

Messages

of the Book of Mormon

Interpretation of Lehi's Vision

Key Scripture 1 Nephi 11–15

Explanation Nephi, after hearing about his father's vision of the tree of life, desired to see the same things his father saw and was granted this request. Upon seeing the tree in vision, he desired to know its interpretation. Nephi then saw the coming of the Son of God and knew that the tree of life represented the love of God. He soon learned the meaning of several other symbols in his father's vision, as this chart illustrates. The angelic ministrant also showed Nephi episodes of world history, including periods of war, colonization, apostasy, and wickedness. Thus in light of 1 Nephi 11–15, the vision of the tree of life can be seen not only as a powerful illustration of God's love shown through the atonement of Jesus Christ, but also as an allegory of the history of the world, as the right-hand column of the chart illustrates.

Source Daniel H. Ludlow, *A Companion to Your Study of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 101.

Interpretation of Lehi's Vision

Symbol	Interpretation	Examples Given
DARK AND DREARY WASTE 1 Nephi 8:7		
LARGE AND SPACIOUS FIELD 1 Nephi 8:9, 20	The world 1 Nephi 8:20	
TREE OF LIFE 1 Nephi 8:10; 11:25; 15:21–22	Love of God 1 Nephi 11:21–22	The coming of the Son of God 1 Nephi 11:13–22
FRUIT OF THE TREE 1 Nephi 8:11–12		
FOUNTAIN/RIVER OF FILTHY WATER 1 Nephi 8:13; 12:16	Hell and the depths thereof 1 Nephi 12:16; 15:26–36	Wickedness and war 1 Nephi 12:13–15
ROD OF IRON 1 Nephi 8:19	The word of God 1 Nephi 11:25; 15:23–25	The ministry of the Son of God 1 Nephi 11:24–25
MIST OF DARKNESS 1 Nephi 8:23	Temptations of the devil 1 Nephi 12:17	Apostasy, wickedness, war, the great and abominable church, plain and precious things removed from the scriptures 1 Nephi 12:19–23; 13:1–9, 20–29
GREAT AND SPACIOUS BUILDING 1 Nephi 8:26	Pride, wisdom, and vain imaginations of the world 1 Nephi 11:35–36; 12:18	Persecution of the Son of God and those who followed him 1 Nephi 11:26–36

The Allegory of the Olive Tree

Key Scripture Jacob 5

Explanation The longest allegory in scripture is Zenos's allegory of the olive tree. In Jacob 5:3, Zenos explains that the tame olive tree represents the house of Israel. From this interpretation, conclusions may be drawn concerning other symbols in the allegory. For example, the young branches taken from the olive tree most likely represent inhabitants of the Americas, the Jews, the lost ten tribes, and a remnant of the house of Israel; and the wild olive tree symbolizes the Gentiles and the nations of the earth. The numbers on the top half of this chart (1–6) represent the six main stages that Zenos addresses in his allegory: (1) the decaying of the top, (2) the grafting in of the wild tree, (3) the planting of young branches in other parts of the vineyard, (4) the returning of the branches to the main tree, (5) the bitter fruit burned by fire, and (6) the good fruit being gathered and stored. On the bottom half of the chart, these same stages are shown graphically, arranged clockwise around the central figure of the tame tree.

The Allegory of the Olive Tree

Jacob 5

Stage 1 Main top of tame olive tree begins to perish (v. 6) and is burned by fire (v. 9)

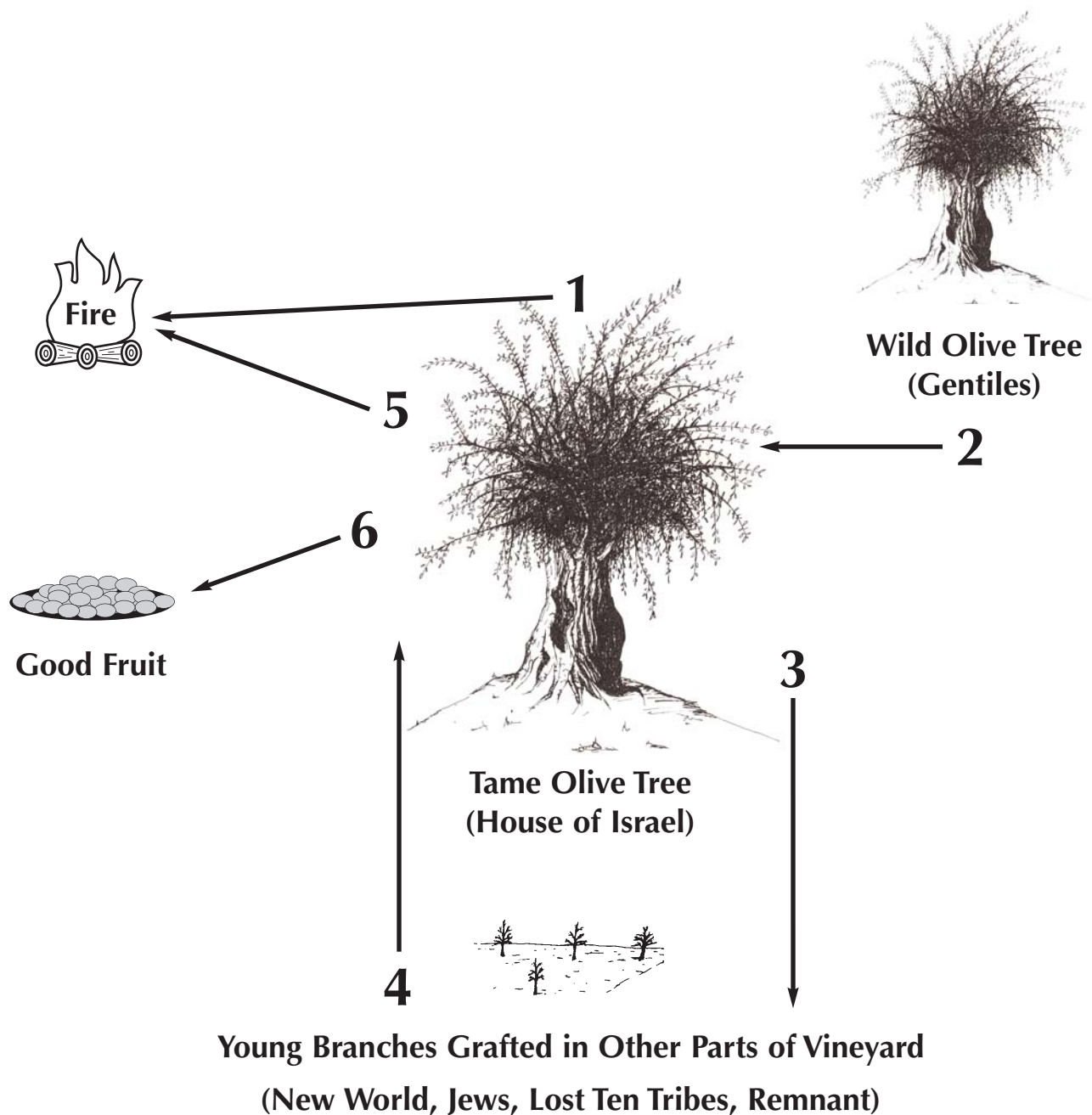
Stage 2 Wild olive tree branches are grafted in (v. 10) and bear good fruit (v. 17)

Stage 3 Young branches are grafted in other parts of the vineyard (vv. 8, 13)

Stage 4 Young branches are grafted back into the tame olive tree (v. 52)

Stage 5 Branches that bring forth bitter fruit are cleared (v. 65)

Stage 6 Fruit is good and vineyard is no more corrupt (v. 75)



Symbolic Elements in Zenos's Allegory

Key Scripture Jacob 5

Explanation Zenos's allegory of the tame and wild olive trees, though complicated, is one of great doctrinal and historical importance, in part because it represents the past and future history of the house of Israel. Understanding the elements in this allegory, which are grouped together and listed on this chart, can lead to added insights concerning God's dealings with his covenant people. As this data shows, the allegory is a dynamic interchange between several trees (or parts of trees) and the master of the vineyard, his servant, and several laborers. This chart does not interpret these symbols as they appear in Jacob 5, but it shows that many elements are built into this extended allegory and thus facilitates in-depth reflection on this text.

Symbolic Elements in Zenos's Allegory

1. The Trees

a tame olive tree
young and tender branches
mother tree
main top
natural branches
root of the main tree
moisture of the root
transplanted branches
a wild olive tree
grafted branches
many other trees
good, tame, natural fruit
bad, wild, bitter fruit
equal fruit

Trees' Doings

growing
waxing old
decaying and perishing
cumbering the ground
overrunning the roots
bringing forth much fruit
becoming corrupt
withering away
growing faster than roots
taking strength
good overcoming evil
thriving exceedingly

2. The Actors

master of the vineyard
servant
a few other servants

Actors' Doings

nourishing
digging about
dunging
pruning/plucking off branches
burning, casting into fire
grafting
planting branches
cutting down trees
grieving
laboring long, caring
sparing
balancing the root and top
preserving
laying up fruit
obeying
rejoicing

3. The Places

a vineyard
nethermost part
poorest spot
poorer than the poorest spot
good spot

Personal Applications of Olive Symbolism

Key Scripture Jacob 5

Explanation The tame olive tree in Jacob 5 may represent not only the house of Israel but also each of us personally. Listed in this chart are symbolic elements of the olive tree allegory and possible personal applications of them. While the gathering of the house of Israel is of utmost concern, personal conversion to the gospel of Jesus Christ as a member of the house of Israel may be even more important. Thus Zenos's allegory should be read and applied in terms of individual as well as collective salvation.

Personal Applications of Olive Symbolism

Symbol

Planted in God's vineyard
Olive trees grow slowly
Without care olives become wild
Each tree needs particular care
Even trees in good soil go wild
Branches should balance the roots
Olive trees like dry, rocky soil
Strong roots will support the stock
Branches should not become lofty
Pruning is necessary
Each branch needs light to grow
Prunings must not cumber the ground
Grafting will preserve the stock
Dunging is necessary
Olive oil is very valuable
Pressure is needed to extract oil
"What could I have done more?"
"It grieveth me to lose this tree"
"Spare it a little longer"

Possible Applications

Membership in God's church
Spiritual growth is slow
We must remain faithful
Lord knows us individually
Use blessings properly
Grow patiently and deeply
Adversity can be a blessing
Keep spiritual roots strong
Avoid pride
Repent regularly
Keep Light of Christ in all
Completely remove evil
Draw strength from others
Study, ponder, and pray
The worth of souls is great
Attaining purity takes work
God does all he can for us
God loves his children
The Lord is patient with us

Five Keys to Understanding Isaiah

Key Scripture 2 Nephi 25

Explanation To his faithful followers in the Americas, the Lord gave a commandment to “search these things diligently; for great are the words of Isaiah” (3 Nephi 23:1). That commandment implies that understanding the gospel of Jesus Christ and the words of Isaiah go hand in hand. Unfortunately, many find the writings of Isaiah hard to understand. Nephi may have been aware of this difficulty, for he addresses his latter-day audience specifically in 2 Nephi 25, giving us five keys to help facilitate comprehension of Isaiah’s words. These keys include being filled with the spirit of prophecy, living righteously in the last days, and understanding the geography and rhetorical tradition of the Jews.

Source Donald W. Parry, “Nephi’s Keys to Understanding Isaiah (2 Nephi 25:1–8),” in *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry and John W. Welch (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1998), 47–65.

Five Keys to Understanding Isaiah Given in 2 Nephi 25

- 1** Understand the “manner of prophesying among the Jews” 25:1
- 2** Do not do “works of darkness” or “doings of abominations” 25:2
- 3** Be filled with the spirit of prophecy 25:4
- 4** Be familiar with regions around Jerusalem 25:6
- 5** Live during the days that the prophecies of Isaiah are fulfilled 25:7

King Benjamin's Coronation of Mosiah

Key Scriptures Mosiah 1–5; 1 Kings 1:34, 39; 2 Kings 11:12, 14, 17; 23:3; 2 Chronicles 6:13

Explanation The coronation of Mosiah by King Benjamin was a grand ceremonial event that parallels the installation of kings in ancient Israel and other Near Eastern countries of antiquity, suggesting that the Nephites continued to practice Old World traditions in the Americas. Coronations were important ritual acts in the ancient Near East, including, among other things, anointing the new king, installing him in office with insignia, and presenting him to the people—elements that Benjamin's ceremony also contained. Old Testament parallels to Mosiah's coronation can be found in 1 Kings 1:34, 39; 2 Kings 11:12, 14, 17; 23:3; and 2 Chronicles 6:13.

Source Stephen D. Ricks, "Kingship, Coronation, and Covenant in Mosiah 1–6," in *King Benjamin's Speech: "That Ye May Learn Wisdom,"* ed. John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1998), 233–75.

King Benjamin's Coronation of Mosiah

Israelite Pattern

Book of Mormon Parallel or Adaptation

The Sanctuary Was the Site of the Coronation

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 (Mosiah 1:18)

Mosiah was then presented to the people in the public gathering at the temple (Mosiah 2:30)

The King Stood on a Royal Dais, Platform

Benjamin constructed a tower from which he spoke to the people gathered (situated in tents) at the temple (Mosiah 2:7)

Installing in Office with Insignia

Benjamin gave Mosiah the official records of the people (the plates of brass and the plates of Nephi), the sword of Laban, and the miraculous Liahona (Mosiah 1:15–16)

King Mosiah was known to possess "two stones" (Mosiah 28:13)

Anointing

Benjamin consecrated his son Mosiah to be a ruler and a king over his people (Mosiah 6:3)

Presentation of the New King

Mosiah is presented to the people as their king (Mosiah 2:30)

The people responded by accepting the king's declarations (Mosiah 4:2; 5:2–4)

Receiving a Throne Name

A royal name was given to the rulers over the Nephites (Jacob 1:10–11)

Benjamin revealed to all his people a new name at this coronation (Mosiah 3:8)

Divine Adoption of the King

By covenant, all the people became God's sons and daughters on his right hand (Mosiah 5:6–12)

Three Steps in Benjamin's Logic on Service

Key Scripture Mosiah 2–5

Explanation King Benjamin, in his great discourse to the people in the land of Zarahemla, answers the question “Why should we serve?” In his speech recorded in Mosiah 2–5, he provides a logical yet somewhat surprising explanation for service. Benjamin is well known for his famous dictum on service in Mosiah 2:17. Actually, he mentions service two other times as he develops this topic more fully. This chart considers these three statements. They deal with service to God, our debt to God, and knowing God. On one level, a certain logic is embedded within each of these individual statements. On another level, the relationship between them is also logical and interdependent. If we serve men, then we only (merely) serve God. This does not win us great credit, for when we serve God, he blesses us and we are continually in his debt. Thus we have no reason to boast. Why, then, should we serve? If we are humble in our service, we will know God. Knowing the Master whom we serve is the great blessing that profits us more than anything else. This, to Benjamin, is the ultimate reason for service.

Source John W. Welch, “Benjamin’s Speech: A Masterful Oration,” in *King Benjamin’s Speech: “That Ye May Learn Wisdom,”* ed. John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1998), 77–82.

Three Steps in Benjamin's Logic on Service

1 All service is merely service to God.

Therefore, serving fellow beings produces no reason to boast, unless serving God produces some reason to boast.

“When ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God” (Mosiah 2:17)

2 But no matter how much we serve God, we remain unprofitable servants.

Therefore, we have no reason to boast.

“If ye should serve him with all your whole souls yet would ye be unprofitable servants” (Mosiah 2:21)

3 We do not serve God to get ahead with God or man, but to know the voice by which we are called.

Therefore, service to God is valuable, but not in ways people always think.

“For how knoweth a man the master whom he has not served?” (Mosiah 5:13)

Overview of Benjamin's Speech

Key Scripture Mosiah 2–5

Explanation This chart is an outline of the chiasmic nature of King Benjamin's speech to the people at the temple of Zarahemla. In it are seven major sections separated by interruptions or intervening ceremonial acts. The overall structure of the text follows an A–B–C–D–C'–B'–A' pattern: the atonement of Jesus Christ is the crux, or center, of the speech (section D), the angel's and Benjamin's testimonies of the atonement are found on either side of it (sections C and C'), the behavior of the people is addressed in sections B and B', and sections A and A' address God and his relationship with the people. Further chiasms can be found on the sentence level, indicating that this speech was highly structured for the occasion. The evidence of chiasmus in the Book of Mormon attests to its artistry and antiquity. For a more detailed explanation of chiasmus, refer to charts 128–33.

Source John W. Welch, "Parallelism and Chiasmus in Benjamin's Speech," in *King Benjamin's Speech: "That Ye May Learn Wisdom,"* ed. John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1998), 325–28.

Overview of Benjamin's Speech

Supporting Elements in Mosiah 1–6

Words of Speech in Mosiah 2–5

Preparations (1:1–2:8)

Successor named and new name to be given; people gathered but not yet numbered; tower constructed

First Interruption (2:29–30)

Coronation proclamation

Second Interruption (2:41–3:1)

Remember, remember, the Lord has spoken; Benjamin calls again for attention

Third Interruption (3:27–4:4)

Thus has the Lord commanded, amen; the people fall to the ground and confess; atoning blood is applied; joy and remission; Benjamin begins to speak again

Fourth Interruption (4:30–5:6)

Remember, and perish not; covenant response of the people; Benjamin accepts their covenant

Final Acts (6:1–3)

Names recorded of all who accepted the name; Mosiah consecrated; priests appointed; people dismissed

A. All are indebted to God (2:9–28)

God is the heavenly king; God has physically created and sustains all people; people should serve and thank God; the hope of exaltation after death

B. Consequences of obedience or disobedience (2:31–41)

Obedience brings victory and prosperity (compare Leviticus 26); prohibition of contention; rebellion and disobedience bring pain and anguish; all are eternally indebted to Heavenly Father

C. The angel's testimony of Christ's deeds (3:2–10)

The Lord Omnipotent will come down in power and goodness; the sacred name of God; the suffering and death of Jesus Christ

D. Sanctification by the atonement of Christ (3:11–27)

The only possibility of reconciliation; putting off the natural man and becoming a saint; people will be judged according to their works

C'. Benjamin's testimony of God's goodness (4:4–12)

God is good, patient, long-suffering; believe in God; God is all-powerful, loving, and glorious; call upon the name of the Lord daily

B'. Righteous behavior of the redeemed (4:13–30)

Living in peace and social order (compare Leviticus 25); prohibition of contention; because God imparts, all must give to those in need; avoid guilt and sin

A'. The sons and daughters of God (5:6–15)

God has spiritually begotten you this day; the only head to make you free from debt; excommunication upon breach of obligations; covenant people know God by serving him; the hope of exaltation after death

Benjamin's Themes Related to the Israelite New Year

Key Scripture Mosiah 2–5

Explanation Ancient Israelites celebrated several holy days, many elements of which have become the modern Jewish celebrations of Rosh ha-Shanah (New Year), Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement), and Sukkot (Feast of Tabernacles). These three particular celebrations took place during the early autumn season, specifically during the seventh month of the year. Because the Nephites and Mulekites originally came from Jerusalem, it is likely that they continued some of these festival traditions in the Americas. As this chart shows, King Benjamin's speech in Mosiah 2–5 contains themes especially pertinent to the Israelite New Year, suggesting that this speech was delivered near that time of the year. Benjamin's proclamation of his son Mosiah as king at this time is especially fitting, considering that part of the ancient Israelite New Year celebration included proclaiming or sustaining the king or high priest as an authority figure. Each element on this chart is found both in Israelite tradition and in Benjamin's speech. The similarities between Benjamin's speech and ancient Israelite celebrations are circumstantial evidence attesting to the historical backgrounds and divine origins of the Book of Mormon.

Source Terrence L. Szink and John W. Welch, "King Benjamin's Speech in the Context of Ancient Israelite Festivals," in *King Benjamin's Speech: "That Ye May Learn Wisdom,"* ed. John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1998), 160–74, 200.

Benjamin's Themes

Related to the Israelite New Year



admonitions
the attributes of God
being sealed to God
covenant making
creation
divine judgment
forsaking sin
God's involvement in history
guilt before God
judgment
kinship of God
law
the long-suffering of God
the Lord Omnipotent
man's nature and nothingness
preaching and prophecy
rebirth and resurrection
remembrance
reverence and fear of God
sacrifice
testimony against the people
warnings against sin
wisdom

Benjamin's Themes Related to the Day of Atonement

Key Scripture Mosiah 2–5

Explanation The Day of Atonement is one of the most sacred holidays in Jewish culture. In preexilic Israel it included ritual atonement in the temple and a series of holy assemblies. Because Benjamin's speech in Mosiah 2–5 and its surrounding context emphasizes several topics particularly significant to this day of religious celebration, it is possible that Benjamin gave the speech on or near the Day of Atonement. In fact, he refers to the atonement overtly seven times—a number that represented spiritual perfection and that was used in connection with rituals performed on the Day of Atonement and during other times of purification mentioned in the book of Leviticus. This holy day was also a time of forgiveness for the people of Israel who confessed their sins and repented; similarly, the people of Benjamin were spiritually reborn after they confessed and repented of their sins. Each element in this chart, listed alphabetically, is found both in Israelite texts and in Benjamin's speech.

Source Terrence L. Szink and John W. Welch, "King Benjamin's Speech in the Context of Ancient Israelite Festivals," in *King Benjamin's Speech: "That Ye May Learn Wisdom,"* ed. John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1998), 174–83, 201.

Benjamin's Themes

Related to the Day of Atonement



atonement	indebtedness to God
balancing order and diligence	inscribing names of the righteous
being made free from sin	joy and blessings
belief in God	knowing the divine name
belief in the Messiah	left hand
blessings	the means of salvation
blood	the name of God
blotting out names of transgressors	preparations
the commandments of God	pride
confession and repentance	purification
conversion	rebellion against God
eternal rewards and punishments	repentance
faith	right hand
the fall of Adam	sacrifice and purifications
the fallen state of humanity	scapegoat, driving ass out
foundation of the world	service to God and fellowman
giving to the poor	submission
the goodness of God	suffering and works of the Messiah
humility	unintentional sin
ignorant sin	

Benjamin's Themes Related to the Feast of Tabernacles

Key Scripture Mosiah 2–5

Explanation Sukkot, or the Feast of Tabernacles, as it is currently celebrated represents the events associated with the exodus from Egypt, although it was probably originally an agricultural celebration. Although it is not possible to know exactly which parts of this celebration were observed in Jerusalem during Lehi's lifetime, there are several significant parallels between the fully developed celebration of Sukkot and King Benjamin's speech and the events associated with it. These elements, shared by both Israelite and Nephite observances, include a pilgrimage to the temple, sitting in tents, reading the law, coronating a king, and renewing the covenant.

Source Terrence L. Szink and John W. Welch, "King Benjamin's Speech in the Context of Ancient Israelite Festivals," in *King Benjamin's Speech: "That Ye May Learn Wisdom,"* ed. John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1998), 183–90, 201.

Benjamin's Themes

Related to the Feast of Tabernacles



becoming sons and daughters of God
booths/tents
coronation
covenant
deliverance
earthly king
the effect of knowing God
family
giving thanks and praise
heavenly king
joy in the commandments
keeping the commandments
kingship
knowing God by serving God
law and order
one's accountability after being warned
pilgrimage
praise
rejoicing and thanksgiving
remembrance
sacrifice
temple assembly
thanksgiving and praise

Benjamin's Themes Related to Sabbatical and Jubilee Years

Key Scripture Mosiah 2–5

Explanation In addition to scheduling his speech during the season of the fall festival complex, King Benjamin may have also timed it to be given at the end of a sabbatical year, which came once every seven years. During this year, the land was not to be tilled, the yield was given to the poor, and debtors and slaves (or servants) were released from their obligations. Similarly, at the end of his speech Benjamin commands his people to “till the land,” which would make sense if the people had not been working in the fields during the sabbatical year and were preparing to resume agricultural activity. Benjamin also tells the people to settle their debts with their neighbors. These parallels are quite striking.

But this is not all. Textual evidence indicates that this may also have been a jubilee year, which occurred every seventh sabbatical year and offered a new economic beginning for the poor in the land and spiritual renewal for all. Parts of the jubilee text, found in Leviticus 25, and parts of Mosiah 2 and 4 essentially mirror each other. Topics such as settling debts, succoring the poor, depending on God, and prospering in the land, listed on this chart, are all present in both texts. Benjamin's speech was one of monumental importance to the Nephites who still lived under the law of Moses. No wonder Mormon chose to include this speech in its entirety.

Source Terrence L. Szink and John W. Welch, “King Benjamin's Speech in the Context of Ancient Israelite Festivals,” in *King Benjamin's Speech: “That Ye May Learn Wisdom,”* ed. John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1998), 190–99, 202.

Benjamin's Themes

Related to Sabbatical and Jubilee Years



blessings
 debt recognition
 forgiveness
 freedom
 land
 love
 peaceful living
 prosperity
 purification and renewal
 reading of the law
 rendering to each his due
 returning things borrowed
 riches and generosity
 service and servants
 slaves released