
Mosiah 29 — The Reign of the Judges Established — Mosiah's Epistle on the Voice of the People, the Danger of the Unrighteous King, How Much Iniquity One Wicked King Causes, and Alma the Younger Chosen Chief Judge

Mosiah 29: Mosiah II writes an epistle to all his people. He proposes the abolition of the kingship and the institution of judges chosen by the voice of the people. He warns at length of the dangers of unrighteous kings, citing Noah. He articulates the law of common consent. The voice of the people approves. Alma the Younger is chosen the first chief judge. Alma the Elder dies aged 82. Mosiah dies in the 33rd year of his reign at age 63. Thus ends the reign of the kings over the people of Nephi; the reign of the judges begins. c. 91 BC.

Mosiah 29 is the master chapter of the Nephite political reorganization — the abolition of the kingship and the institution of the reign of the judges. It is, doctrinally, the most articulate political-theology text in the Book of Mormon, and one of the most-cited chapters in the Latter-day Saint tradition of civic teaching.

Hebrew Word Studies

deror / mishpat / am (דֶּרֶר / מִשְׁפָּט / אֵם) — **liberty (jubilee release) / justice, judgment, ordinance / people, populace vv.**

25–32. The chapter operates with three Hebrew political nouns whose force is felt under the English. *Deror* is the noun of Lev. 25:10 (*proclaim liberty throughout all the land*) and Isa. 61:1 (*to proclaim liberty to the captives* — quoted by Christ in Lk. 4:18). It is not abstract liberty; it is jubilee-release, the divinely-mandated restoration of a people. *Mishpat* is the noun behind every "judgment of the Lord" text; it shares its root with *shofet*, judge. *Am* is the noun behind every "voice of the people" text. Bound together, Mosiah's argument is: the voice of the people (*am*) chooses the judges (*shoftim*) to administer justice (*mishpat*) in a land of liberty (*deror*). It is the most Hebraic political vocabulary deployed anywhere in the Book of Mormon.

From the Chapter's Architecture

It is also the closing of the first generation. Alma the Elder and Mosiah II have carried the work since Abinadi's martyrdom. With their deaths the chapter ends the Book of Mosiah, ends the reign of the kings, and ends an era. The next book opens, by design, with a fresh trial: Nehor preaching priestcrafts in the first year of the reign of the judges (Alma 1:1), and Amlici seeking to be king (Alma 2:1) almost as soon as the kings are gone. The reform does not abolish wickedness; it tests the people who chose the reform.