

## Some Theoretical Musings on the Name Benjamin in the Book of Mormon

From the beginning, Hebrew scholars have realized that there is inherent meaning in the names of persons mentioned in the Bible. Similarly, Book of Mormon scholars have sought ancient Middle Eastern-linked meaning in the names of persons mentioned in the Book of Mormon. (See my Commentary: 1 Nephi 1, and also Book of Mormon Onomasticon.)

In recent times, scholars are postulating that the meaning of Book of Mormon names extends beyond just the simple meaning of the roots that make up the names. For example, the name Nephi has not only been associated with “good,” but various scriptures in the Book of Mormon have been identified that use “wordplay” to highlight that meaning. Moreover, in the account in Second Maccabees 1, the name “Nephi” is given to a substance that is linked to the restoration of covenant temple ordinances (covenant salvation). The same can be said about the name Mormon. It has also been linked with the meaning of “good.” However, we find in 3 Nephi 5:12 we find that Mormon himself links his name with the place where the covenant church was restored. Thus the names of two most important men involved in the composition of the Book of Mormon are linked with covenant restoration. When we link this knowledge with the fact that the Book of Mormon now carries the name “Another Testament of Jesus Christ,” and that the word “testament” means “covenant—thus rendering the title: “The Book of Mormon: The Restored Covenant of Jesus Christ,” – then we find an amazing correlation.

Another example is found in the Book of Mormon in a prophet-king-leader by the name of Mosiah. According to original research by John Sawyer and John Welch, the term *mosiah* was an ancient Hebrew term, like *go'el* ("redeemer, or avenger of blood"), or *sedeq* ("victor, savior"). Such terms originally had meaning in Hebrew daily life and culture but came to be used among their titles for God. The word *mosia* (pronounced moe-shee-ah) is a word peculiar to Hebrew, a "word invariably implying a champion of justice in a situation of controversy, battle or oppression."

Apparently the form of the word Mosiah is a "hiphil participle" in Hebrew. It occurs in the Hebrew in Deuteronomy 22:27, 28:29; Judges 12:3; Psalms 18:41; and Isaiah 5:29--texts that in all probability were on the Plates of Brass. This word, however, was not transliterated into the English by the King James translators, and thus the Hebrew would not have been known to Joseph Smith. It was, however, known and used as a personal name in the Book of Mormon, as well as by people in the Jewish colony at Elephantine in the fifth century B.C.

King "Mosiah"<sup>(1)</sup> (Omni 1:12) was a God-appointed hero who delivered the chosen people of Nephi from serious wars and contentions by leading them in an escape from the land of Nephi (see Omni 1:12-14). It is unknown whether he was called Mosiah before he functioned as a *mosia* of his people or whether he gained this well-earned title afterward, perhaps as a royal title, but either is possible. (John Sawyer and John Welch, "What Was a 'Mosiah'?", in Reexploring the Book of Mormon, F.A.R.M.S., p. 105-107.)

In other words, Mosiah<sup>1</sup> carries his name (Mosiah—"Messiah") because he led his covenant people (from the land of Nephi) through a wilderness and delivered them into a more promised land (the land of Zarahemla) where they could enjoy and practice the principles of the covenant gospel. Thus the name Mosiah is linked not only with inherent meaning of the roots, but with significant history.

Once in this new promised land (the land of Zarahemla), the Nephite people of Mosiah found the people of Zarahemla that “came out from Jerusalem at the time that Zedekiah, king of Judah, was carried away captive into Babylon.” (Omni 1:15)

The two peoples merged and Mosiah<sub>1</sub> was made their king. In time Mosiah<sub>1</sub> grew old and his son, whose name was Benjamin, began to reign in his stead. (Omni 1:23) In the Book of Mormon story, this king "Benjamin" would rule over both the Nephites (descendants of Ephraim and Manasseh) and the people of Zarahemla. (Later we find that Zarahemla was a descendant of Mulek, the son of Zedekiah (Hel. 6:10; Mosiah 25:2) so the people of Zarahemla are also referred to as “Mulekites.”) In the Book of Mormon record we also find that this king Benjamin led his people into "a serious war" against the Lamanites (Omni 1:24).

With this in mind, it is interesting that in ancient Israel, the tribe of Benjamin occupied a strip of land between the tribe of Judah and the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh. Under the Divided Monarchy, "Ephraim" (the Northern kingdom) occupied part of the lands of Benjamin, while "Judah" occupied the rest of the land. However, the tribe of Benjamin remained part of the kingdom of Judah (1 Kings 12:19-24). The tribe of Benjamin earned a high reputation for bravery and skill in war. (Tyndale House, The Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Vol. 1, p. 185.)

One might ponder as to whether the name "Benjamin" from Old Testament times had anything to do with king Benjamin in the Book of Mormon? Perhaps the name "Benjamin" and the role the character plays in the Book of Mormon is a coincidence, or a prophetic act by his father Mosiah, or perhaps this is an example of Metonymic naming (after-the fact editorial naming) by Mormon in giving added meaning to his abridgment of Nephite history. (For further insight, see “John W. Welch, “Benjamin, the Man: His Place in Nephite History,” in King Benjamin’s Speech, p. 25-27). Additionally, the meaning of the name “Benjamin” is linked to “son of the right hand” (see Genesis 35:18). We find that same wordplay in the Book of Mormon, where king Benjamin delivered a significantly recorded covenant sermon in which he states: “whosoever doeth this shalol be found at the right hand of God (Mosiah 5:9).

Now if Mosiah<sub>1</sub>’s name was symbolic, what about the name “Benjamin”? WHY would this son of Mosiah<sub>1</sub> acquire such a name? In my view, in order to perhaps better understand why, I will review what happened in their lives as recorded in the Book of Omni.

In speaking of the people of Zarahemla, the record states that “they denied the being of their Creator.” (see Omni 1:17) I would have to wonder, referring to the specific phrasing, if the people of Zarahemla, rather than being totally devoid of religion, were just specifically denying that Christ was the Creator. This idea was apparently one of the very teachings for which they persecuted the Old World prophets Lehi and Jeremiah (see Alma 13:16 personal notes).

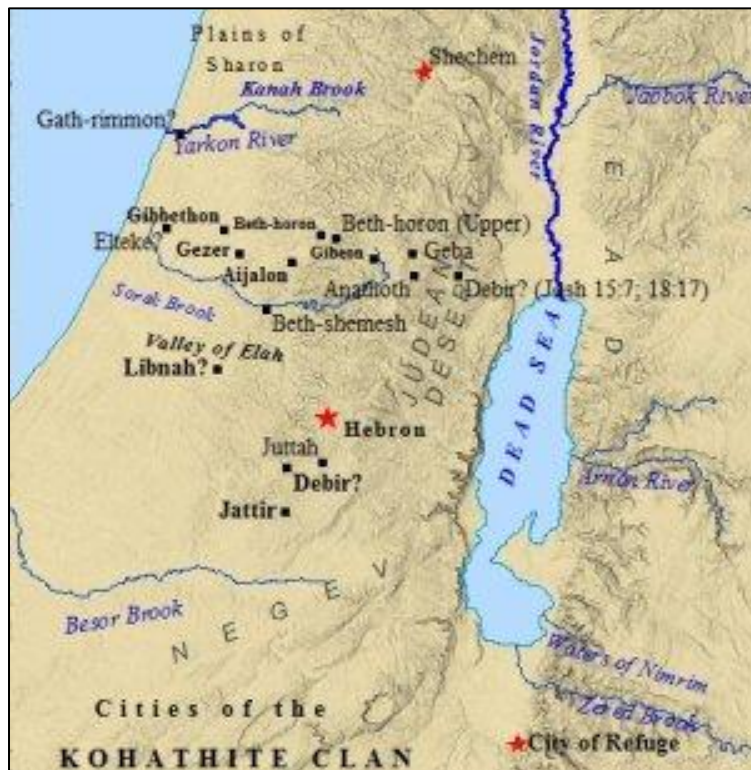
The record keeper Amaleki also writes that "after they [the people of Zarahemla] were taught in the language of Mosiah, Zarahemla gave a genealogy of his fathers, according to his memory; and they are written, but not in these plates" (Omni 1:18). This raises some additional questions in my mind. First of all, WHY was it so important that Zarahemla give a genealogy of his fathers? And second, how detailed was this record? Was the genealogy of Zarahemla written on the large plates or was it a record in itself? If it was on the large plates, it might have been part of the lost 116 pages of manuscript. Whatever the case, this record of Zarahemla is not known to us. However, the fact that Mormon lists Zarahemla as a "descendant of Mulek who came out of Jerusalem" in Mosiah 25:2, and that Mulek was a “son of

Zedekiah" in Helaman 6:10, seems to confirm its existence. Thus we find evidence of Zarahemla's genealogy from a source "not on these plates" just as Amaleki says.

Moreover, we learn in the Book of Mormon that records were usually kept by royalty. In this regard it is also interesting that the Nephite record keeper Amaleki turned all his records over to king Benjamin. (Omni 1:25) Thus in King Benjamin, there was a uniting not just of two peoples, but of their records.

There seems to be something symbolical going on here, but what? Perhaps there is another point worth discussing here. Zarahemla had apparently remembered his genealogy perfectly, implying that his genealogy was of such importance that it had been handed down from one generation to another. Certainly it was important because it showed that Zarahemla descended from Zedekiah the king of Judah. There are, however, some biblical references that point to the possibility that Zarahemla could have also been an elite descendant of the Priests of Levi and Aaron.

When the lands of Israel were originally split up among the twelve tribes, special privilege was given to the tribe of Levi because of their priestly role. The House of Kohath (the son of Levi) was given the city of Libnah (along with 12 other cities and their suburbs--see Joshua 21:8-19).



The Location of the City of Libnah and the city of Anathoth

This geographical association of the city of Libnah to priesthood lineage might be implied in some verses of scripture which speak of Zedekiah's genealogy. In the historical book of 2 Kings we find that "Zedekiah [a son of king Josiah] was twenty and one years old when he began to reign . . . And his mother's name was Hamutal, the daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah" (2 Kings 24:18).

Apparently, Zedekiah's grandfather was "Jeremiah of Libnah"—the title "of Libnah" indicating that his rights of inheritance were at the city of Libnah, and that most probably he was part of the priesthood elite and a direct descendant of Aaron through the loins of Levi. Thus Zarahemla would have descended not only from the royal family of the tribe of Judah through Zedekiah, but through a Levitical priesthood line through Hamutal, Zedekiah's mother.<sup>1</sup> With such dual descendancy would have come an inherent responsibility to pass on a recorded or memorized genealogy from one generation to another.<sup>2</sup>

King Josiah  
→ Zedekiah

Jeremiah (of Libnah) → Hamutal

Additionally, and apparently not realized by the Nephites at the time of king Mosiah, Zarahemla's genealogy possibly represented evidence of a literal fulfillment of revelatory words given by the Lord through the prophet Ezekiel and the prophet Jeremiah at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem in the Old World. Ezekiel was a prophet of the Diaspora, that is, he was taken to Babylonia just before the time of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians about 586 B.C. The Lord used Ezekiel to add his testimony to the fact that Jerusalem would indeed be destroyed. Among the many words Ezekiel recorded concerning the ramifications of this destruction are the following:

Thus saith the Lord God; *I will also take of the highest branch of the high cedar, and will set it; I will crop off from the top of his young twigs a tender one, and will plant it upon a high mountain and eminent.*

*In the mountain of the height of Israel will I plant it: and it shall bring forth boughs, and bear fruit, and be a goodly cedar: and under it shall dwell all fowl of every wing; in the shadow of the branches thereof shall they dwell.*

And all the trees of the field shall know that I the Lord have brought down the high tree, have exalted the low tree, have dried up the green tree, and have made the dry tree to flourish: I the Lord have spoken and have done it. (Ezekiel 17:22-24; emphasis added)

The mention of "high cedar" associated with "the highest branch" is clearly symbolic. According to *The Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, the cedars of Lebanon were large spreading coniferous trees whose wood was highly valued for its durability.

This cedar wood was brought to Jerusalem, for example, for building David's house (2 Samuel 5:11, etc.), Solomon's Temple (1 Kings 5:6-10, etc.), and the new Temple built after the Babylonian Exile (Ezra 3:7).<sup>i</sup> Thus the idea that someone would take from "the highest branch of the high cedar" might imply royal lineage related to the mention of the house of David, but it also might imply priesthood lineage related to the High Priests who ruled at the temple of Solomon.

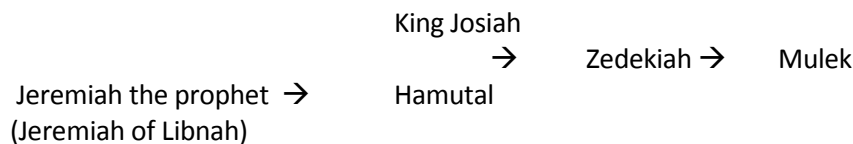
Ezekiel's prophecy could have, in part, been applicable to Mulek, the son of Zedekiah and an heir to both royalty and priesthood; who was cut from the Old World and planted in the New World, and whose descendant, Zarahemla, was found by Mosiah1.



Cedar of Lebanon

Now the prophet Jeremiah (author of the book of Jeremiah) was a contemporary of Ezekiel at the time of the Diaspora. However, while Ezekiel became part of the Diaspora and was taken away, Jeremiah remained near Jerusalem until it's destruction. His mission was not only to warn the Jews of their impending destruction, but to personally witness that destruction and dispersion from Jerusalem itself. Interestingly, Jeremiah was told in his initial call that part of his prophetic mission would also be to "plant" (Jeremiah 1:10). Some have interpreted Ezekiel's prophecy in a way that the "planting" might have had at least a partial fulfillment in Mulek, the son of Zedekiah (and ultimately in Zarahemla a descendant of Mulek).

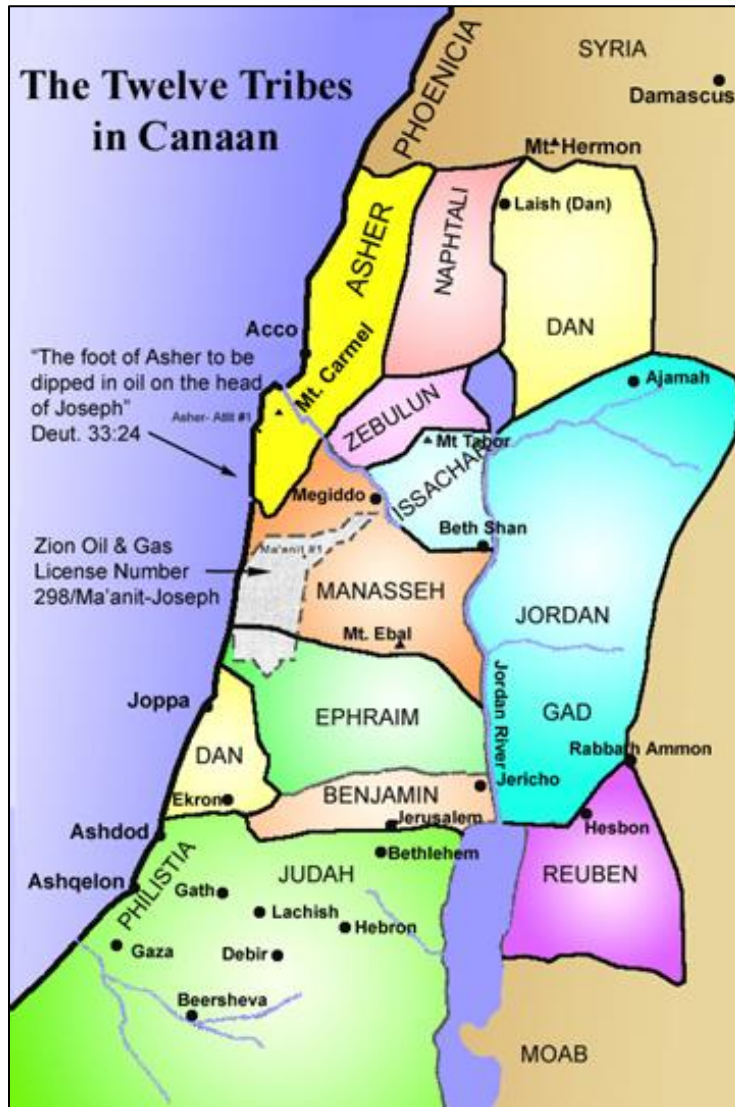
I propose that the prophet Jeremiah and Jeremiah of Libnah were the same person. I also propose that because Mulek was the son of Zedekiah, and that Zedekiah was the grandson of Jeremiah of Libnah (or Jeremiah's literal "seed"), that that "seed" fulfilled Ezekiel's prophecy of a "planting." In other words, Mulek, the son of Zedekiah, would have been the actual great-grandson of Jeremiah the prophet.



Though the reasoning to this connection is highly speculative, I would like to at least leave the reader with a few of the more pertinent proposed connections in the hope that someday more substantive information might come to light.

The prophet Jeremiah was "the son of Hilkiah, of the priests that were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin. (Jeremiah 1:1-3) When the lands of Israel were split up among the twelve tribes, special privilege was given to the tribe of Levi because of their priestly role. The House of Kohath (the son of Levi) was given the cities of Libnah and Anathoth (along with 11 other cities and their suburbs--see Joshua 21:8-19). It is important to note that the scriptures here do not say that Jeremiah the prophet was born in Anathoth, or that he lived there all his life. They simply state that his father Hilkiah was "of the priests that

were in Anathoth." As stated, the Levitical line had also been given the city of Libnah and other cities for their inheritance. Thus, in my way of reasoning, one might postulate that Jeremiah the prophet might have had some links to Libnah as well as Anathoth (and the other cities as well).



The Land of Benjamin

What we can say with certainty is that the prophet Jeremiah was "the son of Hilkiah the priest." Unfortunately there seems to be some confusion in the Bible about any more details concerning Hilkiah, because the name Hilkiah crops up in a number of places during this time period. For example, there are references to:

(1) *Hilkiah the son of Shallum of the priestly line of the tribe of Levi:* The priesthood descended from Levi to Shallum and his son Hilkiah, who lived at a time just before king Zedekiah, which would have probably been during the reign of Josiah (see 1 Chronicles 6:1-13; see also the charts below). Because of this descent, this Hilkiah would be considered the chief heir to the Levitical and Aaronic Priesthood.

(2) *Hilkiah the High Priest who discovered the book of the law in the temple and worked with king Josiah to bring about religious reform*: When God called Jeremiah as a prophet, king Josiah (638-608 B.C.) had been on the throne of Judah for 12 years and had already introduced religious reforms (2 Chronicles 34:4-17). But it was not until 621 B.C., the 18th year of his reign, that he initiated a systematic reformation in Judah's religion and morals (2 Kings 23). The impulse to reform was generated by the momentous discovery in the Temple of "the book of the law" by "Hilkiah the high priest" (2 Kings 22:8-9). Thus, this Hilkiah would have been a High Priest and been a little older than the prophet Jeremiah.

For the moment let's assume that:

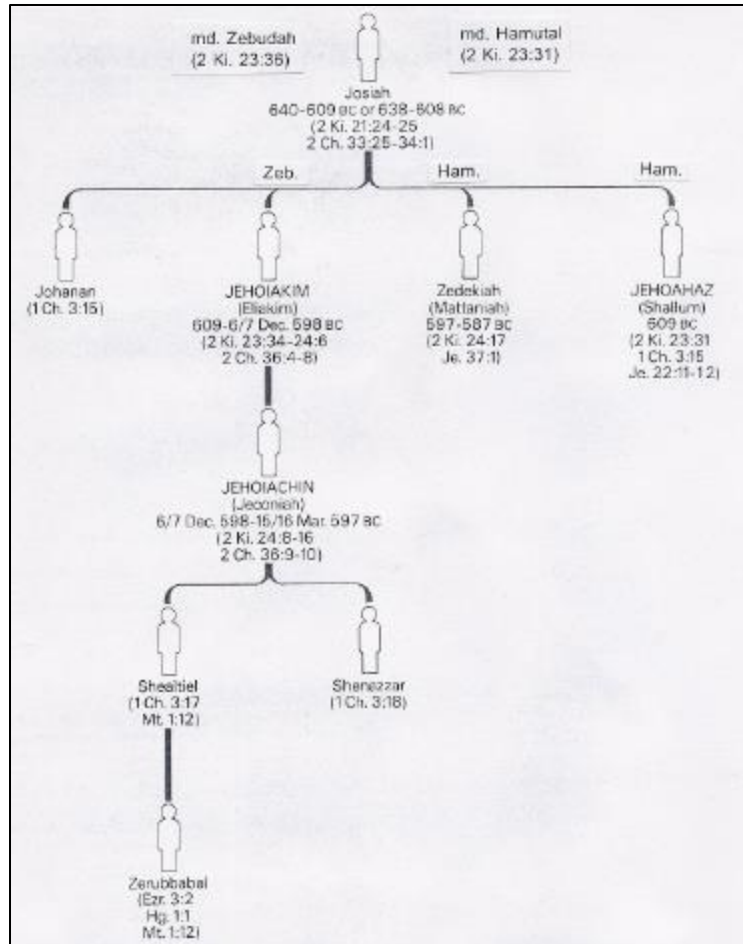
- (1) Hilkiah the father of Jeremiah the prophet,
  - (2) Hilkiah the son of Shallum of the priestly line of the tribe of Levi,
- and (3) Hilkiah the High Priest who discovered the book of the law in the temple and worked with king Josiah to bring about religious reform were the same person.

This means that Hilkiah (and the prophet Jeremiah) would have had lands of inheritance at Anathoth (and/or one of the other cities of the Levites), and that they would have associated closely with king Josiah. Now king Josiah happened to marry a woman named Hamutal, who was the daughter of one "Jeremiah of Libnah" (2 Kings 23:31 and 24:18). If "Jeremiah of Libnah" (Libnah being a priestly city) and Jeremiah the prophet ("son of Hilkiah of the priests that were in Anathoth") turn out to be the same person, then the son of Zedekiah (Mulek) would have been the prophet Jeremiah's great-grandson (or Jeremiah's seed). This is an exciting idea, but we need to examine things a bit closer.

When Babylon rose against Assyria it caused upheavals that led to the destruction of the kingdom of Judah. Egypt, concerned about the new threat, moved northward to support Assyria. It set on the march in 608, moving by way of the kingdom of Judah. King Josiah attempted to block the Egyptian forces from moving northward, and fell mortally wounded in battle at Megiddo. King Josiah's younger son Jehoahaz was chosen to succeed his father to the throne. Three months later, the Egyptian pharaoh Necho, returning from the north, deposed Jehoahaz in favor of Jehoahaz's older brother Jehoiakim. Jehoahaz was taken back to Egypt as a captive.

After the Egyptians were defeated by the Babylonians at the Battle of Carchemish in 605 BCE, Nebuchadnezzar II then besieged Jerusalem. King Jehoiakim changed allegiances to avoid the destruction of Jerusalem. He paid tribute from the treasury, some temple artifacts, and some of the royal family and nobility as hostages. However, the subsequent failure of the Babylonian invasion into Egypt undermined Babylonian control of the area, and after three years, King Jehoiakim switched allegiance back to the Egyptians, and ceased paying the tribute to Babylon. In 599 BCE, Nebuchadnezzar II invaded the kingdom of Judah and again laid siege to Jerusalem. In 598 BCE, King Jehoiakim died during the siege and was succeeded by his son Jeconiah (also known as Jehoiachin). But Jerusalem fell within three months, and Jeconiah was deposed by Nebuchadnezzar, who installed Zedekiah as king. Zedekiah was Jehoiakim's brother.

According to the Hebrew Bible, Zedekiah was made king of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar II in 597 BCE at the age of twenty-one. This is in agreement with a Babylonian chronicle, which states, "The seventh year: In the month Kislev the king of Akkad mustered his army and marched to Hattu. He encamped against the city of Judah and on the second day of the month Adar he captured the city (and) seized (its) king. A king of his own choice he appointed in the city (and) taking the vast tribute he brought it into Babylon."



**Zarahemla gave a genealogy (Illustration):** Chart showing the royal genealogy of Zedekiah and the other sons of Josiah. [Adapted from Universities and Colleges Christian Fellowship, *The Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, vol. 2, p. 739]

From a chronological point of view, Zedekiah was age 21 in 597 B.C. when he was placed on the throne by Nebuchadrezzar (2 Kings 24:18). This would mean that he was born in about the year 618 B.C. If we made a reasonable guess that his mother Hamutal was near 22 at the time of Zedekiah's birth, having married king Josiah around the age of 18 in 622 B.C., then this would place Hamutal's birth in about the year 640 B.C.

We will make a reasonable guess that Hamutal's father (Jeremiah of Libnah) was 34 at her birth, resulting in a birthdate for Jeremiah of Libnah in about the year 674 B.C. So now let us chronologically compare Jeremiah of Libnah with Jeremiah the prophet.

Jeremiah the prophet, "the son of Hilkiah of the priests that were in Anathoth" received his call in the 13th year of king Josiah (626 B.C.) Had he been born in 674 B.C. (like Jeremiah of Libnah) he would have been 48 at the time of his call, and his father Hilkiah would have been possibly 78. This chronology would coincide very nicely.

Note\* Before continuing this discussion let us first take a look at the genealogy of the High Priests in the Bible:



Each entry is supposed to be the son or daughter of the previous entries. Subentries are used for people with multiple wives.

Levi (b. 2195 after creation = 1565 B.C.E., d. 2332 after creation = 1428 B.C.E.)  
(ancestor of Levites [Leviim; sing: Levi]). (Genesis 46)  
Children: Jocheved, Kohath

**Kohath.** (Genesis 46)

Jocheved (married Amram ---Exodus 6:18)  
Children: Moses, Miriam, Aaron

Aaron, High Priest, married Elisheba daughter of Amminadab from the tribe of Judah.  
Aaron was the first high priest,  
Aaron was the ancestor of all the Hebrew Priests [Kohanim; sing. Kohen]). (Exodus 6:20).  
Sons: Nadar, Abihu, Eleazar (below) and Ithamar (ancestor of 7th through 11th high priests: Eli, Ahibut I, Ahijah, Ahimelech, and Abiathar)

2nd High Priest Eleazar I. (Exodus 6:23)  
3rd High Priest Phineas. (Exodus 6:25)  
4th High Priest Abishua. (I Chronicles 6:4-14)  
5th High Priest Bukki, (I Chronicles 6:4-14)  
6th High Priest Uzzi. (I Chronicles 6:4-14)  
Zerahiah (Zaraias). (I Chronicles 6:4-14)  
Meraioth. (I Chronicles 6:4-14)  
Amariah (Arophaeus) (Amarias). (I Chronicles 6:4-14)  
Ahitub. (I Chronicles 6:4-14)

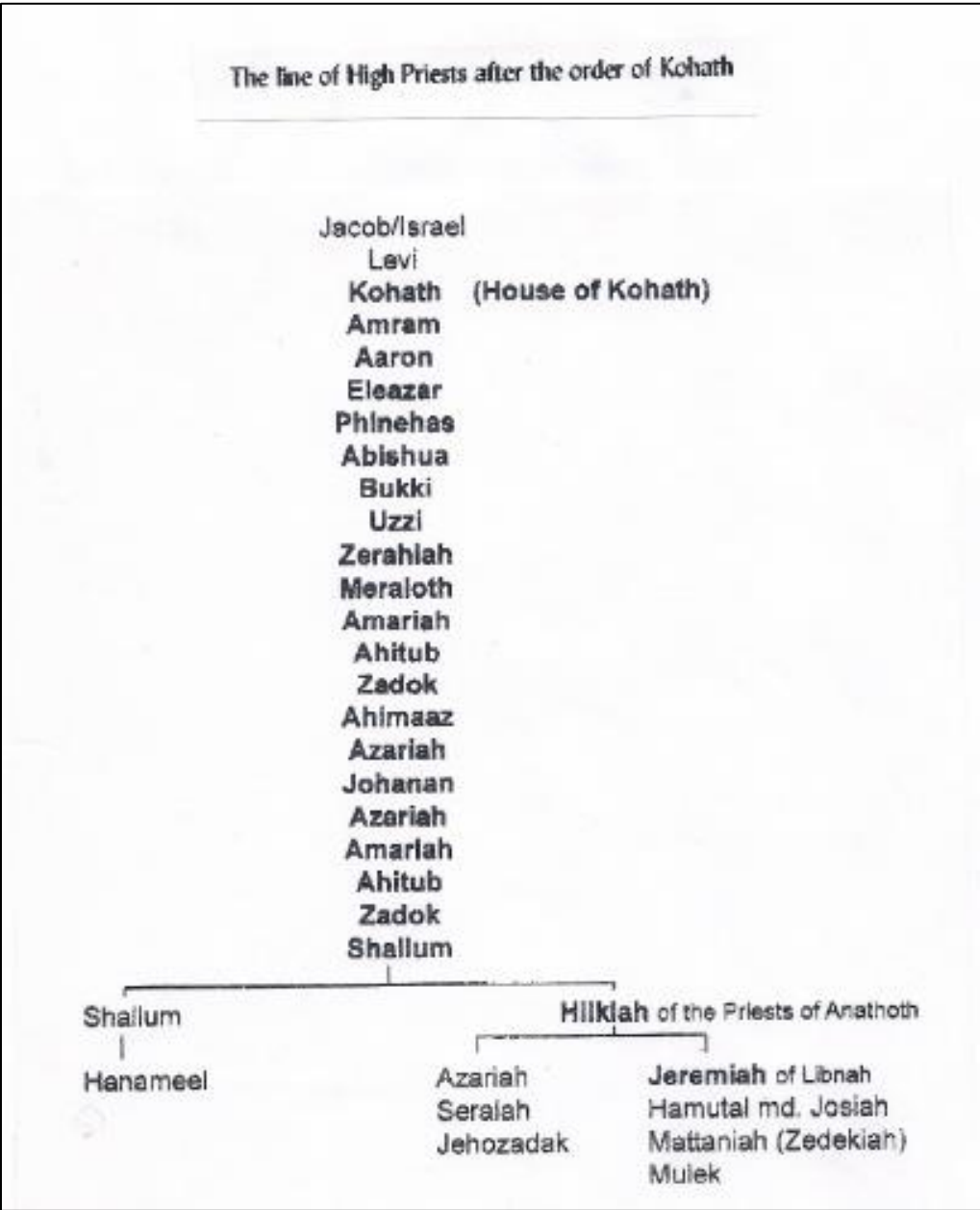
12th High Priest Zadok I. (I Chronicles 6:4-14)  
13th High Priest Ahimaaz (Achmimas). (I Chronicles 6:4-14) Last high priest to serve in the tabernacle (mishkan)  
14th High Priest Azariah. (I Chronicles 6:4-14). First high priest to serve in Solomon's Temple. His three sons were co-high priests and were ancestors of the three great branches of the high-priests.

15th Co-High Priest Johanan I. (I Chronicles 6:4-14).  
16th Co-High Priest Azariah II. Son of Johanan I (I Chronicles 6:4-14).  
17th co-High Priest Amariah, son of Azariah II  
18th High Priest Jehoiada I  
19th co-High Priest Ahitub II (ancestor of high priests Zadok, Shallum, and Jerusha wife of King Uzziah).  
15th co-High Priest Joash father of 16th co-High Priest Jehoiarib (Joarib) father of 17th co-High Priest Jehoshaphat father of 20th co-High Priest Zedekiah.

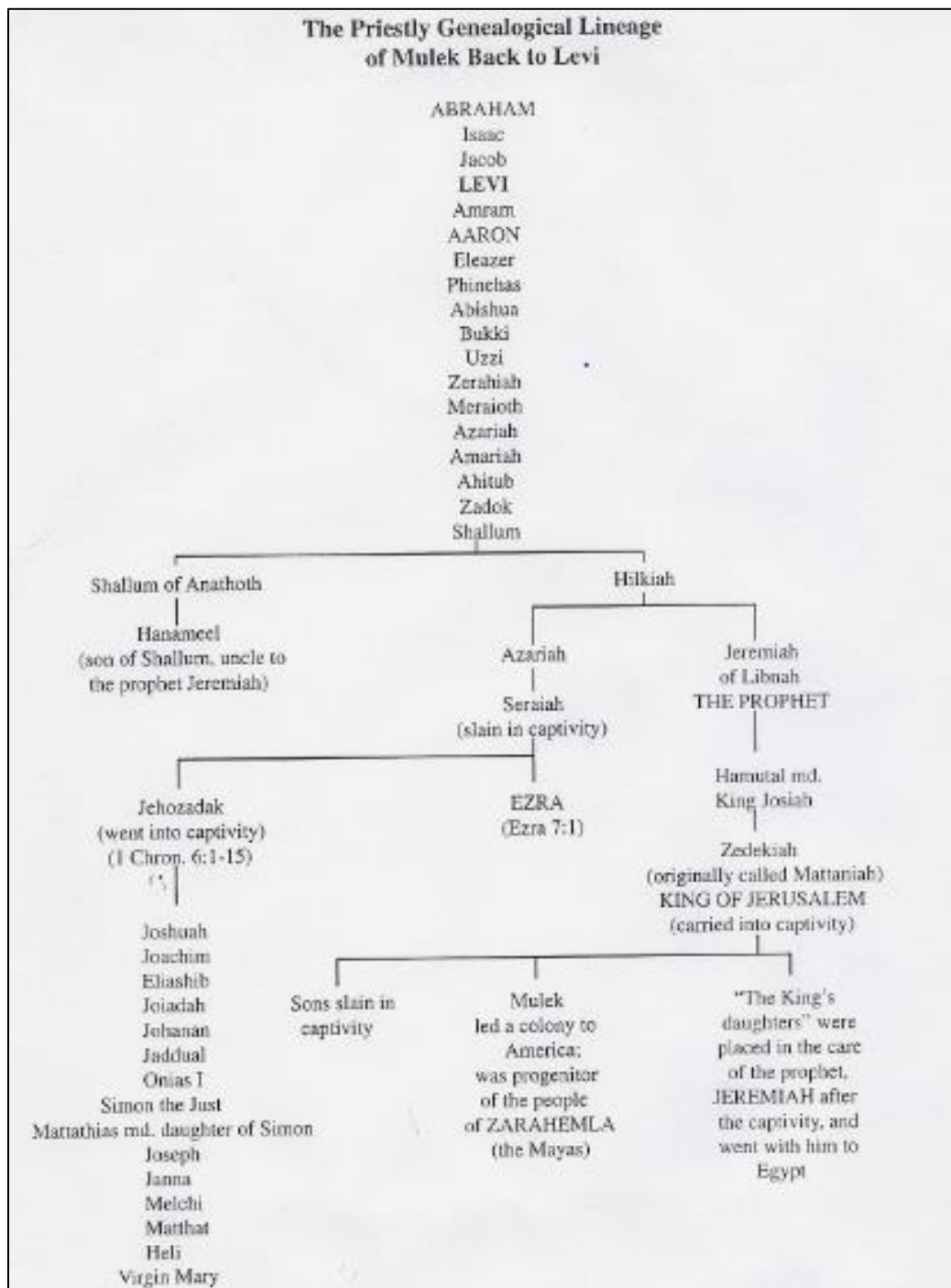
15th co-High Priest **Joram**.  
 16th co-High Priest Jeshua I (Isus)  
 17th co-High Priest Axiomar (Axioramus)  
 19th co-High Priest Phideas (Pedaiah)  
 20th co-High Priest Sudeaus  
 21st co-High Priest Juelus  
 23rd co-High Priest Jotham  
 26th High Priest Neriah (Nerias)  
 27th High Priest Odeas (Hoshaiah)  
 28th High Priest Shallum II. (I Chronicles 6:4-14)  
 29th High Priest Hilkiyah (Helcias) the prophet. (I Chronicles 6:4-14)  
 30th High Priest Azariah (Azarias) V. (I Chronicles 6:4-14)  
 31st High Priest Seraiah (Sareaus). (I Chronicles 6:4-14). Last high priest in the first temple.  
     Sons: Josedech (below), Jachin (father of Idaiah ancestor of Maccabees), Eniachim  
     Jehozadak (Josedech) (Jozadak). (I Chronicles 6:4-14). Did not actually serve as high  
     priest in either Holy Temple. Priest in the first synagogue.

If we assume that Jeremiah the prophet's father was Hilkiyah the high priestly son of Shallum II, then once Hilkiyah was dead, Jeremiah the prophet could have become rightful heir to the title of High Priest over the entire House of Kohath (tribe of Levi and Aaron), which would have entitled him to make intercession for buying land for family and extended family members. In Jeremiah 32:7-12, Jeremiah the prophet was petitioned by his cousin Hanameel to buy a field at Anathoth for him, because it was Jeremiah's right to redeem such land; that is, apparently Jeremiah possessed the rights of inheritance of land at Anathoth. (However, this would not have precluded the prophet Jeremiah from having land at Libnah.) Under the Israelitish system of land purchase and ownership, the inheritance fell to the eldest son in the family. In order for Jeremiah the prophet to possess that right, he had to be the eldest son. Jeremiah 32:6-8 speaks of Jeremiah the prophet's cousin (Hanameel) as "the son of Shallum" and that Shallum was Jeremiah's uncle. Now according to 1 Chronicles 6:13, the father of Hilkiyah was also named Shallum. Jehoahaz, the son of the union of king Josiah and Hamutal was also called Shallum by the prophet Jeremiah (see 1 Chronicles 3:15; Jeremiah 22:11-12). So if Jeremiah's father, who was named Hilkiyah, was the Hilkiyah who was the son of Shallum mentioned in 1 Chronicles 6:13, then we would have another correlation.

Now some might say that 1 Chronicles 6:13-15 does not mention Jeremiah in the line of succession to the high priesthood. But if Jeremiah was called as a prophet, then the assignment of chief priest at the temple in Jerusalem would have been given to another (Azariah). From Azariah the title of High Priest went to Jehozadak, but 1 Chronicles 6:15 states that "Jehozadak went into captivity, when the Lord carried away Judah and Jerusalem by the hand of Nebuchadnezzar." With the line of Azariah (Jehozadak) gone, Jeremiah the prophet, who stayed in Jerusalem, could have been the unquestionable birthright heir to the house of Kohath. If this was true, then what follows becomes quite interesting.



**Zarahemla gave a genealogy (Illustration):** The Line of High Priests After the Order of Kohath. (Bruce Sutton, Personal Communication)



**Zarahemla gave a genealogy (Illustration):** The Priestly Genealogical Lineage of Mulek Back to Levi. (Bruce S. Sutton, *Lehi, Father of Polynesia: Polynesians Are Nephites*, p. 45.)

According to Verneil Simmons (*Peoples, Places and Prophecies*, p. 94-95), although there were many at Jerusalem who sought after the life of Jeremiah the prophet, King Zedekiah (his grandson?) would not allow Jeremiah the prophet to be put to death, and so Jeremiah was shut up in prison, which helped appease certain members of the Sarim who wanted Jeremiah the prophet killed.

After Jerusalem was sacked by the Babylonians, Jeremiah the prophet was not only freed but given complete freedom to move about the country at will (Jeremiah 39:11-15; 40:1-6). This freedom involved access to the Temple. WHY? That access has motivated some to theorize that the prophet Jeremiah was connected in some way to the hiding of the Ark of the Covenant. Verneil Simmons notes that after the captives were led out of Jerusalem (these included the chief priest of the Temple, as well as the second priest and the three keepers of the door), the king's captain ordered the burning of the palace and the Temple--in fact, all of the city. Certainly all objects of value had been removed by the Babylonians before the torches were lit. So one might wonder why, in either the account of the stripping of the Temple, or in the record of what was restored many years later, there was no mention of the Ark of the Covenant or the Urim and Thummim. According to tradition, the Jews of Jerusalem in 175 B.C. believed that the prophet Jeremiah had been commanded of the Lord to preserve the Ark of the Covenant as a witness against Israel in times to come. So why would the Lord pick the prophet Jeremiah? Perhaps he was the legal heir to such a responsibility over the Temple because of his lineage.

The king of Babylon had ordered his captain, Nebuzaradan, to grant any request made by Jeremiah the prophet. If the prophet Jeremiah had wanted access to the Temple during the time that the city's wealth was being removed, was there anyone to oppose him? The priests of the Temple had been taken captive and killed and undoubtedly lesser attendants had fled for safety. So the prophet Jeremiah could very well have taken the Ark of the Covenant and the Urim & Thummim in order to hide them. More importantly, at least for this discussion, the implication is that the prophet Jeremiah had the proper authority (Babylonian, Levitical and Jewish) to do so.

Later we find the prophet Jeremiah living with a group of people that included the "daughters" of Zedekiah (Jeremiah 41:10). One might ask, WHY would the prophet Jeremiah be concerned about the daughters of Zedekiah? One answer might be, if our assumptions are right, that these "daughters" of Zedekiah were his great-granddaughters. But is it possible that a "great-grandson might have been included in these "daughters"? Another answer might be that these "daughters" were also accompanied by their mother(s), who might have been carrying an unborn son (Mulek?) who represented the "seed" of Jeremiah? I propose that part of the fulfillment of the prophet Jeremiah's call to "plant" occurred when Jeremiah preserved an infant son of Zedekiah (or "a tender young twig") carefully concealed among Zedekiah's wives and "daughters."

I also propose that the prophet Jeremiah helped to arrange for that infant son of Zedekiah to escape from the land of Jerusalem. Tradition has it that the prophet Jeremiah accompanied the daughters of Zedekiah into Egypt. One most interesting fact about the Egyptian Pharaoh Necho is that in 600 B.C. (the time that the land of Jerusalem was being conquered and that the prophet Lehi was leaving) Pharaoh Necho commissioned the Phoenicians to sail completely around the continent of Africa and report back to him. This they did successfully. Considering the size of the African continent, it doesn't take much imagination to conclude that if the Phoenicians were capable of that voyage, they were certainly capable of a voyage from Egypt to the Americas. It is no surprise that in the Book of Mormon account, the chief river that ran through the land of Zarahemla in the New World (the Americas) was named "Sidon." Sidon was one of the major ports of the Phoenicians.

So is it fair to say that the prophet Jeremiah not only helped "plant" the "seed" of Ezekiel's prophecy, but that the "seed" was of Jeremiah, and that the posterity of this "seed" would be heir to the Aaronic priesthood? At the time the Prophet Jeremiah might have represented the only worthy legal heir of this Aaronic Priesthood. Was the genealogy which Zarahemla recited a testimony to the fulfillment of this commandment--a royal branch from the kingship line of Judah and an elite branch from the High Priests of the tribe of Levi? From reasoning loaded with supposition, I would say, Yes! For despite the many writings and actions attributed to the prophet Jeremiah, we know very little about his personal life. We do not find any documentation regarding a marriage or children. We also do not know when he died. We also do not know to this day where the city of Libnah was located, let alone whether the prophet Jeremiah lived there, or whether that location might have been connected to his wife's family (thus connecting Jeremiah the prophet with Jeremiah of Libnah).

Oh, let me add just one more thing. It appears from a scriptural source that the prophet Jeremiah saw Israel dwelling in America, whether in vision or by prophetic knowledge. But these words of Jeremiah do not appear in the King James Version of the Bible. The Alexandrian Codex supplies us with the missing underlined text: "Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell in the country beyond the sea safely" (Jeremiah 23:6)

In view of the speculation above concerning priesthood lineage, and the fact that the city of Libnah was in the land of Benjamin, one might ask if these facts might be connected at all with the idea that the son of Mosiah<sub>1</sub> was named Benjamin? One might also ask whether the sons of Mosiah<sub>2</sub> (specifically Ammon, Aaron, Omner and Himni)<sup>3</sup> were part of a marriage between Mosiah<sub>2</sub> and a granddaughter of Zarahemla, or whether king Benjamin had previously married into Zarahemla's family? One might ponder the fact that the biblical Judah had been given the blessing to "rule" by his father Jacob (Israel).

Note\* This article (updated March, 2020) by Alan C. Miner is based upon ideas and correspondence from Bruce Sutton and material in his book, *Lehi, Father of Polynesia: Polynesians Are Nephites*. Sutton's material was based on material from *Seeking after Our Dead: Our Greatest Responsibility*. Salt Lake City: Genealogical Society of Utah, 1928. This article is also based on Verneil Simmon's book *Peoples, Places and Prophecies*, p. 94-95.)

Note\* The prophet, Jeremiah possessed the Melchizedek Priesthood, which encompasses the power and authority of the Aaronic Priesthood. The same could be said about King Mosiah and King Benjamin.

Note\* There is also the Genesis story of Joseph who was separated from his brothers and carried to a foreign land, where he ultimately rose to be a ruler over the people. In this story I find the following allusions to the connection between Mulek (the son of Zedekiah and the ancestor of Zarahemla) and the name Benjamin from the Book of Mormon story:

Benjamin is the younger brother who initially remains in his homeland  
Eventually Benjamin is brought to the foreign land to meet the ruler Joseph.  
Benjamin is singled out by Joseph and loved before the others.  
Joseph assures that Benjamin will stay with him by **hiding** a silver cup in Benjamin's sack.  
Judah offers himself as a ransom for Benjamin.  
Joseph rewards Benjamin above the others by giving him three hundred pieces of silver.  
The Patriarch Jacob brings all his household to Joseph in this new land to be saved from famine.

## NOTES

1. One should keep in mind that Christ's genealogy is traced through his mother Mary. One should also keep in mind that in his grand covenant kingship discourse, king Benjamin talked about Mary.

2. One might understand the responsibility of Zarahemla's ancestors (Zedekiah's descendants) to keep alive their connection to royalty, however it is also worthy of note that according to the prophet Ezra, "a priest who could not trace his genealogy was not admitted to the ministry." (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Genealogy Department. *Seeking after our Dead: Our Greatest Responsibility*, Genealogical Society of Utah, 1928, p. 115.)

3. Briefly, the following meanings are associated with the following names:

|       |                |  |
|-------|----------------|--|
| MULEK | (Mosiah 25:2)  | "king, to rule"                                      |
| AARON | (Mosiah 27:34) | "light giver" (Exodus 4:14)                          |
| OMNER | (Mosiah 27:34) | "the (divine) Kinsman is Light" (JST = Genesis 7:11) |
| HIMNI | (Mosiah 27:34) | "reward, recompense; vengeance"                      |

---