The "Wrong King:"
A Textual Study of Mosiah 21:28 and Ether 4:1

Randall P. Spackman

The purpose of this study is to illustrate the application of six rational principles for studying a natural or historical topic in the Book of Mormon (a record composed over a period of nearly 1,000 years by inhabitants of ancient America). The six principles are: rational reserve, thoroughness, simplicity, consistency, natural uniformity and uncertain cultural understanding. A discussion of each of the principles may be found at www.bookofmormonchronology.net. This principled interpretation process is contrasted with what appears to be a "weighing possibilities" process used to address the same topic by Royal Skousen in his monumental work, *The Critical Text of the Book of Mormon* (seven volumes so far).[1] While both Skousen and I reach similar results—that two specific editorial changes made to the text of the Book of Mormon after its initial publication in 1830 were not necessary—we do so by different methods. The principled interpretation process is logical, explainable and, thus, the results of the process can be rationally assessed. The weighing possibilities process relies on the subjective assessment of the interpreter, which cannot be fully examined.

The problem of the "wrong king" first appears in the Book of Mormon as part of a discussion between two Nephites, Ammon and king Limhi. The original (1830) edition of the Book of Mormon states (in the passage identified as Mosiah 21:28 in the current LDS edition of the Book of Mormon) that "Limhi was again filled with joy on learning from the mouth of Ammon that king Benjamin had a gift from God, whereby he could interpret" the "engravings" on twenty-four gold plates.[2] Joseph Smith's dictated manuscript, the original manuscript produced by his scribes,[3] cannot be consulted about Ammon naming king Benjamin in this text because this part of the original manuscript was destroyed.[4] The name *Benjamin* also appears in this passage in the printer's manuscript (a copy of the original manuscript that was prepared for use by the typesetter of the 1830 edition).[5] Nonetheless, in preparing the second (1837) edition

---

[1]   The volume addressing the textual changes in Mosiah 21:28 and Ether 4:1 is Royal Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon, Part Three: Mosiah 17 – Alma 20* (Provo, Utah: The Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies ["FARMS"], Brigham Young University, 2006), 1418-21.

[2]   Joseph Smith, Jr., author and proprietor, *The Book of Mormon* (Palmyra, New York: E.B. Grandin, 1830; Independence, Missouri: Herald Heritage Reprint, 1970), 200; or Wilford C. Wood, *Joseph Smith Begins His Work: Book of Mormon 1830 First Edition Reproduced from Uncut Sheets* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Publisher's Press, 1958), 200.

[3]   The chronology of the translation and more than 200 factual sources that document the chronology and process are gathered in John W. Welch, "The Miraculous Translation of the Book of Mormon," in John W. Welch, ed., with Erick B. Carlson, *Opening the Heavens: Accounts of Divine Manifestations, 1820-1844* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press and Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book, 2005), 76-213.

[4]   Of the original manuscript, "about 25 percent of the current text" exists today. The remainder was destroyed by water and mold between 1841 and 1882, while it was contained in the cornerstone of the Nauvoo House in Nauvoo, Illinois. Royal Skousen, ed., *The Original Manuscript of the Book of Mormon: Typographical Facsimile of the Extant Text* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2001), 6-7. (The list of extant text of the original manuscript appears on page 37.)

[5]   Royal Skousen, ed., *The Printer's Manuscript of the Book of Mormon: Typographical Facsimile of the Entire Text in Two Parts, Part One: 1 Nephi 1-Alma 17* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2001), 353.

of the Book of Mormon, an editor (or editors)[6] evidently thought the name *Benjamin* was an error in this passage and changed the name to *Mosiah*. This name change appears in all subsequent editions of the Book of Mormon.[7]

The 1830 Book of Mormon (in the text identified as Ether 4:1 in the current LDS edition) also reports a comment by the last of its ancient authors, Moroni, about certain information contained in the twenty-four gold plates discussed by Ammon and king Limhi. This comment occurs 345 pages later in the text of the 1830 Book of Mormon and names king Benjamin as being involved in the transmission and protection of the twenty-four gold plates. According to Moroni's comment, the vision of the "brother of Jared" was "forbidden to come unto the children of men, until after that [Christ] should be lifted up upon the cross: and for this cause did king Benjamin keep them, that they should not come unto the world until after Christ should shew himself unto his people."[8] The original manuscript for this passage also was destroyed. The text of the printer's manuscript uses the name *Benjamin* in this passage.[9] In the 1849 edition of the Book of Mormon, the editor, Orson Pratt, changed *Benjamin* to *Mosiah*. This change appears in ten subsequent editions of the Book of Mormon, including the current (1981) LDS edition.[10]

The Text and Meaning of Mosiah 21:28

Now, using the six interpretive principles, I can begin to analyze the relatively simple chronological problem of the "wrong king," as it appears in the Book of Mosiah. The text of Mosiah 21:28 has a specific content—a series of linked symbols, each with meanings. The interpretation process begins with an examination of the fact of this content, the fact of the text. The earliest available form of the text is located in the printer's manuscript, which was made over time as the typesetter required more text. [11] About eighty-five percent of the printer's manuscript was written by Oliver Cowdery,[12] who was the scribe for the text of Mosiah 21:28 in the printer's manuscript.[13]

The content of the text of Mosiah 21:28 appears as follows in the typographical facsimile of the printer's manuscript that is now available for study:

---

6   When editing the printer's manuscript for publication of the 1837 edition of the Book of Mormon, Joseph Smith did not change *Benjamin* to *Mosiah* in Mosiah 21:28 or Ether 4:1. Skousen, ed., *The Printer's Manuscript of the Book of Mormon, Part One*: 353; idem, *The Printer's Manuscript of the Book of Mormon: Typographical Facsimile of the Entire Text in Two Parts, Part Two: Alma 17-Moroni 10* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2001), 918-19. However, in addition to the change in Mosiah 21:28, there are other changes in the 1837 edition of the Book of Mormon that do not appear in the printer's manuscript. The source of these changes appears to be unknown. L. Ara Norwood, "*Ignoratio Elenchi*: The Dialogue That Never Was," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 5 (1993):342. The reason for the change in Mosiah 21:28 is also uncertain; presumably, an editor or editors thought king Benjamin was already dead when Ammon met with king Limhi.

7   Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon, Part Three*, 1418.

8   Capitalization, punctuation and spelling are as set forth in Smith, *The Book of Mormon* (1830), 546.

9   Skousen, ed., *The Original Manuscript of the Book of Mormon*, 5-7, 37, 527-28; idem, *The Printer's Manuscript of the Book of Mormon, Part Two*: 918-19.

10   Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon, Part Three*, 1419.

11   Skousen, ed., *The Printer's Manuscript of the Book of Mormon, Part One*: 3.

12   Ibid.

13   Ibid., 7, 352-53.

> & now Limhi was again filled with joy on learning from the mouth of
> Am{n|m}on that king Benjamin had a gift from God whereby he could
> inter{p}ret such engravings yea & Am^{m}on also did rejoice[14]

In the 1830 Book of Mormon, this passage was reproduced as a single sentence: "And now Limhi was again filled with joy, on learning from the mouth of Ammon that king Benjamin had a gift from God, whereby he could interpret such engravings; yea, and Ammon also did rejoice."[15]

As I seek to understand this text, the principle of thoroughness leads me to consider a number of questions that might be answered by the context of Mosiah 21:28. For example, who were the three persons mentioned, what were their relationships, when had Limhi been joyful before, what was the gift from deity, what were the etchings to be translated, and what caused Ammon to rejoice with Limhi at that moment? Thus, I begin to gather passages from the context of Mosiah 21:28 that might give me answers to my questions because such answers may help me understand more about Mosiah 21:28.

Mosiah 21:28 appears in the record of Zeniff (Mosiah 9-22), an account kept by the kings of the people of Zeniff. The record of Zeniff is included in the Book of Mosiah because Ammon led a search party to find the people of Zeniff, found them in captivity and then helped them escape to the land of Zarahemla with their record (Mosiah 7-8; 22). When I read the initial verses of Mosiah 7, I learn about a young king named Mosiah, who was vexed by his people's desire to find the people of Zeniff and sent Ammon's search party into hostile territory. In Mosiah 1-6, I learn that Mosiah had recently been consecrated king of the people of Zarahemla by his father, king Benjamin. Thus, at least for a first, quick pass through the text, I must study Mosiah 1-22 for information that may be relevant to the text of Mosiah 21:28.

The Text and Meaning of Ether 4:1

In a similar manner, Ether 4:1 has a specific content and context that can be examined logically. The earliest text available is the printer's manuscript, copied by Oliver Cowdery from the original manuscript.[16] The content of this text appears in the 1830 Book of Mormon as another single sentence:

> And the Lord commanded the brother of Jared to go down out of the mount
> from the presence of the Lord, and write the things which he had seen: and
> they were forbidden to come unto the children of men, until after that he
> should be lifted up upon the cross: and for this cause did king Benjamin keep
> them, that they should not come unto the world until after Christ should shew
> himself unto his people.[17]

My inquiry leads me to ask questions that may be answered by the context of Ether 4:1. For example, who were the people expressly mentioned, what relationships did they have, what was

---

[14]   Skousen, ed., *The Printer's Manuscript of the Book of Mormon, Part One*: 353. The manuscript shows three emendations: (1) an *n* overwritten by an *m* in the name *Ammon*; (2) a *p* partially overwritten by another *p* in the word *interpret*; and (3) an *m* inserted in the text of the name *Ammon*.

[15]   Smith, *The Book of Mormon* (1830), 200.

[16]   Skousen, ed., *The Printer's Manuscript of the Book of Mormon, Part Two*: 918-19.

[17]   Smith, *The Book of Mormon* (1830), 545-46.

the written record, how did the record get from one successor to another, and how might the information have been kept from distribution? In keeping with the principle of thoroughness, I can gather passages from the context of Ether 4:1 that might give me answers to my questions.

As I read the text around Ether 4:1, I find that when Moroni abridged the record on the twenty-four gold plates, he interjected his own comments. The reference to king Benjamin in Ether 4:1 is one of those interjections. Ether 4 and 5 contain more of Moroni's comments in this part of his abridgment; so, some of the verses in those two chapters might be relevant. Ether 4:1 refers to the brother of Jared, his vision of the Lord, and what he was commanded to write. Since the mission and activities of the brother of Jared leading up to the vision, and the vision itself, are set forth in Ether 1-3, I ought to read those chapters. In addition, Moroni's reference to king Benjamin refers to a commandment to keep and withhold information; so, I can seek for passages having to do with those activities. For example, Mosiah 28:10-20 reports king Mosiah's activities in that regard, at the time he transferred the record to Alma. Subsequent transfers are recorded or suggested in Alma 37 and 63; Helaman 3; 3 Nephi 1; and 4 Nephi. A possibly related injunction to keep information private is also noted in Helaman 6:25-26.

Having gathered the passages listed above, can I say I have fulfilled the task required by the principle of thoroughness? No—but I have a starting point. I ought to note that I have not yet used an index or concordance to the Book of Mormon, nor a computerized search tool for investigating an electronic version of the text. I ought to search for additional references to king Limhi, Zeniff, Ammon, king Mosiah, king Benjamin, the brother of Jared, Alma and the twenty-four gold plates. A textual search using key words and phrases may produce passages with potentially relevant text, such as Omni; Words of Mormon; Mosiah 23:30; 24:25; 25-27; 29; Alma 1:8; Helaman 5:9, 21; and Ether 15:33. As I study these passages, I may find ideas and statements that can lead me to search for other relevant text.

The 1830 Chronology

When I have completed a careful reading of the text identified as possibly relevant, I am in a position to begin to outline a rational chronology associated with the lives of Ammon and kings Limhi, Benjamin and Mosiah. The chronology must comply with the principle of natural uniformity. The events occurred in a fixed sequence,[18] whatever the sequence in which they were recorded. The order of events also must adhere to the principles of simplicity and consistency. The simplest chronology is that set forth in the printer's manuscript and 1830 Book of Mormon because this chronology requires no assumptions about what else might have happened or how errors might have occurred. According to the 1830 chronology, king Benjamin was alive when the events took place that are described in Mosiah 21:28 and Ether 4:1, and the name *Benjamin* is correctly recorded in those verses. The consistency of this simple chronology appears in the sequential historical events listed in the Appendix.

The 1830 chronology requires the placement of information from Mosiah 6:5 and Ether 4:1 in the second and third to last positions, respectively (numbers 16 and 15 in the Appendix). The early chapters of the Book of Ether show me that Ether 4:1 is part of Moroni's commentary,

---

[18]   For human events, time has only one direction, from past to future. The thermodynamic, psychological and cosmological "arrows of time," which distinguish past and future, all appear to point in the same direction. Stephen W. Hawking, *A Brief History of Time: From the Big Bang to Black Holes* (New York: Bantam Books, 1988), 143-53.

made hundreds of years after the time of king Benjamin (e.g., Ether 4:3-5; 5:1; 6:1). However, the information about king Benjamin contained in Ether 4:1 must be applied to the time of king Benjamin to have any factual effect. Someone might want to speculate that king Benjamin had a miraculous communication about the twenty-four gold plates before Ammon's search party was sent out. Such a conjecture would require the information from Ether 4:1 to be placed earlier in the chronology (before number 8 in the Appendix). However, there does not appear to be any textual basis for this speculation. Logical principles require a simpler, more natural explanation. In accordance with these principles, king Benjamin examined the gold plates when they arrived in Zarahemla and he then provided information to his son about the restrictions concerning the brother of Jared's vision contained in the plates. Thus, the information from Ether 4:1 is required to be placed after number 14 in the Appendix.

Similarly, there does not appear to be any textual support for an argument that data from Mosiah 6:5 appears out of context in the Appendix. The chronological placement of its facts about king Benjamin, *after* the information from Ether 4:1, is required by that verse. King Benjamin had to be alive to do his part in keeping the vision of the brother of Jared from being published until the Lord permitted it.

The text of Mosiah 6:5 has remained the same at least from the time of the printer's manuscript;[19] so, I do not appear to have any issue of editorial modification. The text is clear: "king Benjamin lived three years and he died." The only element of cultural uncertainty associated with the placement of Mosiah 6:5 is the meaning to be given to the term *three years*. The 1830 chronology requires a vague definition of "about three years."[20] This imprecision is normal English diction today and has been customary for at least several centuries;[21] so, Joseph Smith could have used the phrase imprecisely, too.

An imprecise chronological term in Mosiah 6:5 (if it is such) would not be unique in the Book of Mormon. Helaman 14:2-13 and 3 Nephi 1:5-22 relate to a time about ninety years after the death of king Mosiah, when disputes arose as to the exact length of time meant by the term *five years*. The ancient method of referring to the passage of a number of years had some aspect of vagueness to it. From these passages alone, I cannot assert that such vagueness was identical to that found in the English language. Still, the fact that such imprecision occurred in a similar context is evidence that a vague meaning for *three years* was possible in Book of Mormon times. However, a rational analysis must extend beyond merely identifying possibilities.

When I examine the context of Mosiah 6:5 carefully, I note that the first six chapters of the Book of Mosiah provide a unified account of king Benjamin's bestowal of kingship on his son, Mosiah.[22] This account includes a prologue (Mosiah 1:1-2:8); a carefully prepared speech in

---

[19]   Skousen, ed., *The Printer's Manuscript of the Book of Mormon, Part One*: 306. This text is not extant in the original manuscript. Skousen, ed., *The Original Manuscript of the Book of Mormon*, 37.

[20]   Skousen's definition of *three years* in Mosiah 6:5 as "less than four years" is correct, but may imply an unnecessarily long period. See Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon, Part Three*, 1420.

[21]   *The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary,* two vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), II: 3853 ("Year").

[22]   See John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks, eds., *King Benjamin's Speech: "That Ye May Learn Wisdom"* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1998), particularly "Appendix: Complete Text of Benjamin's Speech with Notes and Comments," 479-616.

meticulous chiastic form about topics such as kingship, discipleship and the use of power (Mosiah 2:9-5:15); and an epilogue reporting the end of the ceremony and various chronological notes (Mosiah 6). This account is a cohesive report that can stand on its own, separate from anything before or after.

In one of the chronological notes of the epilogue, I am told that "king Benjamin lived three years and he died" (Mosiah 6:5). I should notice that the subject is called *king Benjamin* even after his son became a king. This is consistent with the 1830 text of Mosiah 21:28. Ammon knew him as *king Benjamin* and identified him as "the king of the people who are in the land of Zarahemla" (Mosiah 8:14), even though in his old age (Mosiah 1:9), king Benjamin had already consecrated his son. In a similar fashion (but about thirty-two years later), king Mosiah continued to be a king after the start of the reign of judges over the land of Zarahemla and after the selection of the first chief judge (Mosiah 29, especially verses 11, 41-47). The practice of these two kings suggests that if the reigning king did not die before appointing his successor, the reigning king continued to be considered a king, a co-regent of some sort, until his death.[23]

As the context of Mosiah 6:5 is studied, I notice that the report of king Benjamin's speech is followed by an account about Ammon's search party (Mosiah 7-8).[24] The account of king Benjamin's speech is also distinct from the record of Zeniff (Mosiah 9-22), which is introduced by the account of Ammon's search party. From the standpoint of literary structure, rational study undeniably identifies three separate, but somewhat overlapping reports, linked in the beginning of the Book of Mosiah.

This three-report structure has chronological implications that rational principles require me to take into account. As noted above, the epilogue of the first report states that "king Benjamin lived three years and he died" (Mosiah 6:5), but that statement does not mean I am justified in assuming he was dead at the beginning or end of either of the other two reports. In the fact of the text (Omni 1:23-30), I learn that king Benjamin was alive at the time Zeniff led his people into the wilderness—that is, at the beginning of the record of Zeniff (Mosiah 9:1-4). The 1830 version of Ether 4:1 requires king Benjamin to be alive at the end of the record of Zeniff (Mosiah 22:13-16).

I can also notice that the transition between the first two reports has been emphasized with similar political and chronological concepts.[25] The report about king Mosiah not being a burden to his people is connected to a political report about "no contention" among the people (Mosiah

---

[23]   Mosiah 6:4 indicates that king Mosiah "began to reign in his father's stead," suggesting perhaps that Skousen's notion about a royal "retirement" is an accurate depiction of Nephite kingship and succession; however, what does the phrase "began to reign" actually mean? Modern ideas about the practice of "retirement" may be at odds with the practice of kingship in the land of Zarahemla during a time of co-regency. This is an issue of cultural uncertainty.

[24]   The account of Ammon's search party seems to have been entered into the Nephite record when he reported to king Mosiah (Mosiah 22:14). His successful journey likely would have been recorded on the plates of Nephi (see, e.g., Words of Mormon 1:3-5, 9).

[25]   In the printer's manuscript, a chapter heading appears between Mosiah 6:7 and 7:1. Skousen, ed., *The Printer's Manuscript of the Book of Mormon, Part One*: 306. According to Skousen, Joseph Smith appears to have inserted the word *chapter* to create chapter breaks where he may have seen "some visual indication at the end of a section that the section was ending; perhaps the last words of the section were followed by blankness. Recognizing that the section was ending, Joseph then told the scribe to write the word *chapter*, with the understanding that the appropriate number would be added later." Royal Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon, Part One* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2004), 43-44 (emphasis in the original).

6:7). This report appears at the very end of the epilogue. The account of the search party starts with king Mosiah enjoying "continual peace," but the king is burdened by the *teasings*[26] of his people who want him to send a search party into enemy territory, the land of Nephi (Mosiah 7:1; Words of Mormon 1:12-14). When the young king finally dispatched the search party, he and his court probably understood that their emissaries might be discovered by their enemies, the Lamanites. If discovered, the party of "strong men" also might have been viewed as a raiding party. Perhaps in part because king Mosiah's action was overtly political and potentially warlike (a threat to the "continual peace"), it seems possible that his priests or scribes (compare Mosiah 27:1; 12:17-37; and 17:1-4) would have recorded its occurrence in terms of the king's carefully measured official years. In Mosiah 6:7 and 7:1, the more complex phrase *for the space of three years* is repeated. This repetition links the two reports and the phrase clearly contrasts with the simpler term *three years* in Mosiah 6:5.[27]

The foregoing possibilities arise from the immediate context of Mosiah 6:5 and suggest how the text may be interpreted. However, these possibilities do not constitute necessary assumptions for the 1830 chronology. The only required assumption is a customary definition of the term *three years* in Mosiah 6:5, meaning "about three years." This single assumption permits me to view the text of the printer's manuscript and 1830 Book of Mormon at Mosiah 6:5, 7; 7:1; 8:14; 21:28; and Ether 4:1 as being internally consistent and free from error.

In summary, the 1830 chronology maintains that Ammon's search party was dispatched shortly after the third anniversary of king Mosiah's consecration (Mosiah 7:1-3). The search party was at least on the edge of the land of Nephi within forty days (Mosiah 7:5). Ammon's men were working with king Limhi to free his people from the Lamanite guards within a few days more (Mosiah 7:8-8:4; 21:22-22:8). The escape from the Lamanites and the journey to the land of Zarahemla were pursued as quickly as possible (Mosiah 22:9-16). Alma's group made a similar journey, at about the same time, escaping to the land of Zarahemla in about twenty days of travel (Mosiah 23:1-3; 24:18-25). King Benjamin was still living as a co-regent when Ammon and king Limhi arrived in Zarahemla (Ether 4:1). Thus, Ammon could refer accurately to king Benjamin as a living king and seer in Zarahemla who could interpret the twenty-four gold plates (Mosiah 21:28) and the plates could be delivered to king Mosiah in time for king Benjamin to instruct his son about keeping the vision of the brother of Jared from being published (Ether 4:1). For this simple, error-free chronology to have occurred, king Benjamin had to live for about three years and seventy days after consecrating his son. The events could then be recorded by the scribes; included in the abridgments of Mormon and Moroni; and translated, dictated and recorded by Joseph Smith and his scribes, all without error. Based on my proposed rational and explainable process for interpreting these texts in the Book of Mormon, unmistakable textual

---

[26]   "According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the earlier meaning of *tease* did not imply jesting . . . [but] 'to worry or irritate by persistent action which vexes or annoys'." Royal Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon, Part Two* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2005), 1208.

[27]   Based on this single example, I do not propose that official regnal years in the Book of Mormon always appear in the form *the space of ___ years*. However, the contrast between Mosiah 6:5, and Mosiah 6:7 and 7:1, is tightly drawn; so, it should be noted. Perhaps the contrast is between an imprecise term and a precise term (not necessarily always having to do with regnal years). This is another of the many chronological topics in the Book of Mormon that have not yet been studied.

errors have not been found that would justify changing *Benjamin* to *Mosiah* in Mosiah 21:28 and Ether 4:1.[28]

The 1837 Amendment

Having explained that the name *Benjamin* in Mosiah 21:28 was not unmistakably an error, I now apply the principle of thoroughness to examine the logical support required by the name change made in 1837.[29] To find a naming error in Mosiah 21:28, the text must be read with the assumption that king Benjamin's death was known to Ammon. Since I cannot search Ammon's mind, logic must take me to a second assumption. King Benjamin must have died under conditions that permitted Ammon to know of his king's death, presumably before Ammon left Zarahemla.

As I have explained above, a textual basis for these two assumptions cannot be assumed from the position of Mosiah 6:5 before Mosiah 7:1-3. The chronological order of recorded events is not necessarily governed by the order of the verses in the text of the Book of Mormon. The separate construction of the three reports in this part of the Book of Mosiah requires me to recognize that king Benjamin was alive when Zeniff led his people into the wilderness (Omni 1:23-30) and that event is recorded in Mosiah 9. The location of Mosiah 6:5 before Mosiah 7:1-3 and Mosiah 9 thereby fails to provide textual support for these first two assumptions. Thus, a new text or assumption with a textual or factual basis is required for the 1837 amendment to be rationally supportable—but no such text exists.

Of course, a third assumption might suppose that the term *three years* in Mosiah 6:5 means a period equal to, or less than, the time between king Mosiah's consecration and the last time when Ammon could have learned of king Benjamin's death. The problem with this assumption is that the fact of the text does not require the assumption of such a restricted definition for the phrase *three years*. The 1830 chronology is logical and complete with a less restrictive definition and with fewer assumptions. In addition, the 1830 text of the passage now known as Ether 4:1 requires king Benjamin to have been alive when Ammon's search party returned to the land of Zarahemla. The fact that king Benjamin was not dead at that time contradicts all three of the foregoing assumptions that might otherwise seem acceptable for speculating about a naming error in Mosiah 21:28. The 1837 name change in Mosiah 21:28 thus seems to have been an illogical mistake, unless I am willing to create a fourth assumption: the name *Benjamin* in Ether 4:1 also must be a mistake.[30]

---

[28]   This conclusion based on rational principles is consistent with the results of the subjective discourses about possibilities by Norwood (as to Mosiah 21:28), Nibley (as to Ether 4:1), and Skousen (as to both passages). See Norwood, "*Ignoratio Elenchi*: The Dialogue That Never Was," 342; Hugh Nibley, *Since Cumorah: The Book of Mormon in the Modern World* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book Company, 1970), 7; and Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon, Part Three*, 1420-21.

[29]   The lack of published information about the source of the 1837 amendment only permits the treatment of this change as being based on an action by an unknown editor (or editors). If, in fact, the change was made by Joseph Smith in response to revelation, the sources that might document such a revelation and Joseph's deeper involvement in the editing and printing process in 1837 apparently have not yet been made available to scholars such as Nibley and Skousen. See Nibley, *Since Cumorah,* 7; and Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon, Part Three*, 1418-21.

[30]   For historical purposes, it may be important to note that this necessary assumption was not recognized or revealed and Ether 4:1 was not amended when the 1837, 1840 and 1841 editions of the Book of Mormon were

The 1849 Amendment

To describe the logical foundation for the 1849 amendment to Ether 4:1, I will first examine Mosiah 28:11-12. This passage states that sometime during king Mosiah's long reign, he "translated and caused to be written" the message of the twenty-four gold plates "because of the great anxiety" of his people.[31] Since king Mosiah died about nine decades before the birth of Christ (Mosiah 29:46; 3 Nephi 1:1; 2:5-7), this report initially might seem to indicate that king Mosiah did not understand or keep the commandment of the Lord expressed in Ether 3:21: "thou shalt not suffer these things which ye have seen and heard to go forth unto the world, until the time cometh that I shall glorify my name in the flesh; wherefore, ye shall treasure up the things that ye have seen and heard, and show it to no man."

Contrary to this conjecture, I will note that when Mormon described king Mosiah's transfer of the royal records to Alma, Mormon also stated that king Mosiah "took the records which were engraven on the plates of brass, and also the plates of Nephi, and all the things which he had kept and preserved according to the commandments of God" and "conferred them upon Alma . . . and commanded him that he should keep and preserve them" (Mosiah 28:11, 20). The phrase *all the things* would appear to have included at least the "Small Plates" written by Nephi and others (that had been delivered by Amaleki to king Benjamin; Omni 1:23-25), the plates containing the record of Zeniff (that were delivered to king Mosiah by king Limhi; Mosiah 8:5; 22:14), the twenty-four gold plates (that king Mosiah also obtained from king Limhi; Mosiah 22:14; 28:11) and "the interpreters," which were "a gift from God" to be preserved and used by his seers (Mosiah 8:13, 19; 28:20; Alma 37:21). Moreover, for king Mosiah to translate and publish the history of the Jaredite destruction, he had to have permission from deity (Mosiah 8:13). It is equally clear that king Mosiah "kept and preserved" the Jaredite record "according to the commandments of God" (Mosiah 28:11). Thus, king Mosiah appears to have "kept and preserved" the record, at least in part, by choosing not to publish the brother of Jared's vision with other parts of Jaredite history that Mosiah did have his scribes write, thereby conforming to the Lord's commandment set forth in Ether 3:21.

Since 1849, many editions of the Book of Mormon have reported Moroni's comment in Ether 4:1 to be: "for this cause did king *Mosiah* keep them, that they should not come unto the world until after Christ should show himself unto his people" (emphasis added). This version of Ether 4:1, with its assumed naming error and amendment, is accurate about what king Mosiah did. Nonetheless, I cannot miscalculate the logical effect of that truthfulness. The accuracy of Ether 4:1 (as amended in 1849 with the name *Mosiah*) is not textual evidence that the original name *Benjamin* was a mistake.

To maintain the theory that the name *Benjamin* was a textual mistake in Ether 4:1, I must adopt another assumption—my fifth in this expanding string of assumptions: king Benjamin

---

prepared for publication. See Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon, Part Three*, 1419. Orson Pratt, the editor of the 1849 edition, seems to have assumed the accuracy of the 1837, 1840 and 1841 editions of the Book of Mormon (with the name change included in Mosiah 21:28) and assumed further that logic a similar name change should made in Ether 4:1.

[31]   The time when the record was translated by king Mosiah is not specified. Mormon's comment about the translation and publication of information on the twenty-four gold plates is a side comment in its context, an explanation about the transfer of records and a promise that a translated account would be added later to Mormon's abridgment (see also Mosiah 28:17-20). The fact that this comment was inserted in reference to king Mosiah transferring all of the records to Alma only means that the translation was finished before Alma received the records.

(between the time that he conferred the kingdom on his son and the time of his death) did not instruct his son that all or part of the record on the gold plates was to be kept sacred and withheld from the people until after the Lord's appearance to his people. No text supports this assumption; so, logic requires a sixth assumption: king Benjamin must have died before he was able to instruct his son in this manner. Presumably, he died before king Mosiah received the plates from king Limhi because once king Benjamin learned of the gold plates, he likely would have wanted to examine them and would have spoken with his son about them.

Since there is no textual basis for this sixth assumption, the final basis for these assumptions about Ether 4:1 can only be another arbitrary assumption that defines the phrase *three years* in Mosiah 6:5 to mean something like a period less than the time between king Mosiah's consecration and king Limhi's delivery of the plates to king Mosiah. Nothing in the fact of the text compels this limited interpretation. The 1830 chronology is rational without it.

Principled Rationality vs. Weighing Possibilities

In 2006, Skousen chose to discuss Mosiah 21:28 based on the approach of earlier apologetics—to speculate about possibilities.[32] After restating just part of the previous apologetic guesswork, Skousen almost seemed to identify the definition of *three years* in Mosiah 6:5 as the critical interpretive issue. However, he framed the issue as another possibility: "If king Limhi and Ammon arrived in Zarahemla before the end of the fourth year of king Mosiah's reign, then we could interpret the statement in Mosiah 6:5 that 'king Benjamin lived three years and he died' as meaning that king Benjamin did not live to see the completion of four years of retirement."[33]

I would edit Skousen's theoretical possibility by first setting aside the culturally uncertain notion of king Benjamin retiring because it is tangential to the analysis and ignores or overlooks the likelihood of co-regency.[34] Second, I would discard the "if-then" theoretical construction of Skousen's sentence, which assumes unnecessarily that the direct evidence of the 1830 text of Ether 4:1 does not exist. That evidence does exist and cannot be ignored or overlooked. Then, I would summarize Skousen's hypothetical possibility as a positive interpretive statement—the phrase *three years* in Mosiah 6:5 means "less than four years" (perhaps much less, but generally "about three years").

Skousen did not provide logical support for his theory. Instead, he reiterated other guesswork about Ether 4:1 and ended his discussion with a conjectural summation: "If *Benjamin* is an error, the error occurred in the original plates and not during the early transmission of the English language text. Internal analysis suggests, however, that the identification of Benjamin in these passages is actually correct and not a mistake."[35] Skousen did not explain his "internal

---

[32]   See, e.g., Norwood, "*Ignoratio Elenchi*: The Dialogue That Never Was," 339-42; and J. Cooper Johnson, "King Benjamin or Mosiah: A Look at Mosiah 21:28," a summary of Norwood's presentation at the Third Annual Mormon Apologetics Conference, held by The Foundation for Apologetic Information and Research ("FAIR"), accessed by the author on September 7, 2006, at www.fairlds.org.

[33]   Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon, Part Three*, 1420.

[34]   Skousen assumed that "king Benjamin may have still exercised some monarchical prerogatives as long as he was alive." Ibid., 1419. See footnote 23 above.

[35]   Ibid., 1420.

analysis." He seems to have assumed he had weighed the several possibilities that he mentioned. He concluded by placing his own conjecture on the side of Hugh Nibley, who had conjectured that the 1849 name change was not necessary. With Nibley's opinion providing weight to add to his own subjective opinion, Skousen restored the name *Benjamin* to Mosiah 21:28 and Ether 4:1 in his reconstruction of the original text of the Book of Mormon.[36]

Conclusion

I have discovered that the nineteenth century changes in Mosiah 21:28 and Ether 4:1 violate the rational principles of simplicity (a string of seven arbitrary assumptions), consistency (incompatible with the earliest available text) and thoroughness or uncertain cultural comprehension (the textual contexts must be overlooked, ignored or misunderstood). The nineteenth century changes have been shown to be based on two arbitrarily restrictive definitions for interpreting the phrase *three years* in Mosiah 6:5, definitions that seem to have been assumed a dozen years apart and without soundly interpreted textual support. In other words, a mistaken definition for the phrase *three years* seems to have been assumed in 1837 and then, as a result, the naming "errors" appeared to the editors.

How this mistaken definition came to be assumed in 1837 (and perhaps not challenged in 1849), who was involved and why the changes might have been considered proper—these may be suitable topics for historical study. Such a study would examine external sources relevant to an understanding of the editorial processes in 1837 and 1849. However, that historical inquiry is beyond the scope of this textual study.

The purpose of this study has been to illustrate the use of a rational process for interpreting the text about the issue of the "wrong king." As to the name *Benjamin* in the 1830 versions of Mosiah 21:28 and Ether 4:1, the more rational chronology has been shown to be consistent with the printer's manuscript for those verses and with other relevant passages in the text of the Book of Mormon. The 1830 chronology was founded on an imprecise definition for the term *three years*. Such a definition is normal today, was customary in Joseph Smith's day and based on my application of a principled rational process, appears to have been customary in king Benjamin's day. In other words, the name changes cannot be justified rationally from the standpoint of the Book of Mormon text.

---

[36]   Ibid., 1420-21. See also Nibley, *Since Cumorah*, 7.

Appendix

**The 1830 Book of Mormon Chronology
Related to Supposed Errors in Mosiah 21:28 and Ether 4:1**

1. A man named Mosiah was warned by the Lord to flee out of the land of Nephi. He communicated the warning to others and many of them followed him out of the land (Omni 1:12-13). Mosiah carried with him the "records which had been handed down by the kings" (Words of Mormon 1:10). The people of Mosiah traveled through the wilderness and discovered a land and people known by the name Zarahemla (Omni 1:13-14).

2. The two groups of people discovered that some of their separate ancestors escaped from Judah around the time of the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem. The people of Mosiah and Zarahemla united and Mosiah was appointed to be their king (Omni 1:15-19).

3. King Mosiah's son Benjamin reigned next over the people in Zarahemla (Omni 1:23).

4. During the reign of king Benjamin, a large group of people from the land of Zarahemla attempted to return to the land of Nephi, the land occupied by their enemies, the Lamanites (Words of Mormon 1:12-14). In the wilderness, they fell into a dispute and began battling each other. Only fifty escaped being killed. These survivors returned to Benjamin's kingdom in the land of Zarahemla (Omni 1:27-28; Mosiah 9:1-2).

5. Later, a second large group under the leadership of one of the survivors, a man named Zeniff, went into the wilderness in search of the land of Nephi. Their fate was not known during almost all of the remainder of the reign of king Benjamin (Omni 1:29-30; Mosiah 7:1; 9:1, 3-4), but they kept a record that was later included in the Nephite records (the record of Zeniff; Mosiah 9-22).

6. King Benjamin instructed his sons in keeping the records that his father had transferred to him (Mosiah 1:1-8). Near the end of his life, king Benjamin gathered his people together and instructed them (Mosiah 1:9-6:2). Then, he consecrated one of his sons, also named Mosiah, to be a king over his people in the land of Zarahemla (Mosiah 6:2-3).

7. King Mosiah began to reign in his father's stead (Mosiah 6:4). He observed the commandments of God and, like his people, he tilled the earth to care for himself. The people wearied king Mosiah to find out what happened to the large group who had followed Zeniff into the wilderness to find the land of Nephi (Mosiah 6:6-7; 7:1).

8. After the first three years of his reign had passed, king Mosiah sent a party of sixteen "strong men" under the leadership of a descendant of Zarahemla named Ammon to search in the land of Nephi for information about what had befallen their relatives (Mosiah 7:2-3).

9. Ammon's search party wandered forty days in the wilderness before reaching the land of Nephi. At that point, Ammon and three others separated themselves from the group to enter the land. These four came upon king Limhi and his guards outside the walls of the city of Lehi-Nephi. The four members of the search party were captured and committed to prison for two days (Mosiah 7:4-8; 9:6-8; 21:19).

10. When the four members of the search party were brought from prison to be questioned by king Limhi, they discovered their ancestors' former relationships and rejoiced. The remaining members of the search party were summoned and they all joined together in the city of Lehi-Nephi (Mosiah 7:9-16).

11. On the following day or shortly thereafter, king Limhi gathered his people to hear the good news about Zarahemla (Mosiah 7:17-8:4).

12. After dismissing his people to return to their homes, king Limhi had Ammon read the record of his people (the record of Zeniff, as then constituted). King Limhi also informed Ammon that forty-three of Limhi's people had been sent to look for the land of Zarahemla. Limhi's search party had returned not many days before the coming of Ammon. They had been lost in the wilderness and had found a land covered with bones, sword blades and breastplates. They also discovered twenty-four gold plates engraved with a text that no one could read. Ammon was asked if he could interpret languages, but Ammon said he could not (Mosiah 8:5-11; 21:25-26).

13. King Limhi then asked Ammon if he knew anyone who could interpret languages. Ammon informed king Limhi that king Benjamin could do so and king Limhi "rejoiced exceedingly and gave thanks to God" (Mosiah 8:12-21; 21:28).

14. The people of king Limhi sought to rejoin the people of Zarahemla and all efforts were made to devise a way to escape their Lamanite overlords and guards. Within as short a time as possible, they drugged their guards with wine, escaped into the wilderness and made their way to the land of Zarahemla where king Mosiah welcomed them. They delivered all their records to king Mosiah, including the twenty-four gold plates (Mosiah 21:29-22:14). (As to the length of time necessary to make the journey back to the land of Zarahemla, the experience of another group who also fled from the Lamanites at that time may be compared. The group led by Alma made the journey from the land of Nephi through the wilderness to the land of Zarahemla in about twenty days of travel; Mosiah 23:1-3; 24:18-25.)

15. King Benjamin informed king Mosiah that, in accordance with the Lord's commands, the twenty-four gold plates contained information that was not to be published until after Christ had finished his mortal ministry and shown himself to his people (Ether 3:21; 4:1).

16. King Benjamin died about three years after conferring kingship on his son, Mosiah (Mosiah 6:5).

17. Because of the great anxiety of his people and for their knowledge and edification, king Mosiah obtained permission from deity to translate, and he caused to be written, the engravings on the twenty-four gold plates. But he kept and did not publish the vision of the brother of Jared according to the commandments of God (Mosiah 8:13; 28:10-20).