

The Message of The Book of Mosiah

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The Outline of the Book of Mosiah is Chiastic

- a) King Benjamin exhorts his sons (1:1-8)
- b) Mosiah chosen king to succeed his father (1:10)
- c) Mosiah receives the records (1:16)
- d) Benjamin's speech and the words of an angel of the Lord (2:9-5:15)
- e) People enter into a covenant (6:1)
- f) Priests consecrated (6:3)
- g) Ammon leaves Zarahemla for the land of Lehi-Nephi (7:1-6)
- h) People Limhi in bondage, Ammon put in prison (7:15)
- i) The 24 gold plates (8:9)
- j) The record of Zeniff begins as he leaves Zarahemla (9:1)
- k) Zeniff prevails against the Lamanites (9:14-10:20)
- l) Noah and his priests (11:1-15)
- m) Abinadi persecuted and thrown in prison (11-12)
- n) Abinadi reads Isaiah's prophecies of Christ (13-14)
- n') Abinadi make his own prophecies of Christ (15-16)
- m') Abinadi persecuted and killed (17:5-20)
- l') Noah and his priests (18:32-20:5)
- k') Lamanites threaten the people of Limhi (20:6-26)
- j') Record of Zeniff ends as Limhi's people leave the land of Lehi-Nephi
- i') The 24 gold plates (21:27, 22:14)
- h') People of Alma in bondage (23)
- g') Alma leaves the land of Lehi-Nephi for Zarahemla (24)
- f') The Church organized by Alma (25:14-24)
- e') Unbelievers refuse to enter covenant (26:1-4)
- d') The words of Alma and the words of an angel of the Lord (26-27)
- c') Alma the Younger receives the records (28:20)
- b') Judges chosen instead of a king (29:5-32)
- a') Mosiah exhorts his people (29:5-32)

You may have wondered, "Why all these flash-backs?" Once we recognize this chiasmic structure, the need for the flash-backs becomes obvious. Note the precision of this chiasmus. Everything in Mosiah is recorded in just exactly the place where it needs to be recorded in order to create this complex structure. Why did Mormon do this?

The fullness of the message is in the structure. There is a powerful message that is emphasized by this careful organization.

1. **The beginning of Mosiah:** King Benjamin's people are born again — A righteous people accept a message delivered by an angel of God and are *born again*. Even the righteous need to be *born again*.
2. **The end of Mosiah:** Alma is born again — a wicked and rebellious man accepts a message delivered by an angel of God and is *born again*. Even the rebellious sinner can be *born again*.
3. **At the center of Mosiah:** Abinadi identifies Christ as the father of this rebirth — all who are *born again* become *His seed* and he becomes their father. Thus, Christ is the Father and the Son. Those who are born again, the children of Christ, these are they whose feet are "beautiful upon the mountains."

That We Must be Born Again IS the Message of Mosiah

The message of the Book of Mosiah is a powerful affirmation and expansion of Jesus' words to Nicodemus, "**Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.**" (See John 3:1-6.) It is interesting that many Latter-day Saints would use "born again" as the identification of a vocal and narrow minded subset of the Christian population.

Yes, there are a people who are very loud and unbending in their insistence that every man and woman must be *born again* in order to be saved in the kingdom of God. Latter-day Saints sometimes act embarrassed by their claim. Yet, no place in scripture is the necessity of this rebirth more clearly taught than in the Book of Mormon — in this Book of Mosiah.

Mormon seems to have gone to great lengths in his organization of this book to say, "**Pay attention! I have something very important to teach you.**" Note again the way this message is structured. Even the outline of the total chapter seems to be painstakingly organized to emphasize this central message: **all must be born again** to enter the Kingdom of our Father.

In spite of Mormon's emphasis, we have allowed our Christian friends to claim this doctrine as their own. True, what they teach is an imperfect view of the doctrine's fullness. But, how many of us are prepared to help our friends understand that fullness. This doctrine is *common ground*, and the presentation of this doctrine by Mormon and Benjamin is powerful both in content and *witness*. No one, fully exposed to the structure of the Book of Mosiah is going to make the claim that Joseph Smith, or Sidney Rigdon, or any other person living in the America of the 1820s wrote this book. Some may claim a Satanic origin, but our response to that echoes Christ's response to the same charge.

Rebirth, Sanctification, and the Mighty Change

Alma, repented while unconscious???

How could Alma repent while unconscious? Well, he was not *really* unconscious. He testifies of his thoughts during this time in a powerful chiasmic expression of his pain and his joy (Alma 36). But, of course, he physically **did** nothing. Yet, he testifies, "I have **repented** of my sins, and have been **redeemed** of the Lord; behold I am **born of the Spirit**." In his apparent unconscious state he changed his attitude about Christ, and Christ changed him from a fallen natural man to a "**born again**" Christian.

- I What is the Lord teaching us here in this story of Alma. Certainly, few of us will experience the miraculous change that occurred to Alma. In Alma's case, the speed of the process was an exception, not the rule. But, what about the process itself? Was the nature of that process also an exception? I think not. I see in a careful and thoughtful consideration of Alma's experience the opportunity to better understand this *born again* process and its significance to our salvation.
- I In Alma's experience we learn that our *born again* status isn't something we earn by our righteous acts and devoted service, as important as these are. To be *born again* is a **change** in our **nature** which is

made by God. Alma said, "I am born of the Spirit." I think that this may be the most important **"gift of the Holy Ghost."** We have had hands laid on our heads and we have been commanded to **"receive the Holy Ghost."** For most of us it takes a while for us to prepare ourselves to truly receive even a little bit of that Holy presence. It's a process, and a process may run fast, as in the case of Alma, or it may, as for most of us, be very slow. But the results can be the same.

Dr. Millet's Insight's on This New Birth

Dr. Robert Millet, Dean of the BYU Department of Religious Education, uses an eight point outline to teach the deeper meaning of the doctrine of the *New Birth* (from the FARMS video, "The Doctrine of the New Birth").

1. ***One of the vital purposes of the plan of salvation is to renew men and women — to make of them new creatures in Christ.***

Dr. Millet expands on this in these words:

"It is important to belong to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, what the revelations call the only true and living church upon the face of the whole earth. That's a great privilege. But belonging is not enough. The gospel is intended not just to get us into the Church, not even just to get us into the family, but to bring us to life. And so, **the principle of rebirth entails coming to life.**"

President Benson said, "When we awake and are born of God, a new day will break and Zion will be redeemed." (Pres. Ezra Taft Benson, "Born of God")

The Lord declared it to Alma: (Mosiah 27:25-26)

*Marvel not that all mankind, yea, men and women, all nations, kindreds, tongues and people, must be born again; yea, born of God, changed from their carnal and fallen state, to a state of righteousness, being redeemed of God, becoming his sons and daughters; And thus they **become new creatures**; and unless they do this, they can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God."*

2. ***In the scriptures, birth and death are often defined in terms of one another***

We must leave our premortal existence (we **die**?)



To be **born** into mortality

We must leave our sinful nature (our natural man must **die**)



To be **"born again"** into righteousness

We must **die** in mortality



To be **born** into immortality

There is a natural birth and a spiritual birth: the natural birth gives rise to the natural man and the spiritual birth gives rise to the spiritual man. (Baptism is the symbol: see Romans 6)

3. ***Baptism is a two step process: by water and by the Spirit.***

Dr. Millet suggests a possible rewording of an Article of Faith: "We Believe the first principles and ordinances of the gospel are, first faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; second, repentance, third, rebirth, a two-step process: baptism by water and by fire."

Joseph Smith: "You might as well baptize a bag of sand as to baptize a man without giving him the gift of the Holy Ghost."

Baptism is *necessary* for the remission of our sins, but the sins are not washed away by the water. Note Moroni's description of baptism among the Nephites: (Moroni 6:2-4)

"Neither did they receive any unto baptism save they came forth with a broken heart and a contrite spirit, and witnessed unto the church that they truly repented of all their sins.

"And none were received unto baptism save they took upon them the name of Christ, having a determination to serve him to the end.

*"And after they had been received unto baptism, and were wrought upon and **cleansed by the power of the Holy Ghost**, they were numbered among the people of the church of Christ."*

(See also 2 Nephi 31:17 and John 3:5)

4. **Rebirth consists of a personal spiritual experience plus ordinances.**

Joseph Smith said:

"Being born again, comes by the Spirit of God through ordinances." (TPJS, p.162)

He also said:

"It is one thing to see the kingdom of God, and another thing to enter into it. We must have a change of heart to see the kingdom of God, and subscribe [to] the articles of adoption to enter therein." (TPJS, p.328)

President Ezra Taft Benson said:

"Beside the physical ordinance of baptism and the laying on of hands, one must be spiritually born again to gain exaltation and eternal life." (See "Born of God", *ENSIGN*, November, 1985, pp. 5-7)

Dr. Millet explains:

"I've often said that people who've been touched, who've been born again, to see the kingdom, you could tell them, 'Now Mr. and Mrs. Brown, you need to know that Joseph Smith built the Brooklyn Bridge.' And they would say, 'Oh, yes. I know he did, If you say he did, he did.' Now there's something that's happened to them. They're not defensive anymore, they don't want to fight, they don't want to argue, they don't want to debate scripture; they're teachable. The other thing that happens is that their own book of scripture, the Bible is open to them. They now see things they've never seen before."

I don't know about that Brooklyn Bridge stuff, but the Spirit does soften hearts and witness that the Lord's servants can be trusted (we must be trustworthy!). Yes, when "born again" we do become teachable — but, we have not been promised an immediate witness, that "sure knowledge" which many seek. Remember the Lord's council:

To some it is given by the Holy Ghost to know that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and that he was crucified for the sins of the world. To others it is given to believe on their words, that they also might have eternal life if they continue faithful." (D&C 46:13-14)

Nephi emphasizes the necessity of this mighty spiritual change and our dependence on the Holy Spirit: 2 Nephi 32:1-7. He further declares the requirement that this be a permanent change of heart: 2 Nephi 31:14-16.

5. **The new creation is a change of attitude and a change of state — we come to see things as they really are.**

In the Book of Mormon we read about a significant change in attitude that occurred to the people of King Benjamin. The record states that the Spirit of the Lord wrought a mighty change in their hearts and they declared that "we have no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually" (Mosiah 5:2). Dr. Millet comments:

"Have any of you ever felt that? Are these the only people in the world who've ever had

that experience? Their change is such that they 'have no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually.' Has anybody here ever felt that? Of course you have. You or I have been in meetings, or in conferences, or sessions, where we've been so moved by what was said, by what we felt, that there came into our minds and our hearts an honest and genuine resolve that we didn't want to do anything bad again. How long does it last? A half-hour sometimes. Let's suppose a half-hour later you did do something wrong. You snapped at someone, or you were uncharitable. Was it a disingenuous resolve? Was it not a true feeling you had? Was it not born of the Spirit? Do you see what I'm driving at? My question to you is, do we have any indication in the Book of Mormon that the people of Benjamin never sinned again? What's your guess? That they did. But why? They didn't want to. The principle here is, the new birth is a change in feelings and desires. It isn't that a person becomes perfect. It isn't that a person never makes mistakes again. It's just that they don't stay long in the darkness."

Elder Boyd K. Packer teaches us the principle and illustrates this "mighty change":

"Perhaps the greatest discovery of my life, without question the greatest commitment, came when finally I had the confidence in God that I would loan or yield my agency to Him — without compulsion or pressure, without any duress, as a single individual alone, by myself, no counterfeiting, nothing expected other than the privilege. In a sense, speaking figuratively, to take one's agency, that precious gift which the scriptures make plain is essential to life itself, and say, 'I will do as thou directs,' is afterward to learn that in so doing you possess it all the more." (For the full text of this talk, go to "I Want to Obey")

A change of attitude **and** a change of state. What is this change of state? The people of King Benjamin declared:

And we, ourselves, also, through the infinite goodness of God, and the manifestations of his Spirit, have great views of that which is to come; and were it expedient, we could prophesy of all things" (Mosiah 5:3).

This was definitely more than a change of attitude. Their views of life and the world underwent a major modification. Certainly this was true of Alma the younger. He was an enemy to the Church and became a teacher, a prophet, even the High Priest and head of the Church. President Benson makes the simple declaration: "When you choose to follow Christ, **you choose to be changed.**" He goes in to give this magnificent description of the contrast between Christ's way and that of the world:

"The Lord works from the inside out. The world works from the outside in. The world would take people out of the slums. Christ takes the slums out of people, and then they take themselves out of the slums. The world would mold men by changing their environment. Christ changes men, who then change their environment. The world would shape human behavior, but Christ can change human nature." ("Born of God", *ENSIGN* November, 1985, pp. 5-7)

Elder Packer makes this relevant observation as to the nature and depth of this change, and a necessary condition:

"Obedience — that which God will never take by force — He will accept when freely given. And He will then return to you freedom that you can hardly dream of — the freedom to feel and to know, the freedom to do, and the freedom to be, at least a thousand-fold more than we offer Him. Strangely enough, the key to freedom is obedience." ("I Want to Obey")

6. ***Those who are born again are received into a new family relationship — they become sons and daughters of Jesus Christ.***

See Mosiah 5:4-8; Mosiah 15; and *The Promised Messiah* p. 363.

- I We take the family name
- I We covenant to "always remember Him" — *always remember who He is!*
- I We must always remember that His name is sacred
- I We enter a **covenant relationship** with Christ:

- | As members of His Church, we take His name: we accept Him as our father and our *Master*
- | We **covenant** that we are willing to keep His commandments: as members of the family, we do our chores
- | We **covenant** that we will always remember that the *name* WE now bear is **sacred**
- | We enter this **covenant relationship** with baptism
- | We renew this **covenant relationship** each time we partake of the Sacrament.
- | How do we retain this **covenant relationship**?

7. ***It was never intended that we remain children forever, even the children of Christ — If we are faithful, we will become joint heirs with Christ: the sons and daughters of the Father.***

John said that when we see Christ we will be like him (1 John 3:2) and Paul declared:

*The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and **joint-heirs** with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together" (Romans 8:16-17).*

"Joint-heirs with Christ!" As the First-born he is the natural heir and when we seek to "lay hold upon every good thing," we are "born again" and enter into his family — he becomes our father and we his children (Moroni 7:19). But, we are to become **more** than children of Christ, we are promised that we might become the sons and daughters of God the Father. We are the Father's heirs, not Christ's heirs. We are to be raised to the status of joint-heirs with Christ. We are to be like him!

Elder McConkie describes how Saints become sons of God:

"As men pursue the goal of eternal life, they first enter in at the gate of repentance and baptism, thereby taking upon them — selves the name of Christ. They then gain power to become his sons and daughters, to be adopted into his family, to be brethren and sisters in his kingdom. Baptism standing alone does not transform them into family members, but it opens the door to such a blessed relationship; and if men so live as to obtain the Spirit and are in fact born again, then they become members of the Holy Family.

"Then, if they press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, keeping the commandments and living by every word that proceedeth forth from the mouth of God, they qualify for celestial marriage, and this gives them power to become the sons of God, meaning the Father. They thus become joint-heirs with Christ who is his natural heir. Those who are sons of God in this sense are the ones who become gods in the world to come (D&C 76:54-60). They have exaltation and godhood because the family unit continues in eternity (D&C 132:19-24). Celestial marriage standing alone does not transform them into sons of God and make them joint-heirs with Christ, but it opens the door to this greatest of all blessings; and if those involved keep their covenants, they are assured of receiving the promised inheritance. Through Christ and his atoning sacrifice they 'are begotten sons and daughters unto God' (D&C 76:24), meaning the Father. 'And all those who are begotten through me,' Christ says, 'are partakers' of his glory (D&C 93:22)." (Bruce R. McConkie, Doctrinal New Testament Commentary, Vol.2, pp. 474-5)

8. ***The new birth is most often a process.***

Elder Bruce R. McConkie gives us this description of that processes:

"What you have to do is get on the straight and narrow path — thus charting a course leading to eternal life — and then, being on that path, pass out of this life in full fellowship . . ."