families both left England at the same time, in [1621]. They stopped there, but the rest of the family went over to County Antrim on the west coast of Ireland and settled there. They went on speaking English, the very kind we speak today. In fact we speak that dialect here. The west country English dialect is what we speak—that's our western *r*, etc. So we went on and spoke our kind of English, but they stayed in the Hebrides and for 350 years we were separated. Now we can't understand them. That's exactly the amount of time here that these people have been separated since they left Jerusalem. These people went over, and they spoke their [language]. They didn't have records, and they may have been speaking another dialect because there's a great deal to indicate that Lehi and his people were from the desert. Remember, he was descended from Manasseh, and that means many of them would have lived east of the Jordan.

Question: Is it possible that with the Mulekite migration there were Phoenicians?

Answer: There could have been all sorts of people, a mixed bag, because they got a lot of people together—anyone was going to get out. A member of the royal family was there, and he had circulated. Was this the little kid who had gone around to the villages? He was the youngest member of the royal family, and he was the one who had survived. They got out when they heard the news [that the royal family had been killed], because he was busy warning and assisting the others.

Question: Could this also be perhaps where they got the name *Timothy* from? I hear that *Timothy* is a Greek name.]

Answer. Oh, no, remember we said that before that in Lehi's day Palestine was swarming with Greeks, important Greeks. Remember, it was Egyptian territory at that time and Egyptian culture. The Egyptian army, Necho's army, was almost entirely Greek mercenaries. We have inscriptions from that very time up the Nile at Aswan—inscriptions from the mercenaries of the Egyptian army, and they're all in Greek. So Greek was very common, and especially the name Timotheus. That was a common name on Cyprus, and of course, Cyprus was Greek at that time. Remember, there was a great mix-up here, and it continued right over here. We're going to see a lot of it. The people with the records come in, and they take over. That's what happened when the Normans came into England—the Norman minority mixed with the Saxons, and within another 350 years you had Chaucer's English. These things take place that way.

But this is what happened. Notice over here. It wasn't just the people of Zarahemla, but there was a leader called *Zarahemla* among them. He seems to have been a very genial person; he agreed to all sorts of things. He united with Mosiah and agreed to have him made king. Notice in the verse 14 here it says, "And also Zarahemla rejoiced exceedingly." He was just too happy for words to find out about these records, because they [the Nephites] brought the plates. They knew about that. He was a leader, apparently; he knew more about it than most of them. Verse 18: "And it came to pass that after they were taught in the language of Mosiah [Would that take years and years? No, just a week or so. The language, being the two dialects, they would begin to understand each other—it wouldn't take very long], Zarahemla gave a genealogy of his fathers, according to his memory."

Well, yesterday I had my home teacher, Brother Amosa, who is a gigantic Samoan. His father is a chief there. His father had just come two days ago from Samoa to tell how things were there in the old country. It's very interesting what he said, but the thing is, he can recite the genealogy back twenty or thirty generations by heart. You see, they know their genealogy—the islanders do. And that's the sort of thing these people had done. Zarahemla knew it by heart because he was the chief. "Zarahemla gave a genealogy of his fathers according to his memory." See, this isn't the people, this is the man speaking. He was their chief, as we'd say. And that's the way it's done. Verse 19: And, the people of Zarahemla, and of Mosiah, did unite together; and Mosiah was appointed to be their king," with no objection from Zarahemla. As I said he was a genial person, only too glad to have them. But Mosiah is the king only of the migrant Nephites and of the Mulekites here. He's not the king of the Nephites back home. Remember, Mosiah had to move out back here in verse 11. There was no revelation, no prophecy. The lights went out, and it was time to move on. Then Mosiah moved out with his people, and he took the records with him. So he was a person of importance there.

Verse 20: “It came to pass in the days of Mosiah there was a large stone brought unto him with engravings on it; and he did interpret the engravings on it by the gift and power of God.” How does that happen? Well, they started shipping crates of cuneiform documents from the British Museum in the middle of the nineteenth century. Grotefend and others were excavating in Ninevah. When they started getting these records, George Smith used to pile them up. He worked with them. Nobody knew how to read them. It was a complete [mystery] until it was finally cracked later. But George Smith suddenly was able to read them—just by dealing with them, just by handling them and looking at them. The same thing happened with Llewellyn Griffith. He could read Meroitic. That was the language of upper Egypt when the people were driven out of Jerusalem. The priests of Thebes fled and went to the upper Nile. They took Egyptian records with them, and they developed a language of their own called Meroitic that no one can read to this day. But Llewellyn Griffith could read it. He was a Welshman with a Welshman’s mystic gift for language, I suppose. None of his pupils ever picked it up. But he had that great intuitive gift. An intuitive gift is a very important thing in something like Egyptian. Well, some of you language people would know that on a good day, it’s like falling off a log. Everything is perfectly clear, and you wonder whatever bothered you. But if you have a day or haven’t had enough sleep or if you lose confidence, you might as well forget it. You’re not going to read anything that day. You can’t do it if you don’t have the faith and the confidence. But when you feel “gung ho” and have perfect confidence, you can just sail along with a Coptic or Aramaic text—no trouble at all. But other times, don’t even give it a try. So, it is a gift, and you know that from your own experience.

Well, they brought these stones. He [Mosiah] had the gift and power of God, and he told what they said. Coriantumr was discovered by the people of Zarahemla. They had been there 350 years. And he lived with them for nine months, which shows that the Jaredites survived at least until 500 B.C. They went [hundreds] of years before that, maybe back to 2000 B.C., and I think much earlier. It doesn’t make any difference. They were the people who were destroyed upon the north country. The woods Indians, plains Indians, and others like that had a great culture up there once, but they had been destroyed. They came from the tower. Notice that it doesn’t say the Tower of Babel. That’s very important. As a matter of fact, we learn from the book of Ether in the Book of Mormon that the name isn’t Babel, but it’s Nimrod, which is exactly what it was. Remember it went north in the valley of Nimrod. Now we know through tradition and everything else that the tower was called “Nimrod’s Tower,” because Babel didn’t come in until later. That was [determined] from the philological events, etc. And so they came out from the tower. It’s careful not to say the “Tower of Babel,” which was later. But Nimrod’s Tower was that one, and it tells us in the first verse of the second chapter of the book of Ether that they went up into the valley northward where there never had men been, and it was the valley of Nimrod. Nimrod was the big name at that time. I’ve written a great deal about Nimrod, but we won’t go into that here. At that time the language was confounded, “and their bones lay scattered in the land northward.” That’s a literary expression. Their bones could still be there, but in various stages of decomposition, I suppose. That’s from their latest war.

Amaleki is writing this, you see. “Behold, I, Amaleki, was born in the days of Mosiah [he’s looking back on history]; and I have lived to see his death; and Benjamin, his son, reigneth in his stead.” And under King Benjamin the two governments fuse, of course. Benjamin defended Zarahemla from Lamanite attacks; he drove them out of the land of Zarahemla. Verse 25: “I began to be old; and, having no seed . . .” Amaleki has no children, so he hands the records over to King Benjamin. Remember that they had been kept in separate archives—the royal archives of the doings of state and the wars, etc., and

the family archive of the revelations and inspirations that's been handed down. (That's the one we're getting.) But here they're joined in one, and from now on King Benjamin keeps all the records in his archive. And Benjamin has a passion for these records. He's a great antiquarian, we'll find out. He's keeping the records after he ceases to be king. Benjamin is the man to have them, so the two governments fuse, and the plates are now in the hands of one king again. And Amaleki says, "I shall deliver up these plates unto him, exhorting all men to come unto God, the Holy One of Israel, and believe in prophesying, and in revelations, and in the ministering of angels, and in the gift of speaking with tongues." Notice "in the gift of speaking with tongues, and in the gift of interpreting of languages." They had these gifts among them, which indicates they had more than one language. They must have had quite a number of languages or dialects, as far as the case may be. Then in verse 26 he testifies to the Atonement. "Yea, come unto him, and offer your souls as an offering to him, and continue in fasting and praying, and endure to the end [that's the formula: fasting, praying, and enduring to the end] and as the Lord liveth you will be saved."

Now, there were a certain number that wanted to go back. Remember, Mosiah had led them out when things had become too corrupt in the land of Nephites. Now people wanted to go back to the old country. They were homesick and wanted to see what it was like back there—like we want to go back to Jackson County. Verse 27: "A certain number went up into the wilderness to return to the land of Nephi; for there was a large number who were desirous to possess the land of their inheritance." That was their country. Perhaps it was a better country than the one they were in, I don't know. So they migrated back again, but here's a nice psychological touch, a true touch. Many an enterprise has been ruined by a leader with too much authority. Notice that their leader was a strong and mighty man. Well, good—that qualifies him. But he was also "a stiffnecked man, wherefore he caused a contention among them; and they were all slain, save fifty." What American settlement do you think of when you hear about that? Jamestown, of course. Jamestown was the most booming, the most promising enterprise in Virginia in the seventeenth century. They went and settled there, but there was quarreling among them and they disappeared completely. Nobody knows what happened to Jamestown, which was to be the biggest settlement in the New World. They had their deeds and their contracts and everything else to the land from King James, and the colony just disappeared because of the quarreling among themselves. And the same sort of thing happens here. There was contention, and they were all slain save fifty in the wilderness. They went back to Zarahemla but they still didn't give up. [They wanted] to go back again. So finally he ends up, "It came to pass they also took others . . . into the wilderness. And I, Amaleki, had a brother, who also went with them; and I have not since known concerning them."

Now this shows the planting of the tribes and the customs. They were moving all over like this. We're just following one line, a red line of history here. You see what was happening on the continent all over the place. His brother went out, and he had not heard of them since. Well, they could have settled. There were people wandering in all directions here. It's a very complex picture here, mixing with others. So now we come to the Words of Mormon, and please note the date of this. This was written 500 years after the other books we've been reading because he was summarizing later. He was looking back on the whole thing after the curtain had gone down. He's the epilogue, you see. Remember the formula from Job: "I alone am saved to tell thee." So the lone survivor is an important theme in literature and history—the one who survives and tells the history. There are some famous ones in literature, of course. "And now I, Mormon . . . have witnessed almost all the

destruction of my people the Nephites.” So he comes at the end, and this is the theme. Is this going to spoil the ending, incidentally? We know how the Book of Mormon is going to end, now. Does this spoil it, if you know how it’s going to turn out? Well, no. This is the theme of the Book of Mormon. They want us to keep it constantly in mind. This is a bleak theme, speaking of “fear and trembling,” you see. Who’s going to write our epitaph here? So from the first page to the last, we’re reminded the people were destroyed, the people were destroyed, the people were destroyed. Why bother us with that story? Well, it bothers us. They insist on bothering us with that story.

“I witnessed almost all the destruction of my people, the Nephites. . . . I deliver these records into the hands of my son; and it supposeth me that he will witness the entire destruction of my people [they were scattered and destroyed, as you know, but they’re still alive—many of them went out and joined the Lamanites; great droves of them were doing it at that time] But may God grant that he may survive them, that he may write somewhat concerning them, and somewhat concerning Christ, that perhaps someday it may profit them.” You notice [this means] after the destruction. That’s like comparing Jerusalem. Jerusalem was destroyed from time to time, it says. That’s the same thing. The people were destroyed. Well, if they were all destroyed, how can it profit them someday? But it doesn’t mean that. There are survivors, as far as that goes. But *destruo*, as I said, means to break down the structure of the society, that sort of thing. So they were all destroyed, and it [the record] is for them. Well, he searched among the records, and he had plenty of time. “I searched among the records which had been delivered to my hands, and I found these plates [so there must have been quite a pile of them], which contained this small account of the prophets, from Jacob down to King Benjamin, and also many of the words of Nephi [those are the books we’ve just had here; he gave them to us]. And the things which are upon these plates pleasing me, because of the prophecies of the coming of Christ; and my fathers knowing that many of them have been fulfilled . . . down to this day [and there’s more to come—that’s why he is going to deliver this—there’s more to come after him; he’s not the last one]. . . . Wherefore, I chose these things, to finish my record upon them, which remainder of my record I shall take from the plates of Nephi.”

Now why these plates? Verse 7: “And I do this for a wise purpose; for thus it whispereth me, according to the workings of the Spirit of the Lord which is in me [he has this very strong feeling that these records have a purpose and he has to save them], wherefore he worketh in me to do according to his will.” Notice he’s not talking about visitations of angels or revelations or things like that, but this is the intense feeling a person can have. He says that it works in him. It is the Spirit of the Lord which is in him and whispers to him. He has a strong urge. There are many levels of revelation in the Book of Mormon; it’s a very interesting thing. For example, Lehi says, “I have dreamed a dream; in other words, I have seen a vision.” Well, where do you draw the line as long as it is inspiration and it’s true? Verse 8: “And my prayer to God is concerning my brethren, that they may once again come to the knowledge of God [so his brethren are going to survive, and it’s addressed to them primarily], yea, the redemption of Christ; that they may once again be a delightsome people [there’s nothing said about change of race or color or anything like that; they are so mixed up by now, but *delightsome* is what he means—delighting the Lord]. And now I, Mormon, proceed to finish out my record, which I take from the plates of Nephi.”

Amaleki is the last one we read; he is the last one just before the Words of Mormon. The book of Omni ends with Amaleki. Verse 10: “After Amaleki had delivered up these plates into the hands of king Benjamin [notice, he is repeating here], he took them and put

them with the other plates [so the two records are now combined], which contained records which had been handed down by the kings. . . . And they were handed down from king Benjamin, from generation to generation until they have fallen into my hands [they had been handed down for more than five hundred years] . . . for there are great things written upon them, out of which my people and their brethren shall be judged at the great and last day.”

Benjamin had some contention among his people. (Notice that he [Mormon] picks up with Benjamin; that’s where it is going to start.) Here in these two verses [13 and 14], he confirms what [the book of] Omni told us. Amaleki said the same thing in verse 24 of Omni: King Benjamin gathered together his armies and stood against them with his sword. He drove out the Lamanites and brought peace to them. What about this sword of Laban always popping up? Remember, in ancient and medieval times nothing was more valuable than a good sword, because nothing was rarer. The steel of a Damascus sword could cut through an anvil, so it is said. When you had a sword like that, it was extremely precious. You know the most famous sword of all, the sword in the stone, which was Excalibur. That sword was handed down. The person who had that sword would have more than human power. There are some famous swords. Saladin had one. I’m trying to think of some other famous swords, but you can see why a sword would be very valuable and why it would be among the national treasures. The sword of Laban was handed down among the national treasures.

Verse 14: “They did contend against the Lamanites until they had driven them out of all the lands of their inheritance.” Notice that Nephites always fight on their own ground; they claim no other. He drove them out of the lands of the Nephites’ inheritance. Then there came false Christs and all these false teachers. There were a lot of them going around. They were allowed to teach, as far as that goes. But they [were punished] not according to their beliefs or teachings, but according to their crimes. They committed them and were caught in their crimes. False teachers were punished according to their crimes. Remember, Satan was cast out of heaven not because he voted against the Great Plan that the Council passed on (we have many accounts of this in places like the *Abbatôn*), but because when he lost he took to arms. He refused to accept the verdict. Immediately, he revolted with a third of the hosts of heaven, and they were cast out. It was not because he dissented and had a different idea, but because he resorted to violence and force to put it over.

And [in verse 16] then there were many dissensions. Here’s your race problem again. *Dissension* means that the people left and went out to be by themselves or to join other groups. This happened with the Nehors on a big scale, and it was still going on. There were “many dissensions away unto the Lamanites.” The Lamanites were getting almost a steady influx of Nephite blood, so there was this mixture going on all the time. This idea that anything you find in the Western Hemisphere is either Nephite or Lamanite is utterly absurd. The Nephites and Lamanites were minorities by this time. As it told us before, they called them Lamanites and called them Nephites as political labels. That’s what they were.

Verse 17: “For behold, king Benjamin was a holy man and he did reign over his people in righteousness; and there were many holy men in the land.” It was a sacral state, but they had to use “much sharpness,” the same as ever, to keep people in line. Using this “much sharpness” was the price of peace. Verse 18: “Wherefore, with the help of these, king Benjamin, by laboring with all the might of his body and the faculty of his whole soul,

and also the prophets, did once more establish peace in the land.” Notice the “faculty of his whole soul” and the “might of his body.” He used all the strength he could. The faculty of his soul wasn’t exerted on the Lamanites; this isn’t a military action we are talking about. This is what it takes. Exerting his whole soul, in cooperation with the prophets, he established peace in the land.

Now we come to the marvelous book of Mosiah. I have been rushing to get to it because I wanted to get to it this semester. I’m very happy that we can, and here we go. Notice that it begins with the *happy land*. They’ve had a long period of prosperity now. “And now there was no more contention in all the land of Zarahemla.” The curtain rises on a very happy scene, and they are going to have a big national celebration to celebrate their victory, their success, their long years of peace. Their king was a great hero with them because of all the things he had done. “King Benjamin had continual peace all the remainder of his days.” There was a long peace here, as I said. This is a happy situation that we begin with. The subject of this first chapter is *communication*. This whole introductory passage is talking about plates and records. The second chapter is the one that takes up. I said that Benjamin was a great antiquarian. He was just the one to take the records because he was very much concerned with this. He called his three sons—Mosiah, Helorum, and Helaman—“and he caused that they should be taught in all the language of his fathers [see this complexity], that thereby they might become men of understanding.” The language had changed, and they needed to use the original texts (we should take some hints from this) so they could understand the scriptures when they read them “concerning the prophecies which had been spoken by the mouths of their fathers.” They were speaking another language now.

They had many prophets, you notice. Verse 3: “My sons, I would that ye should remember that were it not for these plates, which contain these records and these commandments, we must have suffered in ignorance.” This is in spite of the fact that they had many prophets. Don’t get the idea that because we have a prophet we don’t have to pay much attention to the scriptures. There’s this idea that we have a living prophet to answer all our questions and solve all our problems for us—nothing could be more absurd than that. Here he says, “Were it not for these plates . . . we must have suffered in ignorance, even at this present time, not knowing the mysteries of God.” Well, don’t prophets reveal mysteries of God? The Lord told Joseph Smith, if I’ve told you a thing once I won’t tell you again; if it’s in the scriptures, don’t ask me about it. You look it up yourself; I’m not going to repeat these things. If we don’t take advantage of the revelations we have, we are not going to have more. If the heavens have been silent, there is a good reason for it. Verse 4: “For it were not possible that our father, Lehi, could have remembered all these things . . . except it were for the help of these plates; for he having been taught in the language of the Egyptians therefore he could read these engravings.” We saw these engravings that Martin Harris had from the plates.

Question: Does that also refer to the brass plates?

Answer: No, they were probably in Hebrew. The bronze or brass plates were the record of the Hebrews that was kept by the Jews. Well, they were kept by the Jews since they left Egypt, too. And in 750 B.C. they introduced this very convenient Demotic script, which could be written in a tiny fraction of what it takes for Hebrew, which is very clumsy. Notice there has never been a cursive Hebrew. You always have to write each letter separate right to this day. They don’t run letters together speedily as they do in any normal cursive—that’s crazy. For that reason, right at the beginning they could very well

have adopted that Demotic script, whatever it was. But he [Lehi] could read these things and teach them to his children. So they had been handed down, and “thereby they could teach them to their children, and so fulfilling the commandments of God, even down to this present time.” This is 470 years later. Most ancient records are kept by priests also, and almost never in the vernacular. In the Middle Ages if you were keeping a record of anything it had to be in Latin. That was required, although Latin was not the language of any of the nations of Europe at that time. Spain, Italy, and France—they were all dialects of Latin, but they kept the records in classical, Ciceronian Latin. They all kept records. If you are going to read any chronicles, we have the *Monumenta* here from the Middle Ages. We have the *Patrologia*. We have great collections of medieval records here, and all in Latin. Unless they are from the East; then they had to be in Greek. In other places they had to be in Coptic, which was invented for the purpose. Coptic was invented for the purpose of keeping records. It’s a very interesting thing. They use fourteen old Egyptian hieroglyphs, mix Greek letters with them, and get Coptic. So that’s the way you do; you have a special technique of record keeping and a special language for the record keepers. They have to learn it for the sake of continuity because a language changes. Of course, there are exceptions. We have the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, which are very valuable—the *Laud* and the *Parker Manuscripts*, Anglo-Saxon writings that go way back. They are in Old English.

Question: Didn’t the common people depend on the leaders to be taught the gospel?

Answer: Yes, they depended very much on these prophets. You notice there were many holy men who always had to work on it. The people weren’t so excited about it; they didn’t come to meetings very often. As he said here, “And they did speak the word of God with power and with authority; and they did use much sharpness because of the stiffneckedness of the people” (Words of Mormon, verse 17). So the holy men always had to “crack down” on them. There was that sort of thing.

Verse 6: “O my sons, I would that ye should remember that these sayings are true, and also that these records are true, And behold, also the plates of Nephi . . . and we can know of their surety because we have them before our eyes.” He testified to them.

Speaking of these records here, remember the Lord says, “There is no end to my works or my words.” As I’ve written down here, every creature wants to get in on everything it can. Before you can get in on a project, you must know about it. Without the records you are living in a closet, and we have a closet mentality. And without the records we have no memory; we have the scope of an insect. We can see only what is immediately in front of us. William James defines *intelligence* as “the ability to react to an absent stimulus.” If I can react to an absent stimulus (something that isn’t here), I must have some imagination. But a bug can only react if you touch it, if you are immediately in its presence. Of course, a lot of animals have instinct; they know absent stimuli, preparing for earthquakes, and things like that. But if I don’t know anything at all of the past, I have no memory and I have no identity. Your memory is your identity. A person who has lost his memory has lost his identity. It’s the same with a people; they do the same thing. We feel sorry for the insect; it doesn’t know what it is missing. But we are built to be high-powered information centers, every one of us. The data pours in, and we are battered by impressions from all sides—not just radioactive materials. Rays, and particles, and many forms of energy are trying to get our attention.

The eye that cannot choose but see,

We cannot bid the ear be still [whether we want to or not]  
Our senses feel where ere we be  
Against or with our will.

So these impressions and this potential knowledge is pouring in on you all day. You can become immune to it. You can build up a great defense system against it—an immunization system. You can immunize yourself from knowledge of all sorts, and we are rather good at that because it can be very disturbing sometimes.

Well, Benjamin waxed old then, so he must have taught for many years. There has been a regular priestly collegium going on here. He talks about these holy men and how they worked together, etc. Verse 9: “He waxed old, and he saw that he must very soon go the way of all the earth; therefore, he thought it expedient that he should confer the kingdom upon one of his sons [this is the way he went about it]. Therefore, he had Mosiah brought before him.” Years ago in the old priesthood manual, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, that has been reprinted many times, I had a breakdown of this coronation rite. In the Bible in the book of Kings, you read that there were many kings and how they got to be kings. We are told how they got to the throne and how they lost the throne. There’s a lot said about it. But not one instance in the Bible tells us how a coronation as performed—what they did at a coronation. Yet that is one thing on which we are best informed in all ancient records. In Egypt we know every step of a coronation, and in Babylon, and wherever you go, because it’s in the government records. The coronation is a great ritual. It’s a solemn rite, and it’s a historical event, too. There’s the great assembly. I wrote this here about the great assembly.

Having nothing to do with this, I assembled a whole collection of articles that came out in the *Western Political Quarterly* on the ancient coronation ceremonies. There were at least a dozen different cases of when this happened, and they all followed the same pattern. That’s the pattern that’s followed here very closely. I gave quite a breakdown, all the things it breaks down into. You would be surprised how elaborate and how accurate this description is of a coronation. But after I wrote this, I discovered *Nathan the Babylonian (Nathan ha-Babli)*. Now, as you know, the Jews sought refuge in Babylon. When Jerusalem was destroyed, they went to Babylon. They were kept there for many years, and many of them stayed over. That became the Jewish center of the world, so the great *Talmud* is the *Babylonian Talmud*, written in Babylon down to the year A.D. 1040. The two great schools were recognized in Babylon. This is by Nathan the Babylonian who witnessed the crowning of the king in captivity. He is called the *exilarch* or “the king in captivity” or the *rosh galuth*—the “head of the captivity.” He describes the coronation. Here is how the Jews really crowned their kings. This is the process by which they crowned their kings. He tells us about it here. He lived in the tenth century, and he was an eyewitness of what went on there. He starts out here with the *qahal*, which is the whole community. Our word *ecclesiastical* is the Greek equivalent of that; it means “the calling forth of all the people in a general assembly.”

[According to Nathan], when the ruling council of the whole community of people has agreed on the appointment of a king to rule in captivity, this is the way they go about it. They invoke the heads of the two great schools at Babylon, the School of Sura and the School of Pumbeditha. They hold a meeting with the heads of the schools, the heads of the people, the elders, and the heads of the synagogue, and they meet at the house of a rich and important man who is greatly honored to have this. He pays the expenses of the preliminary meetings. They decide on who will be the king, and they make arrangements.

It would have to be within three days. Here [in the Book of Mormon] Benjamin says suddenly, I'm going to call a king. There's not going to be any discussion because the king is going to be you, and tomorrow you are going to make the announcement [paraphrased]. Why is it that Benjamin himself didn't make the announcement that his son should be king? That was the practice. Why did the new king announce his coronation and not the old king? You've heard, "The king is dead—long live the king." He can't claim to be the king while his father is still alive—that's rebellion. They have to wait until the old king is dead. Then how do you have the old king in the rites? Well, this is very important; the Egyptians really had this developed. The new king is *Horus*, but he has to be recognized by his father. The high priest takes the part in the temple. It is all done by proxy, vicariously. The old king is represented vicariously. That is what happened, and this is what happens here. The *hazzān* takes the place of the old king; he is the *praecentor*. He takes that part and leads the people, and he is the one that hands the crown over. But the announcement has to be made after the king is dead. That's why Benjamin says to his son, I will announce that you will be king, but you will call the people together; you are the one who has to summon them.

Verse 10: "Therefore, he had Mosiah brought before him; and these are the words which he spake unto him saying [he is ritualizing it, making it very formal]: My son, I would that ye should make a proclamation [Well, why don't you make it? The thing is that the king can't announce that the king is dead. The son has to announce that there is going to be a new crown] throughout all this land among all this people, or the people of Zarahemla, and the people of Mosiah." Notice that they are still separate people. You are going to send out the *heror*. The proclamation is very important. Anyone who refuses to come will be banished from the kingdom for three years; that's the universal rule. You had to come to Rome when you received the notice, and you had to come in person. If you didn't come to acclaim the king at that time, you would be an outlaw. You would be banished from the kingdom. This is very important. It tells in the book of Zechariah, And all that do not come up to Jerusalem in the proper season to hail the king there, on them shall be no rain; they shall be cut off [paraphrased from Zechariah 14:17]. You don't have any rights if you don't come as a true citizen, and you have to become registered on that day, for example, in Rome or Greece when they chose a king. You had to be on the list of the *incisi*, the *incised*. They had big lead tablets or plates swinging on sort of doors in the forum. The names of all the citizens were written on them, and you had to come and check your name to show that you were there—that you were an *incisus*, one whose name was *incised*. If you weren't one of the *incisi*, you weren't a citizen; you had no rights whatever. It was very important for people to come and acclaim at the *acclamatio*. I wrote an article on the *acclamatio*, too.<sup>1</sup> It was to acclaim the new king or ruler, and this is what they are going to have happen.

Well, he goes on here, but if you have all read the account in Mosiah of the coronation, let's just race through Nathan the Babylonian's story here. All the elders assemble, and they set the new king apart. Then they proclaim that all the people must come together and bring presents. Here in the Book of Mormon they all bring their first-fruits. The king can only be crowned at new year, the beginning of the new age. It's the Festival of the Booths. They brought their tents, and they all camped with their tents facing the temple. That's not in the Bible, but in the new Temple Scroll that's exactly what happens. There's a special arrangement made for all the tribes. Each tribe has its place, and a place is established for their booths. *Booth* is a very interesting word. It's a good old English word, but it's the same as the Semitic word *bayt*, a house where you throw stuff together and

live. And there's our word *abide*, to live somewhere temporarily. You *abide* in a *booth*. There was the *boðhstether* of Iceland, where the people would come to the great assembly to elect the king, and there was the *logberg*, the mountain of the law. From the top of that the *goði* would read the law to the people, just as Benjamin reads the law to the people here. The high priest was called the *goði*. The people would all come and camp around there in booths, and the rings from those booths still remain. They had stones to hold them down. It tells us in the Bible they were as a shelter from the sun and the rain because it was temporary. They were camping there. The law is "Thou shalt not celebrate the Passover within thy gates." Everybody had to come as a pilgrim, and everybody had to bring a gift in all these places. So they came as pilgrims and lived in their booths. It tells us in the Temple Scroll that every booth faced the temple hill. They completely surrounded it and faced the temple, and they lived in their families separately, as we are told in Mosiah here. As the *Talmud* said, they must feast and sit in rings in their families with their back to each other [paraphrased]. There were certain rules. It tells us the same thing here, that they sat separated by families (Mosiah 2:5).

I want to get back to Nathan here and the way the Jews did it in the Middle Ages when they continued through the years to crown a new king in captivity. They still had their king, and they followed the old established rites. So this is what happened then: They would bring the presents, each according to his means—presents of gold and silver, the richest they could. Then they would feast together in separate families. They would have the big feast. It was a feast and celebration, the great assembly. It was usually a two-day affair, and the day before a wooden tower (this is very important) was erected. Note that Benjamin had a tower put up so he could speak from the top of it; he did the same thing here. There's no mention of towers like that in the Bible, but here it is. It was ten-and-a-half feet high, four-and-a-half feet wide, and broad enough to have three seats. In the center is the big seat for the king, and either side are his two counselors—the head of the School of Sura on the right, and the head of the School of Pumbeditha on the left. (You always have to have the president and his two counselors.) The king is the one who sits on the central throne, the empty throne. It was covered with costly cloths and things. Underneath this tower was a choir of young men, chosen for their voices and for their nobility. They had to belong to illustrious families; it was a very great honor to belong to the choir. They played an important part. Benjamin said, "I'll go down when the heavenly choirs sing." The choir sang the "song of redeeming love" that Alma talks about later on.

Then they open with prayer in which they ask for revelation, that the Spirit of the Lord might be with them. Then there is the sabbath hymn. The people sing an antiphonal hymn—the people sing and the chorus replies. Then there is the universal acclamation; they all stand up and go along with this. It is an antiphonal chorus. Then they sing the Creation Hymn which is very important. They are celebrating the foundation of the world. Here they sing a song called "By the Spirit of All Living Things." The meeting is opened by the *hazzān*. Remember, he is the person who takes the place of the old king. The *hazzān* is a *cantor* today, the one who sings in the synagogue. But the *hazzān* is the *praecantor* who takes the place of the old king and acts as master of ceremonies. He is the principal person there, but the other king is the one who gives the great sermon, of course. Then they give the holiness shouts. The people repeat the prayer, the *qiddūsh*, which is a prayer for the dead actually, so that all people are present on this occasion. Remember, this is a great feast of the ancestors throughout the world when they make this great assembly. The *qiddūsh* is actually the hymn for the dead and has to do with work for the dead. But while the people say it in a low voice, the chorus under the tower gives the hallelujah

shouts. Then all the people arise and utter the Eighteen Benedictions which have to do with the creation of the world. Some people think the Eighteen Benedictions were the oldest text there was. Then they are all seated and the king appears. It says the king has been kept in concealment until now. He mounts the tower and, of course, all the people arise then. The king sits down, but the people remain standing while the two counselors come in and sit down on either side. Then all the people sit down again. But there is also a *proskynōsis*. They fall down in the presence of the king. We saw that before. When people are overwhelmed or want to appear overwhelmed, they go through the act of falling down on their faces. That happens here.

I've gone through it all with quite an elaborate bibliography of sources here. It's in lesson 23 of *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, the old priesthood manual. I didn't realize I had broken it down into such small sections. They really follow very closely along what should be done. As I said, we are sticking to the Jewish record here now. Then what happens? Over the king's head alone there is a magnificent baldachin cover, and the seats of the other two are separated. They are not right close to his. In the Temple Scroll living in the tents and the baldachin are important. Then the master of ceremonies, the *hazzān*, enters the tent in which the king is sitting and gives him a blessing in a low voice that only he, the people on the stand, and the chorus underneath can hear. It's a confidential thing, and all the other people hear is the chorus shouting Amen at the end of certain sentences on certain occasions. So they know that big things are taking place. It's all hush, hush and in a low voice when the *hazzān* goes in. It's the old king handing over personally the rule to his son. It's done in a mystical sort of fashion, with great silence and reverence. He comes from the tent and gives his royal blessing, and the old king blesses the new king.

It's now the king's time to give a great sermon. King Benjamin's sermon is delivered on this occasion—the old king in this case. But the *hazzān* gives the first sermon, and the king gives the second. It's Benjamin who gives the sermon. You may think, "Why not Mosiah? He's the one who is going to be king?" They both give sermons here. He gives the sermon, and that's the first part of the ceremony. Notice, there are two orations in the Book of Mormon here. That's the first part, and the second part is inaugurated by the new king himself. He opens the proceedings [Nathan ha-Babli] says. He gives a sermon on the subject of *ha-perūsh shel îtî ha-yîm*, which is the proper sermon for the particular day. It's the New Year sermon which introduces the creation, the new year, the restoration of life, and all this sort of thing. This is the sermon he gives for the day, it says, "for that very day." Or he gives permission for one of his counselors to give the sermon; he can do that, too.

And it's very interesting that there was an interpreter there because they are not speaking the language of the people here. The whole thing is in Hebrew, and these people speak Aramaic. They have been living in Babylon a long time. They are speaking the eastern Aramaic dialect, so they don't understand the sermon. So again you see this business of the two languages being used. Benjamin had his sons learn the languages because they now read from the Book of the Law. The people can't understand it; there's an interpreter there all the time. Next the king himself personally interprets the Book of the Law. That's exactly what Mosiah does, interpret the law to the people. For the rest of the Book of Mormon the law that Benjamin and Mosiah gave them is the basic law right to the end.

That's the organic law of the Nephites, and it's based on the law of Moses. It's their reading and application of it.

After this introductory sermon there is a *silentium*, and that's a very important thing. Even in the Byzantine court they call it *silentium*. It's the Latin word for "being silent." You get it in Psalms and [Habakkuk 2:20], the very famous introduction. All the churches use it. "But the Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him." That means be quiet. When God enters the temple there must be an absolute hush, and they really insist on it here. If anybody breaks the silence by so much as a *tziftzûf*, which means a *whisper* or a *twitter*, [he is in trouble]. I love the Hebrew word for birds; you can't say the word without chirping like a bird. That's what the word is; you just write it out like that. It says there is not to be a twitter or a sound. So there's a *silentium*.

In the Meistersingers when they are going to inaugurate the mysteries of the Musicians Guild, the first announcement is, "One, two, three, *silentium, silentium, mach keine Rede und kein Gesumm*—be silent in His presence." This came from the Byzantine court, which came from the Persian court. You find it all over the Old World. As I said, you actually find it in the Old Testament, too, that very famous saying, "The Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth *has lefanau* [that means *hush*] before his face." *Kôl hâ-âretz*, "all the earth." They do the same thing here in this Babylonian version, and they demand absolute silence and awe.

Then when the *hazzân* starts reading, he covers his face and recites the whole speech with his eyes closed. If anybody utters a sound, he opens his eyes and looks at them. It says, "The people are overwhelmed by the most unspeakable fear and terror." He is in an inspired state. It's the same thing here. Remember, the people are smitten by the things they hear. But if there is any lack of discipline or whisperings (that's the word it uses here), he opens his eyes and gives you one look. He has his face covered with the *tallith*. But that look is absolutely petrifying; the people just freeze. He gives the sermon from the law, and then there's a question period. There's a certain learned old man who is supposed to reply for the people in the question and answer period. You can [ask] anything you want. Remember, there is a dialogue in Mosiah. Benjamin explains things, everything the people want to know. He gives the answers. It's a very interesting thing that he begins by saying, "It's necessary for you to understand these things." Not only does he have the translator there, but he asks if there are any questions. He makes it clear so people understand it is given for their benefit.

This is the first time he [the new king] is called "the prince." After he has given the speech, the people all shout together, "Long live the king" for the first time. They call him the *nâsîk*, "the king" or "the prince." It's a famous title. *Rôpsh gâlûţ*, "Long live the ruler of the captivity." Well, *gâlûţ* means *revelation, people*, and all sorts of things, "a thing which is unfolding or revealing." Now he is officially the king at last. They finally acclaim him with "Long live the king." Then they say, "May we live and long may the people of Israel live." After that the *praecentor* or *hazzân*, blesses the king and consecrates him. He is now the king. Then a financial report of the kingdom is given. This is a very interesting thing. It includes the donations that have been given on this occasion, and he blesses the givers. After the king receives the Book of the Law, he stands up and expounds the law to the people. This is the main thing—the king discoursing to the people from a tower on the law that they are supposed to obey, the laws and customs of the people. Then it closes with

a prayer, the king and the Book of the Law are blessed. All the people cry, "Amen, we accept." They all must cry "amen." He presents it and they accept it. Then they all go home.

This is the picture we get in the Book of Mormon. The same thing goes on here. This [Nathan ha-Babli] was discovered in the late nineteenth century sometime. You shouldn't find it too hard to understand what goes on here. It's the sermons that count because they are directed to us, and he lowers the beam. It's interesting that this is the great occasion of the national celebration. If ever there was a successful people, standing tall, [it is these people], and all he does is throw cold water on the whole thing. He just drenches them in it. He says, You fools; you don't see things as they are at all. Don't get any big ideas about yourselves. Look out!

1. See Hugh W. Nibley, "Acclamatio," in Dalmas H. Nelson and Richard L. Sklar, eds., *Toward a Science of Politics: Essays in Honor of Francis Dunham Wormuth* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1983), 11–22.