The Lord Will Redeem His People: Adoptive Covenant and Redemption in the Old Testament and Book of Mormon

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In the text of the Old Testament Yahweh is described as the Redeemer of Israel. A redeemer in Israelite society was a close family member who was responsible to help his enslaved kinsmen by buying them out of bondage. A comparable family relationship is created between the Lord and individuals by the making of covenants and the giving of a new name. The adoptive covenant becomes the basis for the Lord’s acts of redemption. This pattern of adoptive redemption can be seen in both the Old Testament and the Book of Mormon. The Book of Mormon identifies Yahweh, the God and Redeemer of the Old Testament, with Jesus Christ. It further explains that redemption from spiritual bondage comes through the ransom price of his blood and is available to those who enter into adoptive covenants, which create a familial relationship and allow the Lord to act as their redeemer.
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Abstract: In the text of the Old Testament Yahweh is described as the Redeemer of Israel. A redeemer in Israelite society was a close family member who was responsible to help his enslaved kinsmen by buying them out of bondage. A comparable family relationship is created between the Lord and individuals by the making of covenants and the giving of a new name. The adoptive covenant becomes the basis for the Lord’s acts of redemption. This pattern of adoptive redemption can be seen in both the Old Testament and the Book of Mormon. The Book of Mormon identifies Yahweh, the God and Redeemer of the Old Testament, with Jesus Christ. It further explains that redemption from spiritual bondage comes through the ransom price of his blood and is available to those who enter into adoptive covenants, which create a familial relationship and allow the Lord to act as their redeemer.

It is commonly recognized that Yahweh is seen as the Redeemer of Israel in texts of the Old Testament. A redeemer in an ancient Israelite setting was a close family member responsible for helping other family members—who had lost their property, liberty, or lives—by buying them out of their bondage or avenging them. The characterization of Yahweh as redeemer is usually seen by scholars as a vague reference to his desire to help his people. More specific study of his role as redeemer is rarely made. An analysis of the biblical text, however, indicates that it is the covenantal relationship between Yahweh and the House of Israel that binds them together and permits Yahweh to act as the Redeemer of Israel. This covenantal relation is repeatedly associated with the giving of a name, indicating a new status and character. As reflected in the new name, it is by the covenant that individuals or Israel as a people are adopted. They become part of the family of Yahweh and, as their kinsman, he
becomes their redeemer. I will refer to this idea of familial ties being created by covenant and expressed in the giving of a new name as “adoptive” redemption.

Redemption in the Old Testament: Definitions and Usage

In the Old Testament there are two words, $gā’āl$ and $pādāh$, which are primarily translated as “redeem.” Both incorporate the idea of “buying back” or “release by the payment of a price.”¹ These words are often used interchangeably, illustrating the concept of salvation from mortal danger through a commercial or legal transaction.²

Although these two terms are often used interchangeably, there are several clear differences in usage. $Pādāh$ is essentially a commercial term that shares a common root with the term for redemption in other Semitic languages. It refers only to the process of a change of ownership; the motivation of the redemption is not essential to the meaning of the word. This idea of redemption does not suggest prerogative, right, or duty.³

Unlike $pādāh$, $gā’āl$ has no Semitic cognates and is found only in Hebrew. $Gā’āl$ refers to redemption made out of family obligation or responsibility. The person who carries this responsibility is known as the $gō’ēl$, the present participle of $gā’āl$. The $gō’ēl$ was a person’s closest relative who was “responsible for standing up for him and maintaining his rights,”⁴ a responsibility based on feelings of tribal unity. Basic duties of the $gō’ēl$ were: (1) to buy back sold property; (2) to buy back a man who had sold himself to a foreigner as a slave; (3) to avenge blood and kill a relative’s murderer; (4) to receive atonement money; and, figuratively, (5) to be a helper in a lawsuit.⁵

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³ Ibid., 53.
⁵ Ibid., 2:341–42.
All of these different duties are, at different times, assumed by Yahweh, who acts as the gōʿēl of Israel. The idea of intimate kinship, essential to the role of the gōʿēl, is connected with Yahweh in Isaiah 63:16, where Isaiah cries out, “Doubtless thou art our father, though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not: thou, O Lord, art our father, our redeemer; thy name is from everlasting.” Yahweh is also seen as a protector of widows and orphans (Proverbs 23:10–11; Isaiah 54:4–5) and as the redeemer of individuals (Lamentations 3:52–58).

**Redemption as a Subclass of Salvation**

There is a common confusion in the use of the terms *save* and *redeem*. They may seem to be used interchangeably and sometimes are assumed to be synonyms. Although they both do convey the meaning of “deliver,” *redeem* is a subclass of *save*. Saving refers to any kind of deliverance, and redeeming specifically refers to deliverance based upon a payment.

The English word *save* is from the Latin *salvare*, “to save,” and *salvus*, “safe.” Its basic meaning is “to deliver or rescue from peril or hurt; to make safe, put in safety.” There is no intrinsic indication of how this rescue is performed. With “redeem,” on the other hand, the Latin root specifically means “to buy back,” *re(d) + emere*. Accordingly, the basic meaning in English is “to buy back (a thing formerly possessed); to make payment for (a thing held or claimed by another).”

While the meaning of Hebrew words may not be as clear as English words because of limited information on etymology and usage, there are still different words used to express the general concept of deliverance than those used to refer to salvation through a specific means. The most common Hebrew root meaning “save” is *YŠ*. It is a general term signifying “removing that which restricts.” Other Hebrew words that have a general concept of delivering include *nāṣal*, *pā-lat*, and *mā-lat*. These terms clearly differ from *gāʿal* and *pādāh*, which refer to deliverance through the payment of a ransom price.

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7. Ibid., s.v., “Redeem.”

Name-giving and Covenant among the Israelites

To understand the significance in the Old Testament of the idea of "giving a name," it is essential to appreciate the importance of names to the Israelites.9 The Hebrew word šēm, usually translated "name," can also be rendered "remembrance" or "memorial," indicating that the name acts as a reminder to its bearers and others. The name shows both the true nature of its bearer and indicates the relationship that exists between entities. There are several instances when names are changed in the Old Testament, and this change of name indicates a corresponding change in character and conduct. This illustrates the Hebrew belief that names represent something of the essence of a person. A new name shows a new status or the establishment of a new relationship. This new relationship may express the dependence of the person who receives a new name, but at the same time renaming may also indicate a type of adoption.10

To the Israelites covenants were also a symbolic formation of a new relationship. In a discussion of the establishment of the covenant at Sinai and the associated ritual meal of Moses and the elders of Israel with Yahweh in Exodus 24:9–11, McCarthy comments:

To see a great chief and eat in his place is to join his family in the root sense of that Latin word [gens]: the whole group related by blood or not which stood under the authority and protection of the father. One is united to him as a client to his patron who protects him and whom he serves. . . . Covenant is something one makes by a rite, not something one is born to or forced into, and it can be described in family terms. God is patron and father, Israel servant and son.11

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By making a covenant with Yahweh, the people of Israel enter into his family and protection. This was explicitly expressed in terms of adoption: "I will take you to me for a people, and I will be to you a God" (Exodus 6:7).

**Old Testament Textual Examples of Adoptive Redemption**

The connection between redemption, covenant, and name-giving can be seen in the experiences of Abraham, Jacob, and the house of Israel. In Genesis 17:1–8 we can see that Abraham's experience specifically contains two central elements to the covenant-redemption relationship: renaming and adoption. As part of the covenant, Abram is called by a new name, Abraham ("father of a multitude"), denoting a change in nature and character. In addition to receiving a new name there is a specific promise of adoption. Yahweh says, "I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed... to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee" (Genesis 17:7). This adoption establishes a sense of possession, a familial relation which allows Yahweh to act as a gōʿēl and redeem, or buy back, his people from slavery. It is also interesting to note that even though the concept of redemption is not specifically mentioned in this passage, it may have been understood as can be seen by Isaiah's statement, which referred to God as the redeemer of Abraham: "Therefore thus saith the LORD, who redeemed Abraham, concerning the house of Jacob" (Isaiah 29:22).

These same elements of an adoptive covenant and redemption are found when Jacob received the name Israel from the angel. The texts that relate this story are found in Genesis 32:24–30 and Genesis 48:14–16. In the second passage, which represents Jacob's commentary on the original incident, Jacob clearly identifies his experience as an act of redemption. When Jacob refers to "the Angel which redeemed me from all evil" (Genesis 48:16), it can be argued that he is referring to Yahweh himself. He "called the name of the place Peniel: for I have seen God face to face" (Genesis 32:30) and declared that his life had been preserved. In the Hebrew text the angel is called ha-gōʿēl, the "redeemer" or the "one redeeming." In both passages the concept of renaming or passing on a name is central. In the original description, Jacob is given the new name of Israel. Then, in Genesis 48:16, Jacob blesses his grandsons Ephraim and
Manasseh, recalling the memory of his redemption, and gives them his name and the names of Abraham and Isaac.

In the account of the deliverance out of Egypt we find another clear connection between adoption, redemption, and covenant. In Exodus 5, Moses speaks to Yahweh, reporting on his unsuccessful efforts to convince Pharaoh to release the children of Israel. Yahweh responds (in Exodus 6:4–8) and refers to the covenant that he made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as an assurance that he will redeem Israel out of their bondage in Egypt. The Lord then speaks of making a covenant with Israel as a people. The phrase, “I will take you to me for a people, and I will be to you a God: and ye shall know that I am the Lord your God, which bringeth you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians” (Exodus 6:7), is reminiscent of a sense of adoption in the individual covenants made with Abraham and Jacob. This sense of familial obligation is characteristic of the redemption provided by the go3el in Hebrew legal practice. The Lord’s redemption of Israel from bondage was more than simply a deliverance or an exercise of power; it was the fulfillment of promises of adoptive redemption with the patriarchs and the establishment of a covenant relationship with the house of Israel through which they became the people of the Lord, and Yahweh became their go3el, the redeeming kinsman of Israel.

Adoptive Redemption in the Book of Mormon

As in the Old Testament, redemption is one of the central themes of the Book of Mormon. The concept of redemption in the Book of Mormon fits the ancient Near Eastern practice of buying someone out of slavery and bondage, although this is often expressed in spiritual terms (as seen in references to the “chains of hell” [Alma 5:7], “the captivity of the devil” [1 Nephi 14:4], etc.). Just as the writers of the Book of Mormon saw captivity in spiritual terms, they also saw redemption as a spiritual matter and sought to persuade people that Jesus Christ is the Redeemer (Alma 37:5–10). This concept of redeemer in the Book of Mormon clearly matches the Israelite concept of the go3el, a family member who had the responsibility to redeem his kinsmen from bondage. The Old Testament view of Yahweh as

12 Consider also Deuteronomy 7:8: "because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, hath the Lord brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt" (emphasis added).
the go'êl of Israel can be seen in the Book of Mormon, where
the Lord’s acts of redemption are connected to covenants that
establish an adoptive relationship with a person or people; when
they enter into this covenantal relationship and receive a new
name, he becomes their go'êl and is able to redeem them. Book
of Mormon writers take Old Testament redemption typology and
the concept of adoptive redemption and make it explicitly spiri-
tual and Christian.

Redemption in the Book of Mormon

In accordance with the ancient Near Eastern practice of re-
demption from physical bondage, the people in the Book of
Mormon understood that redemption from spiritual bondage re-
quired a redeemer to pay the ransom price. The Old Testament
characterization of Yahweh as the Redeemer of Israel is also pre-
sent in the Book of Mormon. Here it is also understood that
Yahweh would come to earth and through his suffering pay the
price of redemption. Lehi teaches that “redemption cometh in
and through the Holy Messiah” because “he offereth himself a
sacrifice for sin, to answer the ends of the law, unto all those
who have a broken heart and a contrite spirit” (2 Nephi 2:6–7).

In addition to identifying Yahweh, the Redeemer of Israel,
with Jesus Christ, the writers of the Book of Mormon give an-
other important insight into spiritual redemption by making a
distinction between redemption from spiritual death and redep-
tion from physical death. Lehi explains that the universal re-
demption from physical death is possible because “the Messiah
cometh in the fullness of time, that he may redeem the children
of men from the fall” (2 Nephi 2:26). This physical redemption
of the children of men is not complete redemption. It only makes
men “free according to the flesh” and able “to choose liberty and
eternal life” or to choose “captivity and death” (2 Nephi 2:27). In
addition to this redemption from death brought about by the res-
urrection of Christ (Mormon 9:13), Christ’s suffering and
atonement provide a redemption from hell, or spiritual bondage.
Both Lehi and Nephi explicitly declare that the Lord “hath re-
deemed my soul from hell” (2 Nephi 1:15; 33:6). Almost six
hundred years later, the prophet Nephi2 explains this redemp-
tion, teaching that the redemption of Christ was understood by
Abraham and Moses (Helaman 8:14–18) and that:

Our father Lehi was driven out of Jerusalem be-
cause he testified of these things. Nephi also testified
of these things; ... they have testified of the coming of Christ. ... And behold, he is God, and he is with them, and he did manifest himself unto them, and they were redeemed by him; and they gave unto him glory, because of that which is to come. (Helaman 8:22–23)

According to the prophet Nephi, his ancestors Lehi and Nephi both saw Christ and were redeemed by him. The connection that Nephi makes between entering into the presence of God and being redeemed is made by Lehi himself when talking with his son Jacob in 2 Nephi 2:3–4, saying:

_I know that thou art redeemed, because of the righteousness of thy Redeemer; for thou hast beheld that in the fullness of time he cometh to bring salvation unto men. And thou hast beheld in thy youth his glory; wherefore, thou art blessed even as they unto whom he shall minister in the flesh._

The idea that full redemption means entering into the Lord’s presence is another important aspect of the concept of spiritual redemption in the Book of Mormon. This connection can be seen not only in the experiences of Lehi, Nephi, and Jacob, but also in the much earlier example of the brother of Jared. After his people had left the tower of Babel, the brother of Jared spoke with the Lord; he was told that because of his faith and knowledge he was redeemed and could enter into the Lord’s presence. The text of this passage shows the central importance of the Lord’s identification of himself as the Redeemer from the foundation of the world.

Because thou knowest these things ye are _redeemed_ from the fall; therefore ye are brought back into my presence; therefore I show myself unto you. Behold, I am he who was prepared from the foundation of the world to redeem my people. Behold I am Jesus Christ. I am the Father and the Son. In me shall all mankind have life, and that eternally, even they

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13 The story of the Jaredites was not a text that was available to the Nephites until later in their history (Mosiah 28:17–19), and it demonstrates the continuity of the Lord’s relations with mankind throughout different dispensations.
who shall believe on my name; and they shall become my sons and my daughters. (Ether 3:13–14)

Covenant in the Book of Mormon

The concept of covenant in the Book of Mormon is consistent with Israelite practices recorded in the Old Testament. Covenants are the formation of new relationships and can be seen in family terms. Like the Israelites, the Nephites believed that people were able to make covenants directly with God. This belief is demonstrated by the actions of the people of Ammon after their conversion. They covenanted that “they never would use weapons again for the shedding of man’s blood; and this they did, vouching and covenenting with God, that rather than shed the blood of their brethren they would give up their own lives” (Alma 24:18).

The Book of Mormon also contains the concept that covenants with God can be considered an adoption. King Benjamin explains to the people that “because of the covenant which ye have made ye shall be called the children of Christ, his sons, and his daughters” (Mosiah 5:7).

Name-giving in the Book of Mormon

In the Book of Mormon, names have importance and significance consistent with Israelite practices recorded in the Old Testament (i.e., a name can be a memorial, an indication of change of character, and a part of a covenant or an adoptive relationship.) The Israelite concept that the term name (šēm) also means memorial is demonstrated in the passage when Helaman talks with his sons Nephi and Lehi about their names. He tells them that they were given the names of their forefathers so “that when you remember your names ye may remember them; and when ye remember them ye may remember their works” (Helaman 5:6–7). The Israelite idea that change of name shows a change of character is demonstrated by the Lamanites who are converted to Christ and “were desirous that they might have a name, that thereby they might be distinguished from their brethren” (Alma 23:16).

As in the Old Testament, renaming is also understood to be part of a covenant in Nephite culture. When Moroni rallies the people of Nephi with the title of liberty, “all those who were true believers in Christ took upon them, gladly, the name of Christ,
or Christians as they were called, because of their belief in Christ who should come” (Alma 46:15). The people proceed to “enter into a covenant that they will maintain their rights, and their religion” (Alma 46:20) and accept the ritual covenant-breaking punishment, which is that “if they should transgress the commandments of God, or fall into transgression, and be ashamed to take upon them the name of Christ, the Lord should rend them even as they had rent their garments” (Alma 46:21).

In the Book of Mormon the making of covenants is usually connected with taking the name of Christ upon one’s self. This practice connects the idea of renaming as a change of nature with the idea of renaming as adoption, because a new name was also an indication of adoption in the ancient Near East.

**Book of Mormon Textual Examples of Adoptive Redemption**

This background on the significance of redemption, covenant, and name in the Book of Mormon shows that Nephite practices followed Israelite customs. The Israelite practice of the go’él’s being responsible to redeem his kinsmen from bondage can also be found in the text of the Book of Mormon. In the previous examination of Old Testament texts we saw how this familial basis for redemption was established between Yahweh and Abraham, Jacob, and the house of Israel through covenants and was indicated by the giving of a new name. In the remainder of the paper, I will examine texts of the Book of Mormon that demonstrate the understanding and establishment of the same relationship of adoptive redemption between the Lord and his people in the Americas.

**King Benjamin’s Speech (Mosiah 1–6)**

King Benjamin’s speech and the covenant made by his people have been the topic of intensive and insightful study. Scholars connect it with many different biblical and ancient Near Eastern patterns. Surprisingly, this speech not only fits into many genres, but it manages to do so without one description contradicting another. After a brief overview of the different suggestions of ancient Near Eastern background I will examine this discourse in the light of the adoptive redemption pattern.

Hugh Nibley compares King Benjamin’s speech to ancient Near Eastern coronation rites associated with New Year’s festi-
vals. John W. Welch describes it as a "classic ancient farewell address" and claims it is the most complete example of the characteristics found in ancient farewell speeches. John A. Tvedtnes argues that the speech and coronation took place at the festival of Sukkot ("booths" or "tabernacles"). Stephen D. Ricks notes that not only was the Feast of Tabernacles the ritual setting for covenant renewal ceremonies in the Old Testament (following an even older Near Eastern pattern), but also that King Benjamin's speech closely follows this biblical and ancient Near Eastern treaty/covenant pattern.

These suggestions as to the time and setting of this speech give additional evidence to its connection of covenant, adoption, and redemption. Tvedtnes claims that "according to Jewish tradition, the first Sukkot was celebrated at the foot of Mount Sinai, six months after the Exodus from Egypt." This was the time of year when Israel covenedanted with the Lord and became his people. The Feast of Tabernacles included a "rehearsal of the law of God and a public commitment to obey his commandments," as well as coronation or kingship renewal. Tvedtnes notes that the king of the Israelites presided at the Sukkot assembly and that every seventh year the festival was a renewal of the law given at Sinai (Deuteronomy 31:9–13).

Tvedtnes mentions Welch's argument that the speech took place during a jubilee year and claims that this is consistent with a Feast of Tabernacles setting because the jubilee year is an-

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16 John A. Tvedtnes, "King Benjamin and the Feast of Tabernacles," in Lundquist and Ricks, eds., By Study and Also by Faith, 2:197–237.
18 Tvedtnes, "King Benjamin and the Feast of Tabernacles," 199.
19 Ibid., 201.
20 Ibid., 205.
nounced in the same seventh month that this festival occurs.\textsuperscript{21} The jubilee year (and possibly sabbatical years) would have been a very significant setting for King Benjamin to give a message about spiritual redemption because it was the time when Israelite slaves were to be freed (Deuteronomy 15:12–18; Leviticus 25:39–42) and people were freed from their debts (Deuteronomy 15:1–3), and it is only in the jubilee year that the land is returned to its original owners (Leviticus 25:25–28). It is interesting to note that when originally giving these injunctions to the Israelites the Lord refers back to the redemption of Israel, saying that “thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt, and \textit{the LORD thy God redeemed thee}: therefore I command thee this thing to day” (Deuteronomy 15:15). If King Benjamin’s speech did take place at the beginning of a jubilee year, the timing would additionally emphasize the redemptive content of his speech because of the day and the message of that day, as prescribed in Leviticus 25:9–10.\textsuperscript{22}

Then shalt thou cause the trumpet of the jubilee to sound on the tenth day of the seventh month, \textit{in the day of atonement} shall ye make the trumpet sound throughout all your land. And ye shall hallow the fiftieth year, and \textit{proclaim liberty} throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof. (emphasis added)

In the context of King Benjamin’s Christ-centered message, this connection between the Day of Atonement (part of the fall festival time) and the proclamation of liberty would clearly be understood as a symbol of redemption from spiritual bondage.


\textsuperscript{22} Welch, “King Benjamin’s Speech in the Context of Ancient Israelite Festivals,” 58–59, argues for a setting at the end of the jubilee year, based on a description of “continual peace throughout all the land” (Alma 30:2) forty-nine years later. While I find this a very observant comment I believe that a setting at the beginning of the jubilee year and the addition of another year before the next jubilee celebration would not affect this chronology, given his own observation that “the inclusive mode of sometimes counting the last year as the first of the next jubilee cycle accounts for the frequent confusion between 49 and 50 year jubilee counts”; “King Benjamin’s Speech,” 54.
through the price of the atonement of Christ. As King Benjamin explains in his speech, the freedom from bondage carried out every sabbatical and jubilee year comes through Christ. He refers to the law of Moses, which prescribed the keeping of the sabbatical and jubilee years, and comments in Mosiah 3:14–15 that:

The Lord God saw that his people were a stiff-necked people, and he appointed unto them a law, even the law of Moses. And many signs, and wonders, and types, and shadows showed he unto them concerning his coming; and also holy prophets spake unto them, concerning his coming; and yet they hardened their hearts, and understood not that the law of Moses availedeth nothing except it were through the atonement of his blood.

In the context of a sabbatical or jubilee year the practice of redeeming land, debtors, and slaves can easily be understood as “types and shadows” of the spiritual redemption which comes through Christ.

In fact, in both King Benjamin’s address and in the response of the people we can see how the covenant renewal practices associated with the Feast of Tabernacles become a reenactment of the adoptive redemption pattern observed at Sinai, but with an additional, overtly spiritual and Christian dimension.23 The people enter into a covenant with God (Mosiah 5:5), receive a new name which reflects this adoptive relationship (Mosiah 5:7–8), are made free (Mosiah 5:8), and, as a result of retaining the name in one’s heart and keeping the covenant, receive the promise of complete redemption, being able to enter the presence of God (Mosiah 5:9–15). This pattern follows the connection between covenant, renaming, and redemption that was earlier examined in the experiences of Abraham, Jacob, and the house

23 The question as to why a king and not a priest would have led a covenant-renewal ceremony is addressed by Stephen D. Ricks, “The Ideology of Kingship in Mosiah 1–6,” in Welch, ed., Reexploring the Book of Mormon, 116, who notes that the king in Israel was responsible to act as the “guardian of the covenant between the Lord and his people.” It is also interesting to consider how the king acts as a representative for the Lord. King Benjamin recognizes this position when he says that “I . . . was suffered by the hand of the Lord that I should be a ruler and a king over this people” (Mosiah 2:11).
of Israel, but here the text makes it clear that the redemption is through Christ. King Benjamin tells the people that “because of the covenant which ye have made ye shall be called the children of Christ, his sons, and his daughters” (Mosiah 5:7). This description is one of the clearest examples that covenant creates an adoptive relationship. The element of renaming is equally clear. The people are told “that ye should take upon you the name of Christ, all you that have entered into the covenant with God” (Mosiah 5:8). Likewise, King Benjamin explicitly explains that it is because of this relationship that the people are able to be redeemed, saying that “under this head [Christ] ye are made free, and there is no other head whereby ye can be made free” (Mosiah 5:8). Finally, they are told that those who “take upon [them] the name of Christ,” having covenanted to “be obedient unto the end of [their] lives . . . shall be found at the right hand of God, for [they] shall know the name by which [they are] called; for [they] shall be called by the name of Christ” (Mosiah 5:8–9). This promise of being “found at the right hand of God” is a promise of complete redemption, to be able to enter the presence of God, as the Lord said to the brother of Jared: “Because thou knowest these things ye are redeemed from the fall; therefore ye are brought back into my presence; therefore I show myself unto you” (Ether 3:13). When we recognize that a person’s name and nature were intimately connected in ancient cultures, we can see that those people who “know the name by which [they are] called; for [they] shall be called by the name of Christ” (Mosiah 5:9) know the nature of Christ, like the brother of Jared, because they have that same nature themselves. These are the people who are fully redeemed from the bondage of this world and of the natural man “through the atonement of Christ the Lord” (Mosiah 3:19).

This covenant-making procedure demonstrates that the biblical adoptive redemption pattern is followed in King Benjamin’s speech, but with a clearer Christian dimension. It is interesting to note, however, that neither the word “redeem” nor any of its variants occur in the text of the speech. Yet, at the same time, the basic meaning of redemption—freeing from captivity through the payment of a price—is found here even more clearly than in any of the biblical passages because the sacrifice

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24 Obviously, this is not an unusual observation to those who read the Old Testament with an understanding that Yahweh was Jesus Christ. The text of the Book of Mormon clarifies this point.
of Christ is central to this text. King Benjamin explains that “his blood atoneth for the sins of those who have fallen by the transgression of Adam, who died not knowing the will of God concerning them” (Mosiah 3:11), “the law of Moses availeth nothing except it were through the atonement of his blood” (Mosiah 3:15), “the blood of Christ atoneth for their [little children’s] sins” (Mosiah 3:16), and that all must “believe that salvation was, and is, and is to come, in and through the atoning blood of Christ” (Mosiah 3:18). Because we do not have the original text of the Book of Mormon we know neither the original word nor the exact meaning of the term that is translated as “atone” in English. I would suggest, however, that in the context of King Benjamin’s speech “atone for” should be understood as “pay for” because of the use of the preposition “for.” Christ’s blood does allow at-one-ment to take place, but that sense of reuniting in the English term cannot meaningfully be connected with “for,” as the concept of payment can. Thus the phrase “his blood atoneth for the sins” (Mosiah 3:11) would not make sense as “his blood reunites for (or even “with”) the sins,” but “pays for the sins” would make perfect sense. This understanding that King Benjamin viewed the blood of Christ to act as the price of redemption is also reflected in a later Book of Mormon commentary on this text. Helaman spoke to his sons Nephi and Lehi and told them to remember “the words which king Benjamin spake unto his people; yea, remember that there is no other way nor means whereby man can be saved, only through the atoning blood of Jesus Christ, who shall come; yea, remember that he cometh to redeem the world” (Helaman 5:9).

Thus we can see that even though the word “redeem” or “redemption” is not found in the English translation of King Benjamin’s speech, the time and location, internal concepts, and later commentary all indicate a message of redemption based on entering into an adoptive covenant with the Lord.

**Abinadi (Mosiah 11–16)**

Redemption is clearly a central theme in Abinadi’s two visits to the people of King Noah (Mosiah 11–16). Welch, Thomasson, and Smith, in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, suggest a redemptive setting for Abinadi’s address by arguing that he chose to come at the festival of Pentecost, which celebrated the covenant made at Sinai and the giving of the law. During this spring festival, also known as the Day of the
Firstfruits, the people would have gathered together to celebrate and commemorate Israel’s redemption, covenant, and the reception of the law.  

Two years later, perhaps on Pentecost again, Abinadi returns to the city of Nephi, commanded by the Lord to “prophesy again unto this my people” (Mosiah 12:1). He repeats the warnings of the last visit as declarations of imminent destruction and bondage. He is then taken before the king where the priests question him and ask him the meaning of the words of Isaiah 52:7–10:

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings. . . . Break forth into joy; sing together ye waste places of Jerusalem; for the Lord hath comforted his people, he hath redeemed Jerusalem; The Lord hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.

Upon hearing their question about the meaning of this passage, Abinadi scolds the priests for not understanding the ways of the Lord and asks them what they teach the people. They reply that they teach the law of Moses and claim that salvation comes by the law of Moses (Mosiah 12:25–32). Abinadi partially responds to their claim, saying that:

If ye keep the commandments of God ye shall be saved; yea, if ye keep the commandments which the Lord delivered unto Moses in the mount of Sinai, saying: I am the Lord thy God, who hath brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. (Mosiah 12:33–34)

Instead of directly teaching that salvation does not come by the law alone (as he later does in Mosiah 14), Abinadi reminds the priests that the commandments of God were given as part of the adoptive covenant at Sinai. He emphasizes the covenant by explicitly referring to the time and situation when the Lord gave the commandments. It was at Sinai that the Lord covenanted with Israel as a people and they were called “his people.” This covenantal relationship is the qualification for redemption.

Abinadi clearly acknowledges that these commandments, the law of Moses, are part of the covenant. He teaches that obedience to the commandments does not save, but simply allows one to keep the covenant and qualify to be redeemed by the Lord. The reference to Sinai is heightened by the narrator who compares Abinadi before the priests to Moses on Sinai, stating that “his face shown with exceeding luster, even as Moses’ did while in the mount of Sinai, while speaking with the Lord” (Mosiah 13:5).

After reviewing the Ten Commandments, central to the law of Moses, Abinadi responds directly to the priests’ statement in Mosiah 13 by saying:

And now ye have said that salvation cometh by the law of Moses. I say unto you that it is expedient that ye should keep the law of Moses as yet; but I say unto you, that the time shall come when it shall no more be expedient to keep the law of Moses. And moreover, I say unto you that salvation doth not come by the law alone; and were it not for the atonement which God himself shall make for the sins and iniquities of his people, that they must unavoidably perish, notwithstanding the law of Moses. (Mosiah 13:27–28)

He then goes on to teach explicitly that “there could not any man be saved except it were through the redemption of God” (Mosiah 13:32). Abinadi supports this claim by quoting the Messianic prophecy of Isaiah 53, which explains that the redeemer would pay the spiritual price necessary to free those in bondage to sin. “He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed” (Mosiah 14:5). Abinadi teaches that this prophecy will be fulfilled when “God himself shall come down among the children of men, and shall redeem his people” (Mosiah 15:1).

After quoting Isaiah 53, Abinadi expounds upon this Messianic promise of redemption and explains how the concept of adoptive redemption is a principle of spiritual redemption. The two concepts that are central to Abinadi’s development are summarized in his statement: “God himself shall come down among the children of men, and shall redeem his people” (Mosiah 15:1). The first idea is that God himself, Yahweh, shall come to earth and “make his soul an offering for sin” (Mosiah
14:10). By paying a price the redeemer meets the demands of justice and allows the slaves to go free. Likewise, through his death, Christ will have “power to make intercession for the children of men, ... having broken the bands of death, taken upon himself their iniquity and their transgressions, having redeemed them, and satisfied the demands of justice” (Mosiah 15:9). As God was the redeemer from bondage in Egypt, so he is the redeemer from the bondage of sin.

Abinadi’s second concept is that God shall redeem “his people,” referring to those who have covenanted with him to become his people. This concept of redemption based on covenant is crucial to understanding Abinadi’s discussion of the “seed of the Lord” and “his generation” in Mosiah 15. In this chapter it is clearly stated that the Lord “has redeemed his people” (Mosiah 15:18) and that his seed “are they whose sins he has borne; these are they for whom he has died, to redeem them from their transgressions” (Mosiah 15:12). Those who hearkened to the words of the prophets and “believed that the Lord would redeem his people” are his seed (Mosiah 15:11). Abinadi implies that adoption and redemption are not arbitrary, but are the result of making and keeping covenants. He also explains the implications of the principle of adoptive redemption for those who will not become the “seed” of the Lord by keeping their covenants, saying,

The Lord redeemeth none such that rebel against him and die in their sins, ... that have wilfully rebelled against God, that have known the commandments of God, and would not keep them, ... for the Lord hath redeemed none such; yea, neither can the Lord redeem such. (Mosiah 15:26–27)

Alma at the Waters of Mormon (Mosiah 18)

One of the most clear and concise textual examples of the connection between covenant and redemption is found in Mosiah 18, where Alma1 talks to the subjects of King Noah who have come into the wilderness to hear him teach the words of Abinadi. When they are ready to enter into a covenant with the Lord, Alma addresses them in a famous discussion of the duties of the Saints associated with the baptismal covenant. This speech is even more interesting when we notice the explicit connection between covenant, adoption, and redemption. In Mosiah 18:8–9, he addresses the people and mentions their desire “to
come into the fold of God, and to be called his people," and "to bear one another's burdens, that they may be light, ... that ye may be redeemed of God, and be numbered with those of the first resurrection, that ye may have eternal life." This states that "coming into the fold of God" and being "called his people" are necessary in order to be redeemed of God. In Mosiah 18:10 Alma explains how this adoption is possible, saying that "if this be the desire of your hearts, what have you against being baptized in the name of the Lord, as a witness before him that ye have entered into a covenant with him." We see here that the baptismal covenant acts as an adoption which allows the Lord to become the redeemer, or goêêl, of the individual who has taken his name upon him and covenanted with him.

The connection between covenant and redemption in this ordinance is also emphasized in the baptismal prayer. Alma says to Helam that he baptizes him "as a testimony that ye have entered into a covenant to serve him; ... and may he grant unto you eternal life, through the redemption of Christ, whom he has prepared from the foundation of the world" (Mosiah 18:13).

The Peoples of Limhi and Alma

The Book of Mormon's theme of redemption from death and sin builds upon the more tangible redemption discussed in the Old Testament. There are situations, however, where Book of Mormon peoples look to the Lord for physical deliverance as well as spiritual. During their respective periods of captivity, both the people of Limhi and the people of Alma are clearly aware of a connection between covenants and their physical redemption.

It has been suggested that Limhi's address to the people took place on either Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement) or Shavuot (the festival of Firstfruits or Pentecost) in a temple setting.26 If this was the case, then the timing and the location would add an additional emphasis to the message of redemption by God, the Day of Atonement symbolizing God's ransom and Pentecost being the time when Moses and the house of Israel covenanted at Sinai. At this time Limhi's people are in bondage

26 John W. Welch, Donald W. Parry, and Stephen D. Ricks, "This Day," in Welch, ed., Reexploring the Book of Mormon, 117–19. They note that the phrase "this day" (found in Mosiah 7:12; 7:21), like its Hebrew equivalent etzem, is regularly used in a temple setting and acts as a "covenantal marker" (117).
to the Lamanites and Limhi reminds them of the bondage and redemption of their fathers, saying:

Lift up your heads, and rejoice, and put your trust in God, in that God who was the God of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob; and also, that God who brought the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt. (Mosiah 7:19)

As the biblical accounts explains, these individuals and the people of Israel all entered into covenants with the Lord, establishing an adoptive relationship with him, and received the promise of redemption.

By making these specific references, Limhi reminds his people that the Lord can redeem them as well, if they bring themselves into the necessary relationship with him. He explains that through their wickedness under King Noah they separated themselves from this relationship with the Lord, but Limhi tells them to "turn to the Lord with full purpose of heart, and put your trust in him, and serve him with all diligence of mind" and that "if ye do this, he will, according to his own will and pleasure, deliver you out of bondage" (Mosiah 7:33). It is significant that after the people of Limhi are redeemed from bondage and join the people of Mosiah at Zarahemla, Limhi and his people want to enter into the adoptive covenant of baptism just as the people of Alma had previously done. Alma baptized them in the same manner as he did those at the waters of Mormon (see Mosiah 25:17–18). Not only was the covenant exactly the same, but the idea of renaming can also be seen in this passage. The text notes that "whosoever were desirous to take upon them the name of Christ, or of God, they did join the churches of God; and they were called the people of God" (Mosiah 25:23–24).

Alma and the people who entered into covenant with the Lord at the waters of Mormon were likewise taken into captivity. In this situation, however, they knew that they had taken upon themselves the name of the Lord and had been adopted by him through their baptismal covenants. This understanding allowed them to have faith that he would act as their ġōּל and redeem them from bondage. Therefore, they cried mightily and poured out their hearts to God. In response to their cries, the voice of the Lord came to them, saying: "Lift up your heads and be of good comfort, for I know of the covenant which ye have made unto me; and I will covenant with my people and deliver them out of bondage" (Mosiah 24:13). Here the Lord specifically
refers to them as "my people," indicating an adoptive relationship, and says that because of the covenant he will deliver them out of bondage.

**Redemption of His People**

Another example of the concept of adoptive redemption in the Book of Mormon can be seen in the repetition of the idea that the Lord will redeem "his people." The phrase that the Lord will "redeem his people" appears ten times in the Book of Mormon and the declaration that he has "redeemed his people" occurs seven times.\(^{27}\) From the text it is clear that it is the act of making and keeping covenants that makes a group of people "the people of the Lord" (see 1 Nephi 17:33–35). The text explains that the redemption of Israel was made possible because the patriarchs loved the Lord and chose to accept his covenants.

> And he loveth those who will have him to be their God. Behold, he loveth our fathers, and he covenanteth with them, yea, even Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and he remembereth the covenants which he had made; wherefore, he did bring them out of the land of Egypt. (1 Nephi 17:40)

The Book of Mormon explains that "the Lord's people" are not arbitrarily chosen to be saved while others are chosen to be damned. Instead, it stresses that "the Lord esteemeth all flesh in one," but "he that is righteous is favored of God" (1 Nephi 17:35). This emphasis on righteousness clarifies the adoption of Israel. Because they were righteous and willing to enter into covenants with the Lord, they became "the people of the Lord" (see Exodus 6:7).

This adoption by covenant to become the "people of the Lord" is illustrated in Mosiah 26. Here the Lord speaks to Alma about the people who were willing to enter into a covenant with him at the waters of Mormon. In his address he explicitly states that the people who are willing to bear his name are his people.

> Yea, blessed is this people who are willing to bear my name; for in my name shall they be called; and they are mine" (Mosiah 26:18). Through their baptismal covenant the people of Alma re-

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ceived a new name and were adopted. He explains that those who are adopted by covenant and keep that covenant will receive a place at his right hand, "for behold, in my name are they called; and if they know me they shall come forth" (Mosiah 26:24). The Lord contrasts this promise of redemption with the fate of those who will not enter into (or keep) their covenants, receive his name, and be adopted.

And it shall come to pass that when the second trump shall sound then shall they that never knew me come forth and shall stand before me. And then shall they know that I am their Redeemer; but they would not be redeemed. (Mosiah 26:25–26)

The prophets of the Book of Mormon teach that redemption is offered to all; however, only those who enter into covenants and are adopted by the Lord, receiving his name, create a family relationship with the Lord where he is able to act as their gōwâl and deliver them from the bondage of sin.

Adoptive Covenant Renewal

When the Lord visited his covenant people in the Americas after his resurrection he taught that:

I am he that gave the law, and I am he who covenanted with my people Israel; therefore, the law in me is fulfilled, for I have come to fulfil the law. . . . For behold, the covenant which I have made with my people is not all fulfilled; but the law which was given unto Moses hath an end in me. (3 Nephi 15:5, 8)

Because the covenant was not all fulfilled, the Lord established baptism and the sacrament as covenant making and renewing ordinances. The sacrament was instituted specifically in remembrance of his redemptive sacrifice. This ritual meal of covenant renewal recalls the ritual meal of Moses and the elders of Israel with the Lord as a part of the covenant on Mount Sinai (Exodus 24:9–11). In both cases, eating together symbolizes joining the family of the Lord.

The concept of adoptive redemption highlights the elements of this covenant renewal contained in the sacramental prayers recorded by Moroni "according to the commandments of Christ" (Moroni 4:1). The priest, representing the congregation,
prays to God "in the name of thy Son, Jesus Christ" (Moroni 4:3), recalling that through baptism we take upon ourselves the name of Christ. In the prayer over the bread this covenantal renaming is renewed as the priest promises that "they are willing to take upon them the name of thy Son."

The sacrament prayers teach what to do to keep the adoptive covenant of baptism: "take upon [oneself] the name of [Christ], and always remember him, and keep his commandments" (Moroni 4:3). The promise in both prayers is that the participants "may have his Spirit to be with them" (Moroni 4:3; 5:2). In spiritual terms, this is a promise of redemption because it is by this promise that we can be "wrought upon and cleansed by the power of the Holy Ghost" (Moroni 6:4) and thereby be freed from the spiritual prison of sin and separation from God.

Conclusion

The Hebrew text of the Old Testament explains the concept of the goř-ēl as a family redeemer, and indicates how through covenant Yahweh becomes the goř-ēl of Israel and then redeems his people from bondage. The Book of Mormon keeps this concept of Yahweh's being the goř-ēl of Israel and identifies Yahweh as Jesus Christ. It teaches that spiritual redemption comes through the price of Christ's suffering and death to those who become his adopted children through covenant and the reception of his name.

An understanding of the role of covenants in creating an adoptive relationship with the Lord, allowing him to act as goř-ēl, is more than a scriptural or historical footnote. This understanding is crucial for Latter-day Saints as a modern covenant people. To fully appreciate the importance of covenants we must recognize that we are in bondage, and, like the ancient Israelites, we need a goř-ēl to redeem us. We must know that "were it not for the redemption which he hath made for his people, which was prepared from the foundation of the world, . . . all mankind must have perished" (Mosiah 15:19). To appreciate the power of our covenants there must not only be a recognition of bondage, but also an awareness that our goř-ēl has already paid the redemption price, that "he suffered the pains of all men, yea, the pains of every living creature, both men, women, and children" (2 Nephi 9:21). With this knowledge that our goř-ēl has paid the ransom price, as a modern covenant people we can claim the redemptive power of the Lord because we have established an
adoptive relationship with him through our covenants. We must only believe in the reality of this relationship and “exercise faith in the redemption of him who created [us]” (Alma 5:15).

The texts that we have examined show this pattern of adoptive redemption. Abraham, Jacob, Lehi, Nephi, Jacob, and the peoples of King Benjamin and Alma all believed that Christ was their gō'ēl or redeemer. They entered into adoptive covenants, received new names, and believed that this adoptive relationship would allow the Lord to act as their gō'ēl and redeem them. These people experienced this redemption; they either saw Jesus in the flesh or “died, firmly believing that their souls were redeemed by the Lord Jesus Christ; thus they went out of the world rejoicing” (Alma 46:39). The experiences are a compelling demonstration of the redemptive power of Christ as gō'ēl. Just as the gō'ēl was bound by his family ties to redeem his kinsman, so Yahweh became, through adoptive covenant, the gō'ēl of the faithful in the Old Testament and Book of Mormon and assured their redemption from captivity.