

King Benjamin and the Mysteries of God

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The scriptures are like a great disassembled puzzle. If we want to know what one section means, we may have to assemble additional pieces of scripture for a fuller picture. In particular, we might want to know what was happening at the temple in Zarahemla with King Benjamin and his people; we might want to understand the spiritual dynamics of the event and what they have to do with us. We can find several verbal parallels scattered throughout scripture which help identify the pattern into which an event such as the one with Benjamin's people fits.

To learn more about this significant event and its meaning for us, let us consider several passages in the King Benjamin account: First, in Mosiah 3:4, the angel says he has come in response to King Benjamin's prayers. For what result was King Benjamin praying? Corollary questions include: What was King Benjamin's role in causing his people to partake of the glory of God and to take the name of Christ, "that thereby they may be distinguished above all the people which the Lord God hath brought out of the land of Jerusalem" (Mosiah 1:11)? As we shall see, King Benjamin, being a prophet of God, had the keys and power of revelation by which he could unlock spiritual blessings for his people, to triumph over the powers of evil, and to bring eternal peace and salvation to his community.

Second, when Benjamin speaks of all the people the Lord brought out of Jerusalem, he is referring to about five hundred years of Nephites, prior to his day, who knew of the coming of the Savior. So, what does he intend to do that will distinguish his community from their forefathers? Why does the angel come, according to Mosiah 3:2-5? In Mosiah 4:3 it says that the people are "filled with joy" and are born again. What can we discover about the experience of being born again both from the account here in Mosiah and from other accounts in scripture? As I will show, Benjamin's people were not spiritually ignorant; they were prepared to receive a powerful spiritual rebirth, the endowment of the Spirit, and the name of Christ. Because of their preparation for this priesthood ordinance, the people's faith became knowledge, and they became known as sons and daughters of God in a sacred temple setting.

King Benjamin: For What Was He Praying, and What Was His Role?

Benjamin was a prophet, seer, and revelator, a king and a priest, one who held the keys of power and blessing for his community. He had received all the accouterments of the high priesthood: the sacred plates, the sword of Laban, the ball or director, and the Urim and Thummim.¹ To understand what King Benjamin did for his people, we need to understand more about the nature of priesthood and priesthood holders. Ammon teaches King Limhi about how seers can both reveal hidden things and also work mighty miracles for the benefit of the people:

A man may have great power given him from God.

But a seer can know of things which are past, and also of things which are to come, and by them . . . shall secret things be made manifest, and hidden things shall come to light, and things

¹ Although the Urim and Thummim is not mentioned among the things that Benjamin entrusts to his son Mosiah (see Mosiah 1:16), it is likely he had it because his father, Mosiah₁, had the interpreters (as alluded to in Omni 1:20), and his son, Mosiah₂, had them (according to Mosiah 28:11, 13); Mosiah 28:14 notes that the interpreters were handed down from generation to generation.

which are not known shall be made known by them, and also things shall be made known by them which otherwise could not be known.

Thus God has provided a means that man, through faith, might work mighty miracles; therefore he becometh a great benefit to his fellow beings (Mosiah 8:16-18).

Ammon's words are a helpful description of the relationship between the priesthood-holding seer and the revelation of mysteries. **Mysteries are spiritual realities that can only be known and understood by revelation** (see Alma 26:22; D&C 6:11; 42:61); our scriptures record them, our prophets teach them, and the Holy Ghost reveals them to the diligent seeker. We see that our whole gospel is a collection of mysteries—**things that would not be known by men in the mortal probation if God did not reveal them.**

In connection with the powers of revelation, as Ammon says, a righteous priesthood holder can work by faith to provide great benefits to his fellow beings (see Mosiah 8:18). **A priesthood holder can, in fact, exercise great faith in behalf of others of lesser faith and can "fill in" with faith for them;** thus a prophet and a people together can bring down blessings for even a whole community. The Lord seems to be interested not only in individuals, but also in communities of individuals who wish to establish holy cities and have the possibility of uniting with heavenly communities. A priesthood holder's office is to sanctify himself and stand as an advocate before God seeking blessings for his community in the manner of the Lord Jesus Christ himself, whether the community be as small as a family or as large as King Benjamin's. Like the ancients, one who holds the holy priesthood is always "look[ing] for a city" (Hebrews 11:10, 16).

Now we have in our minds what Benjamin might be trying to do as he begins his address:

My brethren, all ye that have assembled yourselves together, . . . 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 (Mosiah 2:9).

The Doctrine and Covenants teaches about the keys of the mysteries:

The power and authority of the higher, or Melchizedek Priesthood, is to hold the keys of all the spiritual blessings of the church—

To have the privilege of receiving the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, to have the heavens opened unto them, to commune with the general assembly and church of the Firstborn, and to enjoy the communion and presence of God the Father, and Jesus the mediator of the new covenant (D&C 107:18-19).

Priesthood is the great governing authority of the universe. It unlocks spiritual blessings of the eternal world for the heirs of salvation. The power to redeem is the most coveted power among righteous priesthood holders in time

or in eternity. **The greater the soul, it seems, the greater the desire to labor to bring souls to Christ** through causing them to take his name upon them. "What was the power of Melchizedek?" Joseph Smith asks. "Twas not the priesthood of Aaron etc., [but it was the power of] a king and a priest to the most high God. [That priesthood was] a perfect law of Theocracy holding *keys of power and blessings*. [It] stood as God to give laws to the people, administering endless lives to the sons and daughters of Adam."² He explains:

[Priesthood] is the channel through which all knowledge, doctrine, the plan of salvation and every important matter is revealed from heaven. . . . It is the channel through which the Almighty commenced revealing his glory at the beginning of the creation of this earth and through which he has continued to reveal himself to the children of men to the present time and through which he will make known his purposes to the end of time.³

Elder David B. Haight, in recounting a sacred experience he had in viewing the Savior's ministry, tells of coming to a greater understanding of the power of the priesthood: "During those days of unconsciousness I was given, by the gift and power of the Holy Ghost, a more perfect knowledge of His mission. I was also given a more complete understanding of what it means to exercise, in His name, the *authority to unlock the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven* for the salvation of all who are faithful."⁴ We see men standing in this priesthood office of unlocking the blessings of salvation all the way back to Adam. Adam, in fact, was the great prototype of priesthood holders who strive to unlock the mysteries for the faithful and to bring their posterity and their communities into at-one-ment with the Lord Jesus Christ. The Prophet Joseph taught that **Adam blessed his posterity because "he wanted to bring them into the presence of God.** They looked for a city . . .," Joseph said, "whose builder and maker is God' (Hebrews 11;10)."⁵

After Adam, Enoch labored with his people and succeeded in bringing to pass not only their sanctification, but also their translation (Moses 7:21), a function of the higher priesthood.⁶ Melchizedek, king and high priest of Salem, brought many into the fullness of the priesthood and into the presence of God. His followers too were translated, "obtained heaven, and sought for the city of Enoch" (JST Genesis 14:34). The Lord says to Moses and his people: "If ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people. . . . And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation" (Exodus 19:5-6), touching on this holy city idea again. Moses "sought diligently to sanctify his people that they might behold the face of God; but they hardened their hearts and could not endure his presence; therefore, the Lord . . . swore that they should not enter into his rest while in the wilderness, which rest is the fullness of his glory" (D&C 84:23-24). The Prophet

² Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, comps. And eds., *Words of Joseph Smith* (Orem, Utah: Grandin Book, 1991), 244; corrected and emphasis added.

³ Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 38-9.

⁴ David B. Haight, "The Sacrament—and the Sacrifice," *Ensign* (November 1989): 60; emphasis added.

⁵ Joseph Fielding Smith, comp., *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 159.

⁶ See Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 41.

Joseph says: "Moses sought to bring the children of Israel into the presence of God, through the power of the Priesthood, but he could not. In the first ages of the world they tried to establish the same thing; and there were *Eliases* raised up who tried to restore these very glories, but did not obtain them; but they prophesied of a day when this glory would be revealed."⁷

In our own dispensation, the Prophet Joseph Smith himself showed great anxiety to see the temple completed before his own death, saying: "Hurry up the work, brethren. . . . Let us finish the temple; the Lord has a great endowment in store for you, and I am anxious that the brethren should have their endowments and receive the fullness of the Priesthood. . . . Then . . . the Kingdom will be established, and I do not care what shall become of me."⁸

In understanding what Benjamin does for his people, it is important to see that he is a king and a priest after the pattern of Adam, Enoch, Moses, and Melchizedek. In fact, Alma's description of Melchizedek has striking parallels to Mormon's description of Benjamin:

Now this Melchizedek was a king over the land of Salem; and his people had waxed strong in iniquity and abomination; yea, they had all gone astray; they were full of all manner of wickedness;

But this Melchizedek having exercised mighty faith, and received the office of the high priesthood according to the holy order of God, did preach repentance unto his people. And behold, they did repent; and Melchizedek did establish peace in the land in his days; therefore he was called the prince of peace. (Alma 13:17-18)

It is apparent from patterns revealed in the scriptures, such as this one seen in Melchizedek, that **one major task of priesthood holders is to triumph over the powers of evil, over one's "enemies" (a task mentioned six times in Benjamin's discourse).** Of this task, Joseph Smith says, **"Salvation is nothing more or less than to triumph over all our enemies and put them under our feet and when we have power to put all enemies under our feet in this world and a knowledge to triumph over all evil spirits in the world to come then we are saved."**⁹

In this priesthood pattern, Benjamin contended with the adversary at three main points: He waged war against the destroying Lamanites—using the sword of Laban, going forth in the strength of the Lord (Words of Mormon 1:13-14); he waged another battle against false prophets, preachers, and teachers; and then he put down contention among his people with the assistance of other holy prophets. The record says, "For behold, King Benjamin was a holy man, and he did reign over his people in righteousness. . . . King Benjamin, by laboring with all the might of his body and the faculty of his whole soul, . . . did once more establish peace in the land" (Words of Mormon 1:17-18). **Peace is that essential condition for spiritual progress and is evidence of the triumph of spiritual principle.**

⁷ *Teachings of the Prophet*, 159; emphasis added.

⁸ George Q. Cannon, quoted in Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 306.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 200.

Both Benjamin and Melchizedek qualified to become true kings and priests by laboring against manifest evil and spiritual entropy to save their people, in the pattern of Christ himself. This is the pattern: The priesthood holder labors with all his faculties to rout Satan from his loved ones as Satan is manifested in physical violence, mental warfare, and contention among the people. For any Melchizedek Priesthood holder to become a prince of peace, he must in some degree wrest his little kingdom from the adversary and halt the plans of the destroyer on behalf of his loved ones.¹⁰ John Taylor connects priesthood saving power with the necessity of passing through trials:

Every true man among us feels he is a Saint of the living God, and that he has an interest in the kingdom of God; every man feels that he is a king and a priest of the Most High God. He is a saviour, and he stands forth and acts with energy and power, with influence, and he is full of the Spirit of the Lord. Hence the difference between them and others, and hence the necessity of the experience we are passing through, the various trials we have to combat . . . , and the difficulties we have to overcome.¹¹

Truly, **the priesthood is a system of fathers**, whether the bearer be a father in a family, a home teacher, a bishop, or a prophet. The record describes Benjamin's people gathering at the temple in families, "every man according to his family . . . every man having his tent with the door thereof towards the temple" (Mosiah 2:5-6). Brigham Young says:

We understand that we are to be made kings and priests unto God; now if I be made the king and lawgiver to my family, and if I have many sons, I shall become the father of many fathers, for they will have sons, and their sons will have sons, and so on, from generation to generation, and, in this way I may become the father of many fathers, or the king of many kings. This will constitute every man a prince, king, lord, or whatever the Father sees fit to confer upon us.

In this way we can become King of kings, and Lord of lords, or Father of fathers, or Prince of princes, and this is the only course, for another man is not going to raise up a kingdom for you.¹²

Priesthood is organized like branches of a vine. The Savior says, "I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing" (John 15:5). The Lord has designated a channel for the blessings of the priesthood. Each member of the Church stands within this channel through a system of connections. How important it is to stay in the priesthood channel and not create disconnections or follow others who stand outside the line and have no authority to administer or to receive the blessings of salvation. A wife stands in the channel of her husband's priesthood which connects to the living prophet and thence to the Lord Jesus Christ, the great High Priest. The blessings of salvation flow down this priesthood

¹⁰ See Mosiah 4:14 on keeping evil out of one's family.

¹¹ *Journal of Discourses* (9 August 1857), 5:114.

¹² *Ibid.* (14 July 1855), 3:265-6).

channel. The individual links of the priesthood chain may be ordinary, imperfect people; nevertheless, notwithstanding their weaknesses, there is no salvation and no being born again outside this channel.

Our father Abraham writes of his great desire to be part of this chain of fathers:

I sought for the blessings of the fathers, and the right whereunto I should be ordained *to administer the same*; having been myself a follower of righteousness, **desiring also to be one who possessed great knowledge**, and to be a **greater follower of righteousness**, and to **possess a greater knowledge**, and to be a father of many nations, a prince of peace, and **desiring to receive instructions**, and **to keep the commandments of God**, I became a rightful heir, a High Priest, holding the right belonging to the fathers.

It was conferred upon me from the fathers; it came down from the fathers. (Abraham 1:2-3; emphasis added)

Benjamin stood in this priesthood channel and acted as a conduit of blessings for his people. We can assume that he had been praying to bring down a particular blessing for his people.

Benjamin's People: The Angel's Permission, Sacred Ordinances, and Spiritual Rebirth

Benjamin's people were an amalgam of those who fled from the land of Nephi under Benjamin's father, Mosiah, and were led by the power of God to the land of Zarahemla, where both peoples were united. Mosiah (I) restored the gospel among them and reigned over them. Therefore, Benjamin's people were not spiritually ignorant. Benjamin says that they had been "a diligent people in keeping the commandments of the Lord" (Mosiah 1:11); he says that there were "not any among them, except . . . little children that [had] not been taught concerning . . . the prophecies spoken by the holy prophets" and all that the Lord commanded their fathers to speak (Mosiah 2:34-35).¹³ We can assume that all these people, having been taught the gospel, were baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. We cannot imagine that they could have been keeping the commandments for a generation or more without having been baptized and having received the Holy Ghost. **There is no true gospel or spiritual progress without these priesthood ordinances.**

In fact, we can infer from the text that Benjamin's people came up to the temple with some preparation for and in some anticipation of a spiritual event. They were aware of what their kings had been trying to do for them according to the ancient pattern. They knew that there was a blessing awaiting them. In Mosiah 2:4 we read that they go up to the temple, in part, to give thanks to God for their king "who had taught them to keep the commandments of God, that they might *rejoice and be filled with love* towards God and all men" (Mosiah 2:4; emphasis added).

To *rejoice and be filled with love* and *to be filled with joy* may have a technical meaning in scripture. They seem to be alternative ways of describing being *born again*. Scripture abounds with references to being filled with this

¹³ From verse 35, we might understand that they knew what was on the small plates of Nephi.

transforming joy and love under the influence of the Holy Ghost. For example, Nephi said, “[God] hath filled me with his love, even unto the consuming of my flesh” (2 Nephi 4:21); the Lamanites were “filled with that joy which is unspeakable and full of glory. . . . The Holy Spirit of God did come down from heaven, and did enter into their hearts, and they were filled as if with fire” (Helaman 5:44-45); the Nephites with the resurrected Christ “were filled with the Holy Ghost and with fire” (3 Nephi 19:13); and Mormon taught us to pray to be filled with this love, which is charity, or perfect love, which will make us pure like Christ (see Moroni 7:48).

It seems that being filled with joy, love, and glory are all ways of describing being born again. Benjamin clearly identifies for the people what they have experienced: “Behold, this day he hath spiritually begotten you; for ye say that your hearts are changed through faith on his name; therefore, ye are born of him and have become his sons and his daughters” (Mosiah 5:7). He says that they have come to the “knowledge of the *glory* of God,” as they have “tasted of his love” (Mosiah 4:11). The Lord connects being born again with being a partaker of the glory of God. He says, “All those who are *begotten through me* are *partakers of the glory* of the same, and are the church of the Firstborn” (D&C 93:22).

One of the blessings of the priesthood is that it can bring others to be partakers of the glory of God. **Angels can also play a part. Angels, as Alma tells us, can be commissioned by God to cause “men to behold of his [God’s] glory”** (Alma 12:29). Thus the angel says to Benjamin, “I am come to declare unto you the glad tidings of great joy. For the Lord hath *heard thy prayers*, and hath judged of thy righteousness, and hath sent me to declare unto thee that thou mayest rejoice; and that thou mayest declare unto thy people, that they may also *be filled with joy*” (Mosiah 3:3-4).

If to be *filled with joy* is the same as to be *born again*, it seems that the angel came from God to authorize Benjamin to proceed with the much-anticipated experience—the endowment of the Spirit and of the name. The angel says that the time has come that these people may literally be “filled with joy” and that “whosoever should believe that Christ should come, the same might receive remission of their sins, and *rejoice with exceedingly great joy*” (Mosiah 3:13).

Is it possible that it was not just the news that the Savior will minister on the earth in a hundred years or so that was intended to fill them with joy—because they already knew all the prophecies of the holy prophets with respect to the Savior’s ministry—but that the atonement was about to become very personal to *them*? Was their faith in the Lord about to become knowledge? This joy announced by the angel was not to be just a momentary experience. **If they were diligent unto prayer (see Moroni 8:26) and obedient to the other instructions their king would give them, they could retain this perfect love and joy in their hearts and even “grow in the knowledge of the glory of [God]”** (Mosiah 4:12).

We can infer then that these two parties—the king and the people—had been praying and preparing for the time when the whole community, in the ancient tradition, might be redeemed and born again.

It is as though King Benjamin, in preparing to put the name of Christ upon his people, precipitates a sort of crisis for them. Without a doubt, he knows what he is going to do, for he says, “I shall give this people a name . . . that never shall be blotted out, except it be through transgression” (Mosiah 1:11-12). Giving them the sacred name

forever may be the same thing as causing them to be born again. Benjamin was about to create either sons of God or sons of perdition; therefore, he prefaced this spiritual endowment with warnings that if they proceeded with taking the name but then turned away in disobedience, they would have to drink of “the cup of the wrath of God” (Mosiah 3:26), and they would drink “damnation to their . . . souls” (Mosiah 3:18, 25).

Benjamin says, quoting the angel's words to him, “When thou shalt have taught thy people the things which the Lord thy God hath commanded thee, even then are they found no more blameless in the sight of God” (Mosiah 3:2). In addition, it may be that Benjamin's words were especially binding on the people, because he had a degree of the same power that the later Nephi did, who ministered with such power and authority that it was “not possible that [the people] could disbelieve his words, for so great was his faith on the Lord Jesus Christ that angels did minister unto him daily” (3 Nephi 7:18; cf. 3 Nephi 7:17). In delivering the words of the angel, Benjamin spoke with the tongue of angels (see 2 Nephi 31:13-14; 32:2-3) and thus, with power.

Notwithstanding the spiritual dangers, the people courageously crossed the threshold of spiritual experience into a fearsome, spiritually induced view of the *reality* of their fallen condition. Benjamin says that at this point, they called on the Lord's name and begged for a remission of sins (see Mosiah 4:20). **In response to their faith and pleas, the Spirit of the Lord came upon them, and they were “filled with joy,” the record says—fulfilling the exact words and promise of the angel.** Their hearts were purified, they received a remission of their sins and peace of conscience because of their “exceeding faith . . . in Jesus Christ” (Mosiah 4:2-3). Benjamin says, “He has poured out his Spirit upon you, and has caused that your hearts should be filled with joy, and has caused that your mouths should be stopped that ye could not find utterance, so exceedingly great was your joy” (Mosiah 4:20).

From additional scriptures we can elaborate a little on what Benjamin's people experienced. There are many things yet to understand about what happened to Benjamin's people, but it seems that to some degree, based on other scriptures about being born again, the people partook of the following blessings:

1. They attained to the order of the Son of God; they became one in God (see Mosiah 5:2): Adam “was born of the Spirit, and . . . quickened in the inner man. And he heard a voice out of heaven, saying: Thou art baptized with fire, and with the Holy Ghost. . . Thou art after the order of him who was without beginning of days or end of years, from all eternity to all eternity. Behold, thou art one in me, a son of God; and thus may all become my sons” (Moses 6:65-68).
2. They received the Holy Spirit of promise (see Mosiah 5:2): “Whosoever is born of God doth not continue in sin; for the Spirit of God remaineth in him; and **he cannot continue in sin**, because he is born of God, having received that holy Spirit of promise” (1 John 3:9, JST).
3. They enjoyed a degree of sanctification (see Mosiah 5:2). Their sins having been remitted, they could not look upon sin save with abhorrence; they also “entered into the rest of the Lord” (Alma 13:12).
4. They were filled with “the Spirit of the Lord” and wanted to labor in behalf of others (Mosiah 5:2). Alma the Younger proclaims: “I had been born of God. Yea, and from that time even until now, I have labored without ceasing, that I might bring souls unto repentance; that I might bring them to taste of the exceeding

joy of which I did taste; that they might also be born of God, and be filled with the Holy Ghost" (Alma 36:23-24).

5. A mighty change was "wrought in [their] hearts" (Mosiah 5:2); they received Christ's image in their countenances; they could "sing the song of redeeming love"; and their hearts were "stripped of pride" and enmity (Alma 5:12, 19, 26, 28). Truly, to have one's heart stripped of enmity and pride would be a great relief.
6. They became, as mentioned above, members of the church of the Firstborn (see Mosiah 5:7; D&C 93:22). Elder McConkie writes about being born again:

Mere compliance with the formality of the ordinance of baptism does not mean that a person has been born again. No one can be born again without baptism, but the immersion in water and the laying on of hands to confer the Holy Ghost do not of themselves guarantee that a person has been or will be born again. The new birth takes place only for those who actually enjoy the gift of companionship of the Holy Ghost, only for those who are fully converted, who have given themselves without restraint to the Lord.¹⁴

These Nephites were "alive in Christ because they enjoy[ed] the companionship of the Spirit"¹⁵; they were immersed in the Spirit.¹⁶

What is impressive here, from what we can gather, is that these people were already commandment keepers. These people apparently did not experience a mighty change from gross evil to goodness, as Alma and Paul did, but from basic goodness to a transformation that exceeded their ability even to describe. But they do say, "The Spirit of the Lord omnipotent . . . has wrought a mighty change in us, or in our hearts, that we have no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually" (Mosiah 5:2). There had been a fundamental change at the fountain of their hearts.

Next Benjamin's people bound themselves to keep all the Lord's commandments (see Mosiah 5:5)—no light agreement; it is weighty and also thrilling. In our day the Lord has commanded the same covenant: "Ye shall become instructed in the law of my church, and be sanctified by that which ye have received, and ye shall bind yourselves to act in all holiness before me. . . . Ye are to be taught from on high. Sanctify yourselves and ye shall be endowed with power, that ye may give even as I have spoken" (D&C 43:9, 16).

What, then, distinguished Benjamin's people "above all the people which the Lord God hath brought out of the land of Jerusalem" (Mosiah 1:11)? Was it perhaps the first time, among the people brought out from the land of Jerusalem, that a king and priest, in the tradition of Adam, Enoch, and Melchizedek, had succeeded in bringing his people to this point of transformation, that he had caused them actually to receive the name of Christ as a community?

¹⁴ *Mormon Doctrine*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966), 101.

¹⁵ Bruce R. McConkie, *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 285.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 287.

But what does it mean to receive the name of Christ? We remember that **when we take the sacrament, we signify not that we have fully taken the name, but that we are willing to take the name** (see D&C 20:77). Elder Dallin Oaks emphasizes the word *willingness* to take on the name of Christ, pointing to a future consummation:

The Lord and his servants referred to the . . . *temple* as a house for “the name” of the Lord God of Israel. . . . In the inspired dedicatory prayer of the Kirtland Temple, the Prophet Joseph Smith asked the Lord for a blessing upon “Thy people upon whom thy name shall be put in this house.” (D&C 109:26.)

. . . By partaking of the sacrament we witness our willingness to participate in the sacred ordinances of the temple and to receive the highest blessings available through the name and by the authority of the Savior when he chooses to confer them upon us.¹⁷

Elder Bruce R. McConkie writes: “God’s name is God. To have his name written on a person is to identify that person as a god. How can it be said more plainly? Those who gain eternal life become gods!”¹⁸ He says, in another place: “The ordinances that are performed in the temples are the ordinances of exaltation; they open the door to us to an inheritance of sonship; they open the door to us so that we may become sons and daughters, members of the household of God in eternity. . . . They open the door to becoming kings and priests and inheriting all things.”¹⁹

King Benjamin’s people received an endowment of spiritual knowledge and power that took them from being a good people to being a Christ-like people—all in a temple setting. In fact, what they experienced through the ordinances and power of the priesthood was a revelation of Christ himself and the power to be assimilated to his image. The Prophet Joseph teaches that **“being born again comes by the Spirit of God through ordinances.”**²⁰ Benjamin’s last words pertained to being “sealed” to Christ and brought to heaven and eternal life (see Mosiah 5:15).

We have in Benjamin’s discourse the essential temple themes pertaining to the creation, the fall, the atonement, consecration, and covenant making. There are important endowment elements missing from the record, but had they been administered on this occasion, or at some later point, they would likely not have been included in our present Book of Mormon. I am suggesting that **King Benjamin’s people received something like a temple endowment in connection with receiving the Lord’s name forever and being born again.** The temple may be the place where the knowledge and power to be born again are administered.

It seems that **there are two parts to any priesthood ordinance: the receiving of the ordinance and the obtaining of the power associated with that ordinance.** The Prophet Joseph makes a difference between seeing the kingdom

¹⁷ Dallin H. Oaks, “Taking Upon Us the Name of Jesus Christ,” *Ensign* (May 1985): 81.

¹⁸ Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1973), 3:458; see also Revelation 3:12; 14:1.

¹⁹ Bruce R. McConkie, *Conference Report* (October 1955): 12-3.

²⁰ Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 12; see also D&C 84:19-25 and JST Exodus 34:1-2.

of God and actually *entering* it.²¹ Scripture often describes the ordinance and the power coming together at the same time. But for most of us, when priesthood holders lay hands on our head to give us the gift of the Holy Ghost, we do not necessarily obtain power in the Spirit at that time. We usually acquire it gradually as we seek it in the experiences of our lives. **When we receive the temple endowment, most of us are not quite sure what to make of the experience, but in time, its power and meaning unfold to us.**

What, then, are we to understand about King Benjamin's people? It may be that the temple ordinance *and* the power came together for them on this occasion. Or it may be that they had already received the temple ordinances at an earlier time and were at this point receiving the Holy Spirit of promise on their previous ordinances. Whichever it may be, the account holds out promise to us. Knowing that the prospect of these spiritual possibilities might be overwhelming to us, the Lord speaks encouragingly: **"Ye are not able to abide the presence of God now, neither the ministering of angels; wherefore, continue in patience until ye are perfected"** (D&C 67:13); but the scriptures also teach: **"Seek the face of the Lord always, that in patience ye may possess your souls, and ye shall have eternal life"** (D&C 101:38). The message seems to be **have patience and also diligence.**

It seems as though much of the Book of Mormon is about being born again. That may be why President Benson pled with us to feast on this book. He writes, "When we awake and are born of God, a new day will break and Zion will be redeemed. May we be convinced that Jesus is the Christ, choose to follow Him, be changed for Him, captained by Him, consumed in Him, and born again."²²

²¹ Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 209. "[It is] one thing to see the kingdom. And [it is] another to be in it (John 3:3-5). [One] must have a change of heart to see the kingdom of God and subscribe the articles of adoption to enter therein." Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 256.

²² Ezra Taft Benson, "Born of God," *Ensign* (July 1989): 5.