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Abstract This article discusses the significance of major scriptural personalities, contrasting the lessons we can learn from the positive and negative experiences of such individuals with the role models set for us in Christ and little children. Internal textual sources relate to the composition of the book of Mosiah within the context of a particular literary tradition and style. According to one argument, the text employs a "dialectical" style or stylistic device based on the "law of opposition in all things," which juxtaposes individuals, such as righteous and wicked kings, to illuminate gospel principles. Several Old World and Book of Mormon perspectives give insight on royal treasures, symbolism, and iconography (including objects such as the Liahona and the sword of Laban). The article also contrasts views of religious freedom, taxation, and agency and responsibility, and compares duties of parents and kings.

Mosiah: The Complex Symbolism and Symbolic Complex of Kingship in the Book of Mormon[1]

Gordon C. Thomasson

Abstract: The significance of major scriptural personalities is discussed, contrasting the lessons we can learn from the positive and negative experiences of such individuals with the role models set for us in Christ and little children. Internal textual sources are examined with relation to the composition of the book of Mosiah within the context of a particular literary tradition and style. An argument is advanced that the text employs a "dialectical" style or stylistic device, based on the "law of opposition in all things," which juxtaposes individuals, such as righteous and wicked kings, to illuminate gospel principles. The place of royal treasures, symbolism, and iconography (including objects such as the Liahona and the sword of Laban) are explored from several Old World and Book of Mormon perspectives. Views of ideas such as religious freedom, taxation, and agency and responsibility are contrasted, and duties of parents and kings are compared.

Scriptural Personalities as Symbols and Types

Regardless of a man's actions, we cannot know his heart as the Father does, and we remain incapable of understanding others' real motives. The Lord counsels, "Judge not unrighteously, that ye be not judged; but judge righteous judgment" (JST, Matthew 7:2). Therefore, we can only assess the character and personality of Book of Mormon figures such as Mosiah, the son of Benjamin, with a humility and tentativeness that makes every statement at best a guess, and at worst, libel.

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[1] I would like to thank George S. Tate of Brigham Young University and Robert S. Wicks of Miami University of Ohio for their assistance on an earlier version of this paper and Michael Lyon for redrawing some of the figures.

Why, then, study scriptural personalities? The Savior did not hold them up to us as models. The scriptures consistently point out the weaknesses and failures of prophets, apostles, and others (as in the case of Mosiah's failure to communicate the gospel effectively to his children), as well as indicating some of their strengths. In fact, the examples the Savior said are worthy of emulation—little children—lack the characteristics we normally praise. Besides little children, who are without sin, the only perfect example we have is the Savior.

We can, however, study the scriptures to see how others faced their problems, sometimes failing and sometimes succeeding, and we can benefit from the lessons they learned (Mormon 9:31). We can "liken the scriptures unto ourselves," drawing perspectives from the texts, taking them to the Lord as guidelines and seeking confirmation from him (D&C 9). In discussing Mosiah we will try to discover what we can learn about—and with—a king, a descendant of kings, who had his own problems and lived in a world in many ways different from ours.

A Style of Its Own

The Book of Mormon reflects the work of many editors over the centuries, including that of Mormon, its principal abridger (Words of Mormon 1:3–6), Mosiah himself (Mosiah 28:11–17), and others. Even with all the editing, careful analysis of its books—their styles, form, sources, symbols, types, and images—can help us better understand the purpose of the book as a witness that Jesus is the Christ. Jacob provides an example of editing. He wrote the summaries of inspired teachings (Jacob 1:4), preserving "a few of the things" which he considered "most precious" (Jacob 1:2) and abbreviating others. He notes his editing with phrases such as "and a hundredth part of the proceedings of this people . . . cannot be written" (Jacob 3:13; cf. 2 Maccabees 2:19–32). Due both to the difficulty in engraving plates (Jacob 4:1) and to the fact that writers of the Book of Mormon were trying to summarize countless records from a long and complex history, we constantly find phrases indicating editorial condensations and omissions. One such phrase is "And many more things did king Benjamin teach his sons, which are not written in this book" (Mosiah 1:8) and "many more things did Mosiah write unto them" (Mosiah 29:33). Nevertheless, the Book of Mormon is an inspired book. In its final form it is

thoughtfully structured and written, and it is evident that conscious planning, not chance, went into its composition.

The book of Mosiah is possibly the most carefully composed book in the Book of Mormon concerning a single period of history. Parts of it were written by Mosiah, son of Benjamin, and he incorporated the records of others (Limhi, Alma, et al.) in his work. Others later condensed the record and wrote certain things Mosiah was unlikely to have said about himself, putting such comments in the third person (Mosiah 6:6–7), and adding details such as the death of Mosiah (Mosiah 29:46–47). At some point in the text's history, it was given its overarching and undergirding chiasmic form and what I have chosen to call its "dialectical style." Mosiah's reign was important in Nephite history in the eyes of those who abridged the book. The book, as we have it, is clearly an interpretive and analytical retrospective history, not a daily journal or chronology.[2]

It is clear that the Book of Mormon prophets considered Mosiah's reign to be a crucial episode in Nephite history, and they abridged it from a rich documentary tradition to give us as complete a picture as possible of what Mosiah accomplished. There are more than twenty texts, types of texts (including whole documentary traditions), and oral sources referred to in the book of Mosiah,[3] giving us a broad perspective on the

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2 Mosiah's own history seems similar to that of the first Nephi, who, "*having seen* many afflictions in the course of my days," subsequently made "a record of my proceedings in my days" (1 Nephi 1:1).

3 Some of these include the plates of brass (Mosiah 1:3), Old Testament copies in the land of Nephi (Mosiah 12:20; 13:11), small or prophetic plates of Nephi (1 Nephi 9:3; Omni 1:25; Mosiah 28:11), large or regal plates of Nephi (1 Nephi 9:4; Jarom 1:14; Mosiah 1:6), a second set of prophetic plates which Mormon describes as running "from Jacob down to the reign of this king Benjamin" (Words of Mormon 1:3), Mosiah's proclamation of the year-rite/coronation (Mosiah 1:10; 2:1), Benjamin's discourse (Mosiah 2:8–4:29), the apocalypse of Benjamin (Mosiah 3:2–4:1), which occurred previous to the coronation and which he read to the multitude, a census of the covenanters who responded to Benjamin's discourse (Mosiah 6:1), a report of Ammon's search for the descendants of Zeniff (Mosiah 7 through 8:1), a treaty between King Laman and King Zeniff (Mosiah 7:21), Zeniff's first-person records (Mosiah 9:1–10:22), records in the third person of Noah's reign including Abinadi's prophecies before (Mosiah 11:20–17:4) *and after* Alma fled Noah's court (Mosiah 17:7–19), Alma's records (Mosiah 25:6), a report of Gideon's actions (Mosiah 19), a report—probably from the repentant children of the priests of Noah and their kidnapped Lamanite wives—concerning the activities of the priests

events during the reign of Mosiah and their causes and effects. Combining so many records suggests a great deal of concern in writing. Mormon passed on a mere fraction of what previous prophets had already condensed; nevertheless, he saw fit to include more material in his abridgment from the reign of Mosiah than from that of any other king except Nephi, the son of Lehi. Yet, Mormon gave us only some one hundred verses dealing with Mosiah himself. This should be a clue that something crucial took place at that time that went beyond the person of the king himself. While Mosiah was at the center of much action, it seems that Mormon's concern was the recording of the process of bringing people to Christ.

The book of Mosiah was written about Mosiah, his father Benjamin, their people, the peoples who came under Mosiah's rule, their histories, the enemies of these peoples, etc. But this is on a shallow level. On another level, the book is an extended treatise on good and bad government. It employs a dialectical style (apparently based on Lehi's dialectical epistemology or

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of Noah after they fled (Mosiah 20, 24), Limhi's proclamation (Mosiah 22:6), the apocalypse of $Alma_1$ (Mosiah 26:14–33, especially verse 33), Mosiah's proclamation of freedom of religion (Mosiah 27:2), $Alma_2$'s vision, which was probably recorded on his father's records (Mosiah 27:13–17), the confessions of $Alma_2$ and the sons of Mosiah which were in some sense "published" through the land (Mosiah 27:35), Mosiah's poll on public preference as to his successor (Mosiah 29:1), Mosiah's *written* treatise on government (Mosiah 29:4–32, which was abridged; see Mosiah 29:33). Also, Mosiah received texts such as Coriantum's record on the engraved stone (Omni 1:20), the twenty-four gold plates found by the people of Limhi (Mosiah 8:9; 28:11, 17), and the oral history and genealogy of the Mulekites which Zarahemla had given to $Mosiah_1$ (Omni 1:18). Moreover, we know that laws were made known to the people in such a way that they could be "sent forth" and also torn up (Mosiah 29:22–23). Add to this the Lamanites' texts (Mosiah 24:4, 6), the number of explicit omissions and editings (for instance, Mosiah 1:8), and those records lost, because "whatsoever things we write upon . . . save it be upon plates must perish and vanish away" (Jacob 4:2), and the historical sources drawn upon by the book of Mosiah seem impressive indeed. Mormon's explanation of his abridgment barely begins to reveal how many records must have been involved (Words of Mormon 1:3–7). This reflects a pattern of widespread public literacy rather than a narrowly specialized literate priestly elite; cf. Gordon C. Thomasson, "Beyond the Barangay: Rethinking the Question of Social Organization in the Pre-Hispanic Philippines," *Cornell Journal of Social Relations* 15/2 (Winter 1980): 180–84.

theory of knowledge based on opposition in all things; 2 Nephi 2:11–16), and clearly juxtaposes an unrighteous ruler (Noah) and the dire consequences such a man could bring on his people, with rulers who tried to follow the Lord. From a literary perspective, the book of Mosiah is one of the most impressive and complex sections of latter-day scripture.[4] On the historical level, it remains an outstanding witness of its writers' involvement in the ritual of the ancient world.[5] On the deepest and most important level, it is a witness for Christ and a powerful analogy of the plan of salvation and man's relationship to God.

Symbols of Kingship

It is Mosiah whose reign we find most interesting. Mosiah was obviously a king. His grandfather Mosiah (like Lehi before him) fled the land of Nephi with a group of Nephites who wished to live the gospel under his rule (Omni 1:12–13). These refugees encountered the descendants of Mulek and his followers in the land of Zarahemla. The two peoples, united under the first Mosiah, were taught by the king and the priests and prophets who had accompanied the Nephites. These prophets, including Amaleki, taught from the brass plates, the large plates of Nephi or royal histories, and the small plates of Nephi or prophetic histories. These people generally prospered under the first Mosiah's son Benjamin, who in time turned the kingdom over to his own son Mosiah. Mosiah_2 was named Mosiah, but, like his ruling forefathers, he was also called a "Nephi" (Jacob 1:11). Thus, those who united under him were called "Nephites" (Jacob 1:14). This cultural pattern of naming a people after their first king is repeated among the Lamanites (Mosiah 7:21–22) and also in Amaleki's description of the people of Zarahemla prior to their union with Mosiah's people (Omni 1:14).

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4 See John W. Welch, "Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon," *BYU Studies* 10/1 (Autumn 1969): 69–84. See also John W. Welch, *Chiasmus in Antiquity* (Hildesheim: Gerstenberg Verlag, 1981), 205.

5 See Hugh W. Nibley, "Old World Ritual in the New World," in *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, vol. 6 in *The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, 3d ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and F.A.R.M.S., 1988), 295–310, and Gordon C. Thomasson, "Togetherness Is Sharing an Umbrella: Divine Kingship, the Gnosis, and Religious Syncretism," in John M. Lundquist and Stephen D. Ricks, eds., *By Study and Also by Faith: Essays in Honor of Hugh W. Nibley*, 2 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and F.A.R.M.S., 1990), 523–61.

Mosiah (hereafter I will refer only to Benjamin's son by that name) received tangible symbols of his authority when he became king. In the private investiture and transfer of power (Mosiah 1:10–16) that preceded Benjamin's public coronation of Mosiah (Mosiah 2–5),[6] we find Mosiah receiving the essentials of traditional regalia from his father. This obvious, and yet neglected, historical detail merits our attention, for it highlights Mosiah's authority and the complex pattern of Old World kingship, of which Mosiah was a part. Prior to assembling the people through the new King Mosiah's proclamation (Mosiah 2:1), Benjamin gave his son the Nephite national treasures, which are representative of those that a real king was required to possess anciently (Mosiah 1:16). The first of these, the plates of brass, contained among other things much of the Old Testament as we know it, a book of Joseph (2 Nephi 4:2), and a genealogy of Lehi's forefathers back to Joseph (1 Nephi 5:14). These, coupled with the genealogy and records of the kings of the Nephites on the large plates (1 Nephi 6:1; 9:4), proved Mosiah's right to rule by the legitimacy of his descent.[7] Other kings of antiquity required royal genealogists to concoct similar-appearing records to rationalize their claim to the right to rule (whatever their real ancestry). The countless forged genealogies produced by successive dynasties or royal houses to justify their usurpation of a throne prove nothing as much as the necessity for kings at least to claim royal descent. Myths of the semi-divine and divine ancestors of royal progenitors, most of whom came to power by force, can also be found around the world, each seeking to justify a dynasty's existence.

The second treasure, the regal sword (in this case the sword of Laban), is often seen in royal and religious art as a

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6 The public coronation has been treated rather thoroughly by Nibley, "Old World Ritual in the New World," 295–310. The private ceremony has been heretofore largely neglected. Other themes peculiar to the Old World symbolic complex associated with kingship abound, including Nephi as hunter and Nephi as blacksmith. See, for example, the smith's apron as a Persian "title of liberty" in Giorgio di Santillana and Hersha von Deschend, *Hamlet's Mill: An Essay on Myth and the Frame of Time* (Boston: Gambit, 1969), appendix 11, 370–71; cf. Hugh Nibley, "A Strange Order of Battle," in *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, 216–18.

7 The importance of genealogical records is not unprecedented, of course. Cf. Nehemiah 7:64–65.

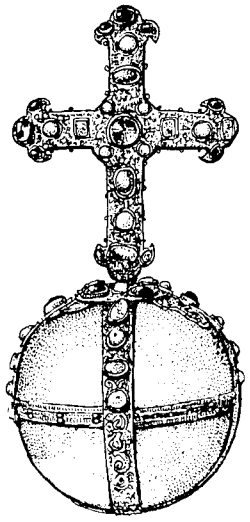

Figure 1. Engraving of Charles V, by Pieter Balten, 1580. It is clear by comparing numerous portraits of this and other rulers that what is important is not the exact likeness of the ruler, but rather that the symbols of royalty, the sword and orb, be present so that there is no question as to the status of the person portrayed. Iconographic legibility was far more of a concern than photographic realism. From Pál Kelemen, *Baroque and Rococo in Latin America* (New York: Dover, 1967), vol. 2, pl. 89d.

Figure 2. Royal orb (*Reichsapfel*) of the Holy Roman Empire, twelth century. Semiprecious stones and gold on wooden core. Hofburg Treasury, Vienna. Redrawn from Percy E. Schramm, *Sphaira-Globus Reichsapfel* (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1958).

symbol of power and rule. In pacific reigns it may be represented less often than a sceptre or stylized arrow, but it is always in the background, at least implicitly, around the world (fig. 1).[8] Until the King of Peace comes, the sword as a symbol of power, or its modern-day equivalent, will remain with us.

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8 Even today in Southeast Asia, the *kris*, or Malay dagger, retains much of the royal sword's symbolism.

The last of the treasures that Benjamin entrusted to Mosiah, the Liahona, deserves special attention. The Liahona was a "ball or director, which led our fathers through the wilderness, which was prepared by the hand of the Lord that thereby they might be led, every one according to the heed and diligence which they gave unto him" (Mosiah 1:16). The Liahona was, in fact, a royal treasure, passed from father to son by Nephi's descendants. Few details in the Book of Mormon have been ridiculed more than the Liahona,[9] and yet few more accurately reflect what one might find in an authentic ancient record. By the time we find possible parallels to the Liahona in later European art, they are stylized almost beyond recognition, and their original use and the power which made them work is completely forgotten.

Royal treasures like the Liahona were once well known, such as the one pictured in the Emperor Charles V's left hand (fig. 1). It is an *orbis terrarum, Reichsapfel*, or orb.[10] The earth or heavenly globe with a cross atop it is also common in the religious art of the period (fig. 2). This symbol of royalty is traceable at least to the time of the late Roman period[11] and arguably to Babylonia as far back as 600 B.C.[12] The orb in some cases is clearly a polished rock crystal, a "crystal ball," or perhaps refers to the "earth as a sea of glass" (figs. 3 and 4).[13] It is a symbol of earthly rule and heavenly power, and its use in royal and religious iconography is an implicit claim to worldly dominion, symbolizing its possessor's power over this earth. It represents an assertion of "holding the world in the palm of

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9 That such ridicule is unjustified is also illustrated in Hugh W. Nibley, *Since Cumorah*, vol. 7 in *The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, 2d ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and F.A.R.M.S., 1988), 251–55.

10 For a good general discussion of this topic, see Percy E. Schramm, *Sphaira-Globus Reichsapfel* (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1958).

11 Tonio Hölscher, *Victoria Romana* (Mainz am Rhein: Verlag von Zabern, 1967), 41–47.

12 Cf. J. T. Milik, *The Books of Enoch* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976), 17, for an English version of the famous Babylonian world map.

13 Cf. the crystalline spheres in Plato, *Republic* X, 616D; Hero of Alexandria, *The Pneumatics* 46, describes a cosmic model made of two glass hemispheres; a related discussion on precious stones is found in Hugh W. Nibley, *The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri: An Egyptian Endowment* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1975), 120–24; cf. also Facsimile 2 of the book of Abraham.

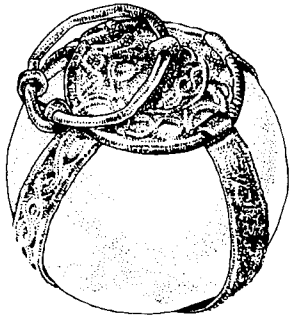

Figure 3. Crystal ball (*Kristallkugel*), suspended in the von Picquigny crypt, fifth or sixth century. Rock crystal and gold. Oxford, Ashmolean Museum. Redrawn from Schramm, *Sphaira-Globus Reichsapfel,* pl. 9, fig. 21.

Figure 4. Christ as Salvator Mundi with the crystal sphere of the firmament (*kristallene Himmelskugel*) as royal orb. Oil painting by Johann Kemmer, 1537. Provincial Museum, Hanover. From Schramm, *Sphaira-Globus Reichsapfel,* pl. 50, fig. 105.

one's hand" (figs. 5 and 6). In the medieval period, the orb was often inscribed as a map, in an abstract form that appears to be a capital letter *T* (fig. 5). The deceptively simple shape was not a reflection of the geographical ignorance of medieval cartographers, but was an idealized representation of the "known" world, charted in accord with theological principles.[14] Above the top of the *T* we read the word *ASIA*. To the left of the base of the *T* we read *EVROPA*, and to its right we read *AFRICA*. The significance of the map begins to emerge when we realize that the intersecting lines are not a *T* but rather three of

[14] Cf. the thirteenth-century Ebstorf map in which Christ holds the usual T-map with Jerusalem in the center; in Niedersächsische Landesbibliothek, Hanover.

Figure 5. Caesar Augustus (Octavian) seated on the usual lion couch/throne with a tripartite disk (*dreigeteilten Erdkreis*). Manuscript illustration, twelfth century (Codex Gent. Universitäts-Bibliothek 92f. 138r). This is a typical example of a medieval "T" map. Redrawn from Schramm, *Sphaira-Globus Reichsapfel,* pl. 35, fig. 73a.

the four arms of a cross. Rotating the orb ninety degrees clockwise puts Asia in the East, as we are accustomed to looking at maps ("orienting" them with north at the top). In this way Europe and Africa are in a clear position relative to each other and to Asia. The visible parts of the cross represented the Mediterranean, Black, and Red seas respectively. The "world" in this map, and in the medieval mind, was seen as a huge cathedral built on the medieval cruciform plan: Gibraltar is the

Figure 6. God as the master builder/mason/architect of the world (*Weltenbaumeister*). Redrawn from Bible Moralisée, frontispiece, c. 1220–1230. Oxford, Bodleian Library. As the world rests in the palm of God's left hand, the "compass" is used in its design and construction.

nave of the cathedral, and Jerusalem is the apse. From this perspective, the top, or fourth arm of the cross does not project into Asia, but instead ascends vertically from Jerusalem into heaven (linking into Jacob's ladder, the earth-navel or world center, the tree of life symbolism, and a host of other images). Such a map corresponds to spiritual rather than geographical realities in this fallen world, and the orb in the king's hand suggested not only his divine investiture within this cosmological framework, but also the king's knowledge of his kingdom. That knowledge was also made concrete in "the royal progress," an institution in which the king traveled around his realm.[15]

The King as Symbol

In the book of Mosiah, then, we have a careful combination of Nephite regal and priestly records and histories, accurate even though condensed, down to the minutiae of their royal treasures. Such care on the part of the writers and editors of the book of Mosiah would suggest that we should not take this symbolic complex lightly. Just as "there is none other people that understand the things which were spoken unto the Jews like unto them, save it be that they are taught after the manner of the things of the Jews" (2 Nephi 25:5), we cannot hope to understand the things of the Nephites, their culture, their lives, and their world in a vacuum. A fiction writer can invent for us the "thoughts" and "motives" of the characters he creates, as well as their actions. But while we can learn a great deal about the cultural background of scriptural figures of the past, we have only the evidence actually in the scriptures as to their personalities. Their actions and words may be recorded and can provide valuable lessons for us.

We do not, however, know their true personalities, their feelings, and the sincerity of their motives that prompted them to act as they did. And so we look at the evidence—Mosiah's role

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15 See Hugh W. Nibley, "Tenting, Toll, and Taxing," in *The Ancient State*, vol. 10 in *The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and F.A.R.M.S., 1991), 33–98; cf. Gordon C. Thomasson, "Togetherness Is Sharing an Umbrella: Divine Kingship, the Gnosis, and Religious Syncretism," in John M. Lundquist and Stephen D. Ricks, eds., *By Study and Also by Faith: Essays in Honor of Hugh W. Nibley*, 2 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and F.A.R.M.S., 1990), 1:538–50.

in Nephite history, what he did and said, and why he played a pivotal role in the New World history of the Nephites prior to the coming of Christ.

Mosiah, like the sons of prophets and kings before him, had "been taught in the language of the Egyptians" (Mosiah 1:4). Such an education was not a mere academic exercise. The plates of brass and Nephi's plates were written in this language. Through study of the scriptures recorded thereon, Benjamin sought to help his sons come to value the scriptures and become "men of understanding; and that they might know concerning the prophecies" (Mosiah 1:2), as well as the commandments and the mysteries of God (cf. Mosiah 1:3). It is not surprising that the descendants of Joseph, especially the members of a ruling family within that tribe, continued to use this language for their own records and scriptures. Only gradually did Nephite writing evolve into what Moroni described as the "reformed Egyptian" in which Mormon transcribed the scriptures he abridged and eventually passed on to us (Mormon 9:32–33). However, Egyptian was probably the language of only a small royal and priestly minority, being used for scriptures and concise, permanent record-keeping. The Book of Mormon texts imply that other materials more perishable than metal plates were used for some documents (Jacob 4:2). The majority of the Nephites were probably literate (in Hebrew?), since Mosiah used written documents to communicate generally with his subjects (Mosiah 29:33). We also know that other peoples were literate and had their own scriptures: the priests of Noah questioned Abinadi out of their scriptures (Mosiah 12:20) and later taught the Lamanites to read (Mosiah 24:4–6). Also, Abinadi's response to his inquisitors was to "read" the remainder of the commandments of God (Mosiah 13:11) as he bore witness to them.

The book of Mosiah teaches principles of truth by illustrating them in a dialectical style suggestive of Lehi's law of opposition in all things (or the ancient doctrine of the two ways), emphasizing that all things can be used either for good or evil. For example, Benjamin taught Mosiah and his other sons to read, following Lehi's example, so that they could be "men of understanding" (Mosiah 1:2) and could teach their children and their subjects the gospel (Mosiah 1:4). Teaching literacy so that men might come to know God was a righteous act and tended to have constructive consequences. In contrast, when Amulon and the priests of Noah taught the Lamanites to read and write the "language of Nephi" it was an aid to commerce and military op-

erations. The Lamanites consequently waxed great in trade and plunder, but they were not taught anything concerning "the Lord their God, neither the law of Moses; nor did they teach them the words of Abinadi" (Mosiah 24:5). Thus, the Lamanites became "a cunning and a wise people, as to the wisdom of the world," but they also came to "[delight] in all manner of wickedness" (Mosiah 24:7).

The few verses in the book of Mosiah that deal directly with Mosiah are eloquent because of a constant, implicit juxtaposing of the application of just principles in his reign against the ways of King Noah. Mosiah and Noah then become, respectively, type and antitype of a just, though human, ruler. Mosiah "did walk in the ways of the Lord, and . . . did keep his commandments in all things" (Mosiah 6:6), whereas Noah did not keep the commandments and walked "after the desires of his own heart" (Mosiah 11:2). Mosiah commanded his people to obey the laws of their fathers, including Benjamin's royal imperative, "I would that ye should impart of your substance to the poor" (Mosiah 4:26). This command to support the poor financially through taxes was also given by Alma (Mosiah 18:27).[16] Mosiah labored to support himself (Mosiah 6:7), while Noah taxed people heavily, not for the benefit of the poor, but for his own benefit and that of his court (Mosiah 11:3–14).

Mosiah championed religious freedom among his people and refused to judge those who dissented or criticized his religion (Mosiah 26:12). The Lord gave Alma authority, only in specific cases, to number such individuals in the church no longer (Mosiah 26:32–36). Noah, in contrast, caused those who disagreed with him and his priests to be hunted, imprisoned, tried, and killed (Mosiah 12:17–19; 17:1, 5–13). While Mosiah was taught in the ways of the Lord and was spiritually gifted, being a "seer" (Mosiah 8:12–17), he was quick to turn over leadership of the Church to another prophet, Alma (Mosiah 25:19; 26:8). This contrasts with Noah, who appointed priests unto himself (Mosiah 11:5), including Alma (before he repented), and ordered that Abinadi be killed (Mosiah 17:1, 12).

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16 That government officials received "wages" is obvious in Alma 11:1–3. Obviously the "judges" and "officers" must have received compensation from public monies in the cases of indigent defendants. There is no evidence that judges got contingent fees, but rather were paid for time employed, and thus "did stir up the people . . . that they might have more employ, that they might get money according to the suits which were brought before them" (Alma 11:20).

Mosiah's proclamation of religious freedom (Mosiah 27:1–2) contrasts with Noah's persecutions of Alma's church (Mosiah 18:31–34). Mosiah was always concerned with his people. This is exemplified in his seeking out those who had left the land of Zarahemla under Zeniff (Mosiah 7:1) and his joy at their return (Mosiah 22:14; 24:25). Mosiah peacefully reunited the people of Limhi, the followers of Alma, and the repentant children of the priests of Noah into one people. All the people residing in Zarahemla took upon themselves the name of Nephites, because the king was a descendant of Nephi (Mosiah 25:1–13). Moreover, he allowed Alma to establish churches throughout all the land of Zarahemla (Mosiah 25:19). The fruits of Noah's reign, on the other hand, were the division and partial destruction and enslavement of his people.

Mosiah recognized some of the contrasts between the actions of a just king and King Noah's actions, for he explicitly used King Noah as an example in his argument against kingship to his people (Mosiah 29:18–23). After Mosiah's sons had repented of their evil way of life and tried to repair the damage they had done among the Nephites, they requested their father's permission to go on a mission to the Lamanites (Mosiah 28:1). This, too, contrasts with Amulon and the efforts of the rest of Noah's priests among the Lamanites (Mosiah 24:1–9). After seeking the Lord's will, Mosiah allowed his sons to go (Mosiah 28:6–8). Finally, none of Mosiah's sons was willing to inherit the kingship from him, desiring instead to devote their time to serving the Lord directly (Mosiah 28:10).

Much can be said concerning the temptation to have kings and to be a king. In Mosiah's letters to his people (Mosiah 29) after his sons refused the kingship, we find statements on government which are of interest even today.[17] But few of us think in terms of ever being faced with the option of becoming, or accepting rule by, an earthly king. Still, however remote a possibility that might seem, we can all profit from lessons to be drawn from the end of Mosiah's reign. As President Kimball said, in warning the Saints against the idolatry of material security,

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17 It is noteworthy, however, that the antimonarchical sentiments voiced by Mosiah bear no resemblance to the "Fourth of July" rhetoric common in Joseph Smith's time and before in the United States. See Richard L. Bushman, "The Book of Mormon and the American Revolution," *BYU Studies* 17:1 (Autumn 1976): 3- 20.

> As I study ancient scripture, I am more and more convinced that there is significance in the fact that the commandment "Thou shalt have no other gods before me" is the first of the Ten Commandments.
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> Few men have ever knowingly and deliberately chosen to reject God and his blessings. Rather, we learn from the scriptures that because the exercise of faith has always appeared to be more difficult than relying on things more immediately at hand, carnal man has tended to transfer his trust in God to material things.[18]

Like Mosiah's sons, we have the option to accumulate our treasures on earth, rather than in heaven. Mosiah's sons had the choice to risk the temptations of earthly kingship or to serve the Lord as missionaries. Their opportunity, though on a somewhat larger scale than ours, perhaps, to "gain the whole world" (Matthew 16:26), had a price—and they refused to pay that price.

The Righteous King as a Symbol of Planned Obsolescence

One of the prices of kingship is that a king must assume personal responsibility for many of the iniquities of his subjects (Mosiah 29:30–34, 38). Mosiah specifically wanted to protect his sons from this burden. He desired "that the burden should come upon all the people, that every man might bear his part" (Mosiah 29:34), and that each be willing "to answer for his own sins" (Mosiah 29:38). This directly contrasts with the understanding of the people of Noah (Mosiah 12:13–14). We ask, "How is it that a king could bear the burden of his peoples' sins? Isn't every man and woman responsible for his or her own salvation?"

We believe in God's children having agency to act and to be responsible for their actions. There is no contradiction between Mosiah's words and this principle. In the resolution of this seeming paradox a most relevant message of the book of Mosiah becomes visible. Mosiah holds kingship up to us as a type and example of a basic gospel principle and its unrighteous opposite. Stated succinctly, the ideal relationship of a king to his

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18 Spencer W. Kimball, "The False Gods We Worship," *Ensign* 6 (June 1976): 4.

subjects is like that of parents to their children and of God to all his children. Mosiah, though fallible like us, typifies this relationship, just as a wicked king does the opposite. It is the responsibility of parents in Zion to teach their children just principles (D&C 68:25–28). They are to allow them to exercise their free agency, enlarge their personal stewardships, and ultimately to help them towards being joint heirs of all our Father possesses. If parents fail to fulfill this responsibility, "the sin be upon the heads of the parents." Mosiah taught his people true principles and guided them to the point where he could justifiably relinquish responsibility for their actions to them and thus literally make them stewards over themselves and the inheritors of his kingdom. The roles of parents and kings are both reflections of the plan in which God places us here on earth, teaches us, and sets us free to enlarge our stewardship or magnify our talents and to choose for ourselves whether or not we will be joint heirs of all he possesses. Moreover, in spite of our failures, he provides a Savior for us. This lesson is implicit in the entire book of Mosiah. It serves as a complex type to the plan of salvation; and King Noah, like Satan, is a reflection of the other plan—not teaching his people correct principles, not allowing them freedom, leaving them ultimately disinherited, driven from their lands and hunted—in short, leading them to physical and spiritual death.

Having children, much like being a king, is a great responsibility. Those "people who belonged to king Benjamin" (Mosiah 1:1), whom he described as "my people," and over whom he then placed Mosiah, charging him to lead "this people, whom the Lord our God hath given us" (Mosiah 1:10), were like children, and answered only for a correspondingly limited stewardship. It was Mosiah's responsibility, just as it is every parent's, to expand the capacity or stewardship of all the spirit children of God entrusted to him, helping them develop the fulness of their potential.

Each of us is a capable of becoming a king or queen. Each of us has within the potential to attain to the complete glory of a true king—not to be one of the tawdry glitter and tinsel imitations that rule over a small part of this globe—but a king or queen in fact and deed, following, as did Mosiah, the pattern set by the King of Kings, accepting the responsibility to teach some of our Father's children, setting them free as mature adult agents unto themselves, and ultimately sharing our entire kingdom with them, as our Father will with us.

Mosiah's life is not just a bit of arcane, though accurate, history. It is a prototype of how every one of us, preparing to be kings and queens unto the Most High God, must live our lives and raise our children. Rather than constantly hedging them in and preventing their growth, we have the responsibility to open the universe to them, thereby expanding their agency and preparing them to be heirs of the Kingdom.