

Comments on Mosiah 2

1 AND it came to pass that after Mosiah had done as his father had commanded him, and had made a proclamation throughout all the land, that the people gathered themselves together throughout all the land, that they might go up to the temple to hear the words which king Benjamin should speak unto them. 2 And there were a great number, even so many that they did not number them; for they had multiplied exceedingly and waxed great in the land.

3 And they also took of the firstlings of their flocks, that they might offer sacrifice and burnt offerings according to the law of Moses; 4 And also that they might give thanks to the Lord their God, who had brought them out of the land of Jerusalem, and who had delivered them out of the hands of their enemies, and had appointed just men to be their teachers, and also a just man to be their king, who had established peace in the land of Zarahemla, and who had taught them to keep the commandments of God, that they might rejoice and be filled with love towards God and all men.

5 And it came to pass that when they came up to the temple, they pitched their tents round about, every man according to his family, consisting of his wife, and his sons, and his daughters, and their sons, and their daughters, from the eldest down to the youngest, every family being separate one from another. 6 And they pitched their tents round about the temple, every man having his tent with the door thereof towards the temple, that thereby they might remain in their tents and hear the words which king Benjamin should speak unto them; 7 For the multitude being so great that king Benjamin could not teach them all within the walls of the temple, therefore he caused a tower to be erected, that thereby his people might hear the words which he should speak unto them.

8 And it came to pass that he began to speak to his people from the tower; and they could not all hear his words because of the greatness of the multitude; therefore he caused that the words which he spake should be written and sent forth among those that were not under the sound of his voice, that they might also receive his words.

v1-8 After Mosiah makes the proclamation requested by Benjamin (cf. 1:10), all of the people gather into the Temple to hear what the king has to say (v. 1). The people have prospered in the land, and as a result so many people gather they cannot count them all (v. 2). The people bring the firstlings of their flocks for sacrifice according to the Law (v. 3) and also according to their thankfulness for their good situation (v. 4). When the people gather to the Temple they set up camp in their tents by family (v. 5), and everyone sets up so the tent door is facing the Temple (v. 6) because there is so many of them they can't all fit in the Temple. Benjamin has a tower built so he can address more people (v. 7), but the crowd is so large they still cannot all hear him. So he has his words written and distributed among the people (v. 8).

The timing of this gathering may be in conjunction with one of the Regalim, or Feasts ordained in the Law of Moses. Some of

the details in the text (e.g., the offering of sacrifices, staying in tents, thanksgiving themes, atonement themes) suggest it was in conjunction with the Feast of Sukkot.

However, some details in the text are hostile to this reading. For example, why would Benjamin send Mosiah out to tell them to gather into the Temple if they were already gathering in anyway? Then, v. 1 says the reason people gathered to the Temple was to hear what Benjamin had to say. And, according to 1:10 the only people summoned are those who are in the immediate vicinity of Zarahemla, those who can be notified that day and then be there at the Temple "on the morrow" so this is a very localized subset of the Nephite population, not a national gathering which would be anticipated with Sukkot. And in v. 7 they have to build a tower on the spot so people can hear. Since the various Feast are Sabbaths, building a tower wouldn't be permitted (the 10th, which is Yom Kippur, the 15th, and the 22nd days of the seventh month of Tishri were Sabbaths wherein no work could be performed, on the intervening days one could do work, cf. Lev. 23:26-36). Then, finally, at the end of his lectures and after their names are taken, in 6:3 Benjamin dismisses them to go back to their houses, on what appears to be the same day as they arrived.

Probably what is happening is Benjamin is just preempting Sukkot by a day or two and having the local people, the ones most affected by a change in kings, come up a day or two early for a pre-Sukkot gathering. This would provide the general context of Yom Kippur and Sukkot and avoid the difficulties mentioned above. If the Nephites had an early harvest, one that was completed before Yom Kippur, then the four days in between Yom Kippur and Sukkot would have been easy for Benjamin to schedule a major convocation on short notice. It is unlikely Benjamin would have called a convocation on such short notice during harvest. In an agrarian society Fall harvest and Spring planting are the two most hectic times of the year.

v2 "they did not number them", this is simply a casual observation that there were a lot of people. Why? Because in 6:1 the names of those present who covenant with the Lord, all except children, is literally documented.

v3-6 These verses tick off the various main themes of Sukkot (a.k.a. Tabernacles, Booths). Here is the pertinent Easton's Bible Dictionary entry:

Tabernacles, Feast of - the third of the great annual

festivals of the Jews (Lev. 23:33-43). It is also called the "feast of ingathering" (Ex. 23:16; Deut. 16:13). It was celebrated immediately after the harvest, in the month Tisri, and the celebration lasted for eight days (Lev. 23:33-43). During that period the people left their homes and lived in booths formed of the branches of trees. The sacrifices offered at this time are mentioned in Num. 29:13-38. It was at the time of this feast that Solomon's temple was dedicated (1 Kings 8:2). Mention is made of it after the return from the Captivity. This feast was designed (1) to be a memorial of the wilderness wanderings, when the people dwelt in booths (Lev. 23:43), and (2) to be a harvest thanksgiving (Neh. 8:9-18). The Jews, at a later time, introduced two appendages to the original festival, viz., (1) that of drawing water from the Pool of Siloam, and pouring it upon the altar (John 7:2, 37), as a memorial of the water from the rock in Horeb; and (2) of lighting the lamps at night, a memorial of the pillar of fire by night during their wanderings.

"The feast of Tabernacles, the harvest festival of the Jewish Church, was the most popular and important festival after the Captivity. At Jerusalem it was a gala day. It was to the autumn pilgrims, who arrived on the 14th (of the month Tisri, the feast beginning on the 15th) day, like entrance into a silvan city. Roofs and courtyards, streets and squares, roads and gardens, were green with boughs of citron and myrtle, palm and willow. The booths recalled the pilgrimage through the wilderness. The ingathering of fruits prophesied of the spiritual harvest.", Valling's Jesus Christ, p. 133.

The entry reflects the Jewish customs associated with the feast. Obviously, the Nephites could have varied to some degree from the Jews in using literal tents, as did their ancestors, rather than the Jewish custom of using booths made of tree branches which are to representing the harvest.

v5 "tents", they brought and set up tents. If the only people there for this meeting were those in the immediate vicinity of Zarahemla, given they were notified the day before and traveled there on short order, one would assume they could have gone home

just as easily as drag up tents. They certainly wouldn't have been forced to camp there because of traveling a great distance from home. The only thing that makes sense is the tents were brought up for Sukkot. Perhaps they were just for protection from the elements? But, if they were, why would Mormon have bothered to include such detail?

v7 "he caused a tower to be erected", given the very short amount of time between announcement and event they had little time to prepare. Whatever tower they constructed would have been built in great haste, hence its ineffectiveness in intended purpose per v. 8.

v8 "he caused that the words which he spake should be written", having the words documented as he spoke would have made it easy on whoever was scribing the plates, and would have ensured its accuracy as well.

v9-30 Benjamin opens his final address to the people by summarizing his tenure as king (v. 9-15), explaining the spiritual underpinnings of his personal views on service (v. 16-26), and announcing the end of his tenure as king (v. 27-30).

9 And these are the words which he spake and caused to be written, saying: My brethren, all ye that have assembled yourselves together, you that can hear my words which I shall speak unto you this day; for I have not commanded you to come up hither to trifle with the words which I shall speak, but that you should hearken unto me, and open your ears that ye may hear, and your hearts that ye may understand, and your minds that the mysteries of God may be unfolded to your view.

10 I have not commanded you to come up hither that ye should fear me, or that ye should think that I of myself am more than a mortal man. 11 But I am like as yourselves, subject to all manner of infirmities in body and mind; yet I have been chosen by this people, and consecrated by my father, and was suffered by the hand of the Lord that I should be a ruler and a king over this people; and have been kept and preserved by his matchless power, to serve you with all the might, mind and strength which the Lord hath granted unto me.

12 I say unto you that as I have been suffered to spend my days in your service, even up to this time, and have not sought gold nor silver nor any manner of riches of you; 13 Neither have I suffered that ye should be confined in dungeons, nor that ye should make slaves one of another, nor that ye should murder, or plunder, or steal, or commit adultery; nor even have I suffered that ye should commit any manner of wickedness, and have taught you that ye should keep the commandments of the Lord, in all things which he hath commanded you-- 14 And even I, myself, have labored with mine own hands that I might serve you, and that ye should not be laden with taxes, and that there should nothing come upon you which was grievous to be borne--and of all these things which I have spoken, ye yourselves are witnesses this day. 15 Yet, my brethren, I have not done these things that I might boast, neither do I tell these things that

thereby I might accuse you; but I tell you these things that ye may know that I can answer a clear conscience before God this day.

v9-15 Benjamin lets them know the primary purpose for his summoning them there is to teach them the spiritual things of God (v. 9), and not to promote himself (v. 10) as he is no more than a mortal man who owes everything to the Lord (v. 11).

Benjamin then recaps his tenure as king by pointing out he didn't do a lot of the things it is so common for kings to end up doing (v. 12-13). Rather, he has done the opposite (v. 14). But, he is not telling them these things to boast about what a great king he has been. He is telling them because he knows that as a result of staying away from these things he has a clear conscience (v. 15).

16 Behold, I say unto you that because I said unto you that I had spent my days in your service, I do not desire to boast, for I have only been in the service of God. 17 And behold, I tell you these things that ye may learn wisdom; that ye may learn that when ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God.

18 Behold, ye have called me your king; and if I, whom ye call your king, do labor to serve you, then ought not ye to labor to serve one another? 19 And behold also, if I, whom ye call your king, who has spent his days in your service, and yet has been in the service of God, do merit any thanks from you, O how you ought to thank your heavenly King!

20 I say unto you, my brethren, that if you should render all the thanks and praise which your whole soul has power to possess, to that God who has created you, and has kept and preserved you, and has caused that ye should rejoice, and has granted that ye should live in peace one with another-- 21 I say unto you that if ye should serve him who has created you from the beginning, and is preserving you from day to day, by lending you breath, that ye may live and move and do according to your own will, and even supporting you from one moment to another--I say, if ye should serve him with all your whole souls yet ye would be unprofitable servants.

22 And behold, all that he requires of you is to keep his commandments; and he has promised you that if ye would keep his commandments ye should prosper in the land; and he never doth vary from that which he hath said; therefore, if ye do keep his commandments he doth bless you and prosper you. 23 And now, in the first place, he hath created you, and granted unto you your lives, for which ye are indebted unto him. 24 And secondly, he doth require that ye should do as he hath commanded you; for which if ye do, he doth immediately bless you; and therefore he hath paid you. And ye are still indebted unto him, and are, and will be, forever and ever; therefore, of what have ye to boast? 25 And now I ask, can ye say aught of yourselves? I answer you, Nay. Ye cannot say that ye are even as much as the dust of the earth; yet ye were created of the dust of the earth; but behold, it belongeth to him who created you. 26 And I, even I, whom ye call your king, am no better than ye yourselves are; for I am also of the dust. And ye behold that I am old, and am about to yield up this mortal frame to its mother earth.

v16-26 Benjamin changes subject to explain his personal views

on how to stay humble. If one stays humble through service, then they stay out of the kind of trouble he has avoided. In other words, king Benjamin did not go bad like many other kings because he applied this principle of service. The general pattern in the text is service (v. 16-18), thankfulness (v. 19-21), blessings (v. 22), indebtedness (v. 23-25), but the principles do overlap with one another in his explanation. Obviously, once you are in debt, then you owe more service, and the whole cycle repeats itself. The implicit message is that if the cycle is broken then you are like those in v. 24-25 whom Benjamin castigates, those who boast saying "ought of yourselves".

He states the service he has performed for the people has actually been service to God (v. 16). He shares this with the people because he wants them to learn wisdom: When you serves others, you are serving God (v. 17). He points out that according to social conventions he is the king, the leader of the people. If the king is the servant of the people, shouldn't the people serve one another as well? (v. 18) And if the people feel they ought to thank the king, but he has only been in the service of God, then they ought to really thank God (v. 19) because if they did everything they possibly could to praise and thank Him they would still be in debt (v. 20-21). This is because all He requires is they keep His commandments, and as soon as they do He blesses them for it, so the original debt of life remains (v. 22-24). Thus, we cannot say anything of ourselves, for we are made of the dust of the earth and even that belongs to God (v. 25). And even the king, who is supposed to be the greatest among men is no better than anyone else, because he is going back to that dust from which he was created (v. 26).

v16-17 How is service to your fellow man actually service to God? Certainly the Lord has told us to love, and thereby serve, our neighbors, but that still is only indirect service to God. The service is to God because anyone we help out is one less person God has to help out. If we can serve others and help them out of their problems, then that is all the less God has to do work behind the scenes to have that person taken care of.

27 Therefore, as I said unto you that I had served you, walking with a clear conscience before God, even so I at this time have caused that ye should assemble yourselves together, that I might be found blameless, and that your blood should not come upon me, when I shall stand to be judged of God of the things whereof he hath commanded me concerning you. 28 I say unto you that I have caused that ye should assemble yourselves together that I might rid my garments

of your blood, at this period of time when I am about to go down to my grave, that I might go down in peace, and my immortal spirit may join the choirs above in singing the praises of a just God.

29 And moreover, I say unto you that I have caused that ye should assemble yourselves together, that I might declare unto you that I can no longer be your teacher, nor your king; 30 For even at this time, my whole frame doth tremble exceedingly while attempting to speak unto you; but the Lord God doth support me, and hath suffered me that I should speak unto you, and hath commanded me that I should declare unto you this day, that my son Mosiah is a king and a ruler over you.

v27-30 After discussing his spiritual views on humility before God and the role of service (v. 16-26), Benjamin returns again to the reason he summoned the people. He picks up the theme from v. 15 and reiterates that he has a clear conscience before, and thus will not have their sins upon him (v. 27). He is relieved about this because he knows it will enable him to go to heaven and enjoy God's presence (v. 28).

But, he has also summoned them up to tell them he can no longer be their teacher and king (v. 29). He is too weak to perform the required duties anymore, and if it weren't for the Lord supporting him he couldn't even stand before them as he is now and tell them He has told him to announce Mosiah is the new king (v. 30).

v21 "unprofitable servants", "unprofitable", not in the sense they are useless, but unprofitable in the sense they cannot out-earn what they owe. Since we are always rewarded for keeping the commandments, we never end up being able to repay the debt owed for the gift of life. We are therefore never making a profit.

v27 "that your blood should not come upon me", cp. Jacob 1:19.

31 And now, my brethren, I would that ye should do as ye have hitherto done. As ye have kept my commandments, and also the commandments of my father, and have prospered, and have been kept from falling into the hands of your enemies, even so if ye shall keep the commandments of my son, or the commandments of God which shall be delivered unto you by him, ye shall prosper in the land, and your enemies shall have no power over you.

32 But, O my people, beware lest there shall arise contentions among you, and ye list to obey the evil spirit, which was spoken of by my father Mosiah. 33 For behold, there is a wo pronounced upon him who listeth to obey that spirit; for if he listeth to obey him, and remaineth and dieth in his sins, the same drinketh damnation to his own soul; for he receiveth for his wages an everlasting punishment, having transgressed the law of God contrary to his own knowledge.

34 I say unto you, that there are not any among you, except it be your little children that have not been taught concerning these things, but what knoweth that ye are eternally indebted to

your heavenly Father, to render to him all that you have and are; and also have been taught concerning the records which contain the prophecies which have been spoken by the holy prophets, even down to the time our father, Lehi, left Jerusalem; 35 And also, all that has been spoken by our fathers until now. And behold, also, they spake that which was commanded them of the Lord; therefore, they are just and true. 36 And now, I say unto you, my brethren, that after ye have known and have been taught all these things, if ye should transgress and go contrary to that which has been spoken, that ye do withdraw yourselves from the Spirit of the Lord, that it may have no place in you to guide you in wisdom's paths that ye may be blessed, prospered, and preserved-- 37 I say unto you, that the man that doeth this, the same cometh out in open rebellion against God; therefore he listeth to obey the evil spirit, and becometh an enemy to all righteousness; therefore, the Lord has no place in him, for he dwelleth not in unholy temples. 38 Therefore if that man repenteth not, and remaineth and dieth an enemy to God, the demands of divine justice do awaken his immortal soul to a lively sense of his own guilt, which doth cause him to shrink from the presence of the Lord, and doth fill his breast with guilt, and pain, and anguish, which is like an unquenchable fire, whose flame ascendeth up forever and ever. 39 And now I say unto you, that mercy hath no claim on that man; therefore his final doom is to endure a never-ending torment.

40 O, all ye old men, and also ye young men, and you little children who can understand my words, for I have spoken plainly unto you that ye might understand, I pray that ye should awake to a remembrance of the awful situation of those that have fallen into transgression. 41 And moreover, I would desire that ye should consider on the blessed and happy state of those that keep the commandments of God. For behold, they are blessed in all things, both temporal and spiritual; and if they hold out faithful to the end they are received into heaven, that thereby they may dwell with God in a state of never-ending happiness. O remember, remember that these things are true; for the Lord God hath spoken it.

v31-41 With this change in rulership, Benjamin warns the people not to start slacking off in his absence. He admonishes them to keep the commandments of God which will come through Mosiah, just as they have kept the commandments of Benjamin and his father as well. If they do so they will prosper, otherwise they will fall into the hands of their enemies (v. 31).

Benjamin reminds them of the words of his father which warned them against contention and being led into sin by the evil spirit (v. 32). Those who fall into these things sin against the law of God and receive damnation for it (v. 33).

He knows that all of the people present have been taught concerning the commandments of God from the records of their fathers (v. 34-35). Thus, any among them who go against the commandments do so in rebellion, and force the Spirit to withdraw from them (v. 36-37). And if the man who does this doesn't repent then he is damned (v. 38), because God's mercy will not claim him (v. 39).

Benjamin then closes off his main address with a rhetorical flourish of the agony of spiritual death (v. 40) contrasted with

the glory and happiness of the righteous (v. 41). He encourages the listeners to ponder over this dichotomy.

v32 "which was spoken of by my father Mosiah", we do not have access to these teachings at present.

v36 "ye do withdraw yourselves from the Spirit of the Lord, that it may have no place in you to guide you in wisdom's path that you may be blessed, prospered, and preserved", this tangential side note speaks volumes on the Lord's economy. It is easier for the Lord to lead those who listen to the Spirit into favorable circumstances and out of bad circumstances than it is for Him to arrange the circumstances around them. The Lord will not impinge on people's free agency, so He has limited influence over the wicked and rebellious. The result is it difficult for Him to work with them and get what He wants out of them. It is much easier for Him to work with those who will listen. So, when it comes to blessing, prospering, and preserving people He leads them by the Spirit into the paths that get them where they need to be.

In a society where wickedness is in the majority, this necessarily requires the righteous to be more flexible in order to be blessed. One cannot expect God to impinge on other's free agency in order to bless them, so one has to be willing to go where the Spirit tells them so they can be blessed according to their needs.

And, if a person spurns the Spirit, they end up wandering into trouble on their own because they have nothing outside themselves to guide them.

v41 Note after several verses (v. 32-40) of emphatic warnings against sin and rebellion and it's consequences, Benjamin ends on an encouraging note. He encourages them to reject all of that negative things, and instead consider the temporally and spiritually blessed condition of the faithful.

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