



The stamp seal of *Malkiyahu ben hamelek* (actual size smaller than a dime). Shown are the seal's printing face (top right), a side view of the seal (top left), a modern impression of the seal in clay (bottom right), and a detailed drawing of the impression (bottom left). Could this have been the seal of Mulek? Photographs courtesy of Robert Deutsch. Drawing by the author.

Has the Seal of Mulek Been Found?

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IS MULEK, A MAN IDENTIFIED IN the Book of Mormon as the only surviving son of Zedekiah, king of Judah, mentioned in the Bible? In 1984 Robert F. Smith pointed to the name “Malchiah the son of Hammelech” in Jeremiah 38:6 as a possible reference to this Mulek.¹ Latter-day Saint scholars of Near Eastern studies have debated the legitimacy of this identification.² Although no consensus has been reached, Smith’s Malchiah-Mulek identification has become part of the scholarly conversation concerning the Near Eastern origins of the Book of Mormon.

Recently, an ancient Judean stamp seal has been identified as bearing the Hebrew form of the name “Malchiah son of Hammelech.”³ Does this mean that an actual archaeological relic that belonged to an ancient Book of Mormon personality has been located? Has the seal of Mulek been found?

To answer this question requires us to explore a number of different but related issues. First, a word of explanation. The reading of Jeremiah 38:6 in the King James Version is somewhat misleading. The Hebrew Bible reads מלכיהו בן המלך, pronounced *Malkiyahu ben hamelek*.⁴ The name *Malkiyahu* was reasonably rendered into English as “Malchiah” by the King James scholars, and the word *ben* was accurately translated as “son.” But the King James term *Hammelech* (pronounced *ha-mélek*) is not really a name; it is a transliteration. In Hebrew, *hamelek* means “the king” (*ha* is the definite article “the,” and *melek* is the word for “king”). Thus, accurately translated, Jeremiah 38:6 refers to “Malkiyahu son of the king.” Noted biblical scholar John Bright translates the phrase as “Prince Malkiah” (the term *prince* referring to a royal son) in his Anchor Bible commentary on Jeremiah.⁵

Smith also suggested that the Book of Mormon name Mulek might be a shortened form of the biblical Hebrew *Malkiyahu*. In support of this possibility, he noted that while Jeremiah’s scribe is called Baruch (Hebrew ברוך—*Barukh*) in Jeremiah 36:4, a longer form of his name—ברכיהו (*Berekhyahu*)—appears on an ancient stamp seal impression published by Israeli archaeologist Nahman Avigad.⁶ Since the Hebrew long-form name *Berekhyahu* could apparently be expressed in a hypocoristic (short form) version like *Barukh*, Smith reasoned that perhaps the long form *Malkiyahu* could have a short form like Mulek. In that event, the “Malkiyahu son of the king” in Jeremiah 38:6 could well have been the Book of Mormon’s Mulek, son of King Zedekiah (see Helaman 8:21).

The Stamp Seal of Malkiyahu

A stamp seal is a small stone, usually about the size of a jelly bean, with at least one side that is flat or slightly convex, engraved with a name, a title, a design, or some combination of these in mirror im-

age. The stamp seal might be encased in a ring to be worn on the finger or might be perforated with a single hole through which a string was passed, allowing the seal to be worn around the neck. The function of the seal was to be pressed into wet clay to leave an impression of the name, title, or design of the seal’s owner. Ancient documents were often sealed by tying them with string and then pressing a stamp seal into a marble-sized ball of clay on the string ends to bond them together. Clay seal impressions are often called *bullae* (singular *bullā*) by scholars. The stamp seal might also be impressed into the wet clay of a newly made ceramic jar before kiln firing, on either one or more of the jar handles, or even on the shoulder of the jar. Archaeologists have discovered numerous stamp seals, stamped jar handles, and clay bullae in excavations throughout the land of Israel. Those with names or titles upon them provide valuable data for many fields of biblical and Near Eastern studies.

The oval-shaped stamp seal of *Malkiyahu ben hamelek* was fashioned of bluish green malchite stone and is very small, measuring just 15 mm long by 11 mm wide (smaller than a dime) and only 7 mm thick. The printing face of the seal is convex, which leaves a concave image on imprinted clay (see fig. 1 for a drawing of the imprinted image).⁷ Two perpendicular lines divide the seal’s image into three fields. The two horizontally parallel fields on the right feature the text in archaic Hebrew. The top right register reads ••למלכיהו•• (*lemalkiyahu••*), or “to Malkiyahu” (i.e., “belonging to Malkiyahu”), followed by two dots that serve as a divider between words. The bottom register reads בן־המלך (*ben•hamelek*), or “son of the king,” with a dot dividing *ben* and *hamelek*. The left side register features a vertical line of six pomegranates flanked by a dot at each end. Dots also outline the oval perimeter of the image.

Just where and when the seal was originally found is not known. It was probably excavated illegally or kept (stolen) by a workman at a legitimate excavation in Jerusalem during the 1980s. Work was still being carried out then in the city of David, the southern Temple Mount, and the Jewish Quarter areas. The seal first appeared on the international antiquities market in a 1991 catalog of Numismatic Fine Arts Inc. of New York.⁸ It was purchased by Jewish millionaire Shlomo Moussaieff, of London, who has a large collection of ancient stamp seals and other antiquities. The

first scholarly reference to the seal appeared in 1995 in an article in French by Andre Lemaire.⁹ The initial English-language publication of the seal appeared in 1997 in the magnum opus of Israeli scholars Nahman Avigad (now deceased) and Benjamin Sass, entitled *Corpus of West Semitic Stamp Seals*, which included a photo of a modern impression from the seal.¹⁰ A subsequent publication in English appeared in 2000 in *Biblical Period Personal Seals in the Shlomo Moussaieff Collection*, by Robert Deutsch and Andre Lemaire, which included photos of the seal as well as a modern impression.¹¹ Lemaire's original assessment of the seal questioned its authenticity. However, the preface to *Corpus of West Semitic Stamp Seals* lists it as one of several seals that, despite their unknown provenance, Avigad, the dean of Israeli stamp-seal scholars, considered authentic.¹²

The authenticity of the Malkiyahu seal is supported by the existence of a number of other seals very similar to it, some of which may have been unknown to Lemaire. Avigad and Sass identify a seal of the same general artistic design as the Malkiyahu seal, including perpendicular lines separating the three registers and a pomegranate motif, although the left register features only a single pomegranate.¹³ That seal, however, was published after 1991, the latest date it could have been used by a forger as a model for the Malkiyahu seal. Avigad and Sass also display a number of seals and impressions that feature a personal name followed by the term *ben hamelek*, or "son of the king," demonstrating that this phrasing was not unique to ancient Judean seals.¹⁴ Avigad felt that two of the personal names on these seals may have been those of sons of kings known from the Bible. One of the

seals (no. 16 in *Corpus*) is inscribed למנשה בן המלך (*lemenasheh ben hamelek*), which means "[belonging] to Menasheh son of the king." This was possibly Manasseh, the son of King Hezekiah.¹⁵ Manasseh, who was the great-grandfather of Zedekiah, became king of Judah himself in 687 BC, ruling until his death in 642 BC (see 2 Kings 20:21–21:18).

Another seal (no. 13 in *Corpus*) is inscribed ליהואחז בן המלך (*leyehoahaz ben hamelek*), which means "[belonging] to Jehoahaz son of the king." This was possibly Jehoahaz, the son of King Josiah and older brother of Zedekiah.¹⁶ Jehoahaz was heir to the throne



Fig. 1. Imprint of the seal of Malkiyahu ben hamelek. The top register reads *leMalkiyahu* (belonging to Malkiyahu), possibly the Book of Mormon Mulek. The bottom register reads *ben hamelek* (son of the king). Drawing by the author.

of Josiah and was elevated to the kingship after Josiah's death in 609 BC, but he was deposed by the Egyptians shortly thereafter and taken to Egypt, where he was never heard from again (see 2 Kings 23:30–34).

Additionally, a seal impression (no. 414 in *Corpus*) that reads לירחמאל בן המלך (*leyerahme'el ben hamelek*), or "[belonging] to Yerahme'el son of the king," may, according to the model presented in this study, have been the person called "Jerahmeel the son of Hammelech" (properly "son of the king") in Jeremiah 36:26, possibly the son of king Jehoiakim, although this was not Avigad's conclusion. Aspects of all of these seals and seal impressions are relevant in attempting to identify Malkiyahu with Mulek.

Could Malkiyahu Have Been Mulek?

A major issue in determining whether Malkiyahu could have been the Mulek of the Book of Mormon is whether Malkiyahu could have been the son of Zedekiah. This issue involves two questions: (1) Does the term *ben hamelek*, properly rendered into English as “son of the king,” really mean what it says? In other words, were persons such as Malkiyahu, designated in the Bible or on stamp seals as *ben hamelek*, actually biological sons of kings? (2) If so, of which king was Malkiyahu a son? Can it be demonstrated that Malkiyahu was indeed the son of King Zedekiah?

Meaning of *Ben Hamelek*

What did the term *ben hamelek* really mean? At first glance this could seem like a silly question, except for the fact that some scholars have doubted that the term *son of the king* really meant the biological son of one of the kings. Avigad himself suggested two ways of understanding the *ben hamelek* title in the Hebrew Bible. First, he posited that “some of these title bearers may have been proper sons of kings.” He cited as examples the two names previously mentioned: *Menasheh ben hamelek* (i.e., Manasseh) and *Yehoahaz ben hamelek* (i.e., Jehoahaz), known both from stamp seals and from the biblical record.¹⁷ In the Bible, neither of these names is actually accompanied by a *ben hamelek* title, but it is clear from the text that the men who bore them were biological sons of kings and became kings themselves (see 2 Kings 20:21; 23:30).

Second, Avigad felt that *ben hamelek* seals or seal impressions bearing personal names not specifically noted in the Bible as biological sons of kings must have been “members of the royal family . . . employed as officials in the king’s service”—in other words, men of the extended royal family, such as nephews and cousins, serving in a bureaucratic

or security capacity.¹⁸ In this category he included *Yerahme’el ben hamelek*, the “Jerahmeel the son of Hammelech” of Jeremiah 36:26.¹⁹ Avigad suggested that in the Bible “several officials with the title ‘son of the king’ are known to have fulfilled duties connected with matters of security.”²⁰ In this claim, however, he overstated the numbers. Only two (not “several”) of the men whom the Bible calls *ben hamelek* are mentioned in connection with security functions; these are the Joash of 1 Kings 22:26 and the Jerahmeel of Jeremiah 36:26.

Other commentators have doubted that most men called *ben hamelek* were even members of the king’s family at all, extended or otherwise, preferring to view these title holders as ordinary court officials, not royal stock.²¹ However, these assumptions are not supported by the biblical evidence.

The Hebrew Bible contains 13 occurrences of the term *ben hamelek* in the singular form, referring to eight different men (see list below). In the King James Version these are usually rendered into English as “the king’s son” rather than the preferable “son of the king,” except for the 2 occurrences in Jeremiah, which are oddly rendered “son of Hammelech.”²² Outside of the Bible, 14 other instances of the *ben hamelek* title exist—nine stamp seals and five seal impressions—representing a total of 11 different names (a complete list appears in note 14). Stamp seals and seal impressions bearing personal names and the *ben hamelek* title have no literary context; that is, they do not appear in sentences or passages that tell us more about their owners. The only way to determine the meaning of the *ben hamelek* title is by studying it as it appears with personal names in the Hebrew Bible, where each usage occurs in a broader story in which the person bearing the name and title is described to some extent. The complete Hebrew Bible list appears here, with King James Version spellings of the personal names and with an asterisk by the names of the four men known with certainty from the biblical context to have been real sons of a king:

1. Amnon* (called) *ben hamelek* (a son of King David)
2 Samuel 13:4
2. Absalom* (called) *ben hamelek* (a son of King David)
2 Samuel 18:12, 20

3. Joash *ben hamelek* (associated with King Ahab, possibly his son)
1 Kings 22:26; 2 Chronicles 18:25
4. Joash* *ben hamelek* (a son of King Ahaziah)
2 Kings 11:4, 12; 2 Chronicles 23:3, 11
5. Jotham* *ben hamelek* (a son of King Azariah/Uzziah)
2 Kings 15:5
6. Maaseiah *ben hamelek* (associated with King Ahaz, possibly his son)
2 Chronicles 28:7
7. Jerahmeel *ben hamelek* (associated with King Jehoiakim, possibly his son)
Jeremiah 36:26
8. Malchiah *ben hamelek* (or Malkiyahu—associated with King Zedekiah)
Jeremiah 38:6

likelihood that Joash was Ahab's son. In fact, the opposite is true. It makes sense that Ahab would entrust a delicate security matter, such as imprisoning a prophet, to one of his own sons. In a similar story, Jeremiah 36:26 reports that Jehoiakim, the king of Judah, directed Jerahmeel *ben hamelek* to arrest Jeremiah the prophet. Again, nothing in the passage suggests that Jerahmeel was not Jehoiakim's actual

“What is the difference between Jerahmeel and all of the other officials who are not called *ben hamelek*? The most obvious answer is that Jerahmeel was a biological ‘son of the king.’ In other words, the term *ben hamelek* very probably means what it literally says: a son of the king.”

Amnon, Absalom, Jotham, and the Joash of 2 Kings 11 are all clearly described as sons of kings in the above biblical passages that mention them. In other words, four of the eight men above were without doubt sons of kings. Their citations make up 8 of the 13 *ben hamelek* references in the Hebrew Bible, a significant statistical majority. These numbers alone lend more support than even Avigad assumed to the idea that *ben hamelek* likely described a biological “son of the king.”

As for the other 4 references, 2 of them, as we have seen, are described as acting in a “security official” capacity. In 1 Kings 22:26 (paralleled by the 2 Chronicles 18:25 reference), Ahab, the king of Israel, gives a directive for Joash *ben hamelek* to assist in putting the prophet Michaiah into prison. There is nothing in the passage to suggest that this Joash is not Ahab's own son. That he acted in a “security official” capacity, assisting with the imprisonment of the king's perceived enemy, does not rule out the

son, even though he acted in a security capacity. Why would a political act like arresting an opponent of the king be deemed evidence that Jerahmeel was not the king's son? One could reason that acts such as silencing pesky prophets were so sensitive that the participation of an actual royal heir was predictable. For a royal son to serve in the administration of his own kingly father is a scenario entirely to be expected. In any event, it is at least as likely that Joash and Jerahmeel were indeed actual sons of the kings they served as they were mere officials of the court, royal nephews, or otherwise.

The stories of Joash and Jerahmeel may, in fact, be construed as evidence *against* their having been mere court officers. As a general rule, the Hebrew Bible employs the term שר (*sar*) to refer to royal officials (the plural is שרִים—*sarim*). The term designates a “minister” (in the political sense), or a “chief” or “ruler” or even “captain.” In the case of Joash *ben hamelek* in 1 Kings 22, he is listed

with Amon, the *sar ha'ir*, or “ruler of the city,” of Samaria, in the directive to imprison Micaiah (the KJV reasonably renders *sar ha'ir* as “governor of the city”): “And the king of Israel said, Take Micaiah, and carry him back unto Amon the governor of the city [*sar ha'ir*], and to Joash the king’s son [*ben hamelek*]; and say, Thus saith the king, Put this fellow in the prison” (1 Kings 22:26–27). It is telling that Amon, who is clearly a high official in the king’s employ, is not listed as *ben hamelek* in his official capacity. If the title *ben hamelek* were a designation for a royal official, we might expect that Amon, too, would be called by that title instead of *sar ha'ir*. That he was not suggests that *ben hamelek* was not merely an administrative designation.

The same is true in the story of Jerahmeel: “But the king commanded Jerahmeel the son of Hammelech [*ben hamelek*], and Seraiah the son of Azriel, and Shelemiah the son of Abdeel, to take [i.e., arrest] Baruch the scribe and Jeremiah the prophet” (Jeremiah 36:26). In this passage, Jerahmeel is the only person designated *ben hamelek*, even though he is one of three who are given the king’s order. In addition, at least six other men who were royal officials of King Jehoiakim, either scribes or other functionaries, are noted by name in Jeremiah 36 but are not called *ben hamelek*. All of these officials are called *sarim* in Jeremiah 36:12 (the KJV misleadingly renders *sarim* as “princes” when, in fact, the term means “ministers” or “rulers”).²³ Jerahmeel is different from all the rest, however. That he receives orders from the king along with the *sarim* is plain. But he is also clearly distinct from the other officials in that he alone is designated *ben hamelek*. What is the difference between Jerahmeel and all of the other officials who are not called *ben hamelek*? The most obvious answer is that Jerahmeel was a biological “son of the king.” In other words, the term *ben hamelek* very probably means what it literally says: a son of the king.

As previously noted, Avigad rejected the idea

that *ben hamelek* was a designation for a court official of some sort, favoring instead the idea that it referred to a royal family member (such as a brother or nephew of the king) who may or may not have acted in an administrative capacity. But there is biblical evidence that this scenario, also, is not correct. In 2 Samuel 13 we read of Jonadab, the son of Shimeah, King David’s brother, who converses with Amnon, David’s son: “But Amnon had a friend, whose name was Jonadab, the son of Shimeah David’s brother: and Jonadab was a very subtil man. And he said unto him, Why art thou, being the king’s son [*ben hamelek*], lean from day to day? wilt thou not tell me?” (2 Samuel 13:3–4). In this selection, Amnon, who was a son of the king, is clearly designated as *ben hamelek*. But neither David’s brother Shimeah nor Shimeah’s son Jonadab, who was David’s nephew, are called *ben hamelek*. If *ben hamelek* could refer to a male of the royal family other than a king’s biological son, as Avigad suggested, we might expect to see this reflected in the above passage, or at least somewhere in the Hebrew Bible. That persons specifically named as the king’s brother and the king’s nephew are not called *ben hamelek* in this passage, nor in any other passage in the entire biblical record, must certainly cast doubt on Avigad’s assertion. Of the five biblical *ben hamelek* references in the Bible that do not clearly identify a son-to-father relationship to the king, not a single one indicates that any man called *ben hamelek* was a son of someone other than the king. There is simply no positive evidence that *ben hamelek* meant anything other than a biological son of the king.

As for Maaseiah *ben hamelek* of 2 Chronicles 28, his royal assignment or function is not mentioned. It is only reported that he was killed in Pekah’s attack on Judah (ca. 733 BC). It is very likely, however, that Maaseiah was the actual son of Ahaz, king of Judah, and probably heir to the throne. Maaseiah’s death may have opened the way for Hezekiah, another son of Ahaz, to become the king of Judah after Ahaz (see 2 Chronicles 28:27; 2 Kings 18:1). The death of Maaseiah is reported with the deaths of two other significant court figures: “And Zichri, a mighty man of Ephraim, slew Maaseiah the king’s son [*ben hamelek*], and Azrikam the governor of the house, and Elkanah that was next to the king” (2 Chronicles 28:7). Thousands were killed in Pekah’s attack on Judah (see 2 Chronicles 28:6), but only these three were

mentioned by name and title. If Maaseiah were nothing more than a generic court official, as some believe the *ben hamelek* title designates, then it would be odd for him not only to be listed along with the two highest royal administrators who served King Ahaz, but also to be indeed ahead of them. Azrikam, “the governor of the house” (Hebrew נִגִיד הַבַּיִת—*nagid habayit*), held the office that made him essentially the chief of staff over the court of Ahaz; and Elkanah “that was next to the king” (Hebrew מִשְׁנֵה הַמֶּלֶךְ—*mishneh hamelek*—literally “second to the king”) was what today would be called the king’s prime minister (similar to the posi-

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tion of Joseph described in Genesis 41:40–43). That Maaseiah is listed ahead of the two as *ben hamelek* suggests he held a position of importance to the king greater than either the prime minister or the chief of staff, and who, other than the crown prince, would fit this description? Certainly a generic court official, whether a nonroyal retainer or a royal nephew, would not. Maaseiah seems to have been the biological son of Ahaz and very likely heir to the throne before being killed by Zichri of Ephraim.

All of these examples from the Hebrew Bible suggest that the term *ben hamelek* was used exclusively to describe a biological son of a king, and not merely a member of the extended royal family or a government official. Returning now to Malchiah, or *Malkiyahu ben hamelek*, who is the subject of this entire inquiry, we come to the next question.

A Son of King Zedekiah?

Was Malkiyahu the son of Zedekiah? Since neither the Malkiyahu seal nor the passage in Jeremiah 38:6 specifically stipulate that Zedekiah was the king to whom Malkiyahu was related, we may only assume that this was so. But there are strong points of evidence for this assumption. The first point is the context of Jeremiah 38, where Zedekiah is the king with whom Jeremiah and his opponents are interacting. Because Zedekiah is mentioned by name in Jeremiah 38:5, it is probable that the scribe composing the text in the subsequent reference to Malkiyahu (v. 6) used the term *ben hamelek* rather than awkwardly repeating the royal name Zedekiah in a phrase like *son of Zedekiah*. Since the term *ben hamelek* appears without a king’s name on the stamp seals and seal impressions mentioned above, it is clear that this was an acceptable way of referring to a royal son and his kingly father without specifically using the father’s name. Indeed, if Jeremiah 38:6 refers to any king other than Zedekiah, we should expect that king to be specifically named in the course of the story, for such was the care taken by Judean scribes. That no other monarch’s name was recorded in Jeremiah 38 suggests very strongly that the king who was the father of Malkiyahu was the king in the chapter’s general context—namely, Zedekiah.

A major question would be the age of Malkiyahu in Jeremiah 38, the chapter that records events during the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem in 586 BC, not long before the fall of the city. Was he old enough to have his name mentioned in the context described in Jeremiah 38? In this chapter, Jeremiah was put into confinement: “Then took they Jeremiah, and cast him into the dungeon of Malchiah the son of Hammelech, that was in the court of the prison: and they let down Jeremiah with cords. And in the dungeon there was no water, but mire: so Jeremiah sunk in the mire” (v. 6). A problem with this verse is that misconceptions



This ancient *bor* in the Judean countryside was a pit in which water was stored. Rope marks in the stone are evidence of years of drawing water. Jeremiah was lowered into such a *bor* (“pit” or “cistern”) in Jerusalem, rather than into a “dungeon” (Jeremiah 38:6). Photo courtesy of D. Kelly Ogden.

arise from certain incorrect terms used by the King James translators. Not only should *Hammelech* be rendered as “the king,” but the Hebrew word that they translated as “dungeon” does not mean “dungeon”—the Hebrew term בּוֹר (*bor*) means “pit,” and in the context of Jeremiah 38 it means a pit for water storage, properly a cistern. Note that there was no water in the “dungeon” (cistern) and that “Jeremiah sunk in the mire” (mud); silting was a common problem in water storage cisterns.

The King James use of the word *prison* in Jeremiah 38:6 cannot be correct either. The Hebrew term is מַטָּרָה (*matarah*) and does not really mean “prison” but “aim,” “objective,” or “target” (compare 1 Samuel 20:20, “mark”). Rather than Malkiyahu, at his young age (see below), being the owner of his own “dungeon” at some royal “prison,” a more ac-

curate rendition of Jeremiah 38:6 suggests that within a palace courtyard used by the royal guard for, among other things, archery practice (as in 1 Samuel 20:20), was the wellhead of a cistern connected with his name. “And they took Jeremiah and put him into the cistern of Malkiyahu son of the king, which was in the target yard; and they lowered Jeremiah with ropes. Now in the cistern there was no water, just mud, and Jeremiah sank in the mud” (author’s translation). So how old would a royal son have to be in order to have a cistern connected with his name? What was the connection? And how old could Malkiyahu have been, as the son of King Zedekiah, in the context of Jeremiah 38?

It is reported in the Bible that Zedekiah was 21 years old when he began to reign (see 2 Kings 24:18).

His reign began in 597 BC²⁴ and

ended 11 years later, in 586 BC, when Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians and Zedekiah was captured (see 2 Kings 25:1–7). It was during Zedekiah’s 11th year that the events of Jeremiah 38 occurred, which would make Zedekiah 32 years old at that point. Taking into consideration that a young man in the royal family could marry and father children as early as 15 or 16 years of age, it is perfectly conceivable that Zedekiah could, at age 32, have had a son who was 15 or 16 years old by 586 BC. If, therefore, Malkiyahu were the first son of Zedekiah, and thus the heir apparent to the throne, as the owner of a *ben hamelek* seal might well be, he could have been as old as 15 or 16 years himself in the context of Jeremiah 38. A teenage crown prince might very well have been assigned his own personal wing or apartment in the royal palace complex, whether he had married or not, and that wing or apartment could have abutted a courtyard where the royal guard held archery practice. One cistern (there might have been more) that was accessed by a wellhead in that courtyard could easily have stretched underneath the princely quarters, so that it was designated as the “cistern of Malkiyahu son of the king.” In other words, it is entirely plausible that the Malkiyahu of Jeremiah 38:6 (and of the stamp

seal in question) could have been the teenage son of Zedekiah and that a cistern in a courtyard of the royal palace could have carried his name. And if that is true, it is entirely possible that Malkiyahu the son of Zedekiah could have been the Mulek of whom the Book of Mormon reports.

Other options for Mulek's age at the fall of Jerusalem have been suggested. John L. Sorenson, in his detailed *BYU Studies* article on the "Mulekites," mentions Smith's suggested identification of Mulek as Malkiyahu and admits that Mulek "could have been as old as fifteen at the time Jerusalem fell" and that "as a prince may have had his own house, wherein there could have been a dungeon" (he did not identify the pit as a cistern).²⁵ However, Sorenson seems to have preferred a model in which Mulek was much younger: "On the other hand, we do not know that Mulek was more than an infant. The younger he was, the greater the likelihood that he could have escaped the notice of the Babylonians and subsequent slaughter at their hands. Whatever his age, he may have been secreted away to Egypt by family retainers and close associates of the king along with the king's daughters (Jer. 43:6–7)."²⁶

But while Egypt very probably played a role in Mulek's being spared from Babylonian execution, the idea that he was secretly brought there by or with the king's daughters is unlikely. The same passage that mentions those daughters and their associates (Jeremiah 43:6) relates that they had been left in the custody of Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, a man handpicked by Chaldean captain of the guard Nebuzaradan to govern Judah on behalf of Babylon (see 2 Kings 25:23). Prior to that handover, the king's daughters and the others would have been in the custody of Nebuzaradan himself, who would likely have seen to it that they were carefully searched, interviewed, and observed, with any male heir of Zedekiah being a priority objective of those efforts. Unlike the ease with which princess Jehosheba had hidden the infant royal son Joash from queen Athaliah 250 years earlier (see 2 Kings 11:1–3), it would have been

practically impossible for the king's daughters or any other Judeans to have secreted an infant Mulek from the custody of Nebuzaradan's security agents.

But if an infant Mulek would not likely have gone undetected by the Babylonians, a 15- or 16-year-old Mulek would have been even less likely to escape capture—unless he was not in Judah at the time Jerusalem fell. In 589 BC Zedekiah rebelled against Babylon, apparently in a conspiracy with Phoenicia and Ammon, to aid Egypt's efforts to take control of western Asia. Young Prince Mulek (Malkiyahu), perhaps barely 13, could have been sent to Egypt by his father either as part of an ambassadorial mission or as part of the liaison that would coordinate Judah's role in the rebellious coalition. Another scenario, perhaps more likely, is that a 15-year-old Mulek was sent to Egypt during 587 BC, when the Babylonian siege,



The port city of Rabbat, Morocco, on the Atlantic coast of North Africa. Mulek's party may have "journeyed in the wilderness" (Omni 1:16) across the desert terrain of North Africa before setting to sea from a coastal site in the area of modern Morocco (see endnote 30). Photo courtesy of R. Kent Crookston.

6:10) is not germane to the discussion of his movements. A passage in Omni alludes to Mulek's travel party without naming him specifically. Key phrases from these passages are of interest:

The people of Zarahemla came out from Jerusalem at the time that Zedekiah, king of Judah, was carried away captive into Babylon. And they journeyed in the wilderness, and were brought by the hand of the Lord across the great waters. (Omni 1:15–16)

The people of Zarahemla, who was a descendant of Mulek, and those who came with him into the wilderness . . . (Mosiah 25:2)

The sons of Zedekiah were . . . slain, all except it were Mulek [and] . . . the seed of Zedekiah are with us, and they were driven out of the land of Jerusalem. (Helaman 8:21)

which had commenced early in 588, was lifted so that Nebuchadnezzar's forces could deal with an Egyptian advance in the south (see Jeremiah 37:5–8). Others evidently traveled safely to Egypt during this time,²⁷ and it may be that Mulek did as well, either to bear messages to Egypt and help coordinate the war or to secure his safety as heir to the throne of Judah, or both. In any case, the choice of Egypt as a safe haven for Mulek was also suggested by Sorenson, who maintained: "It is obvious that

Curiously, Mulek is not mentioned by name in Omni. The passage correctly specifies that "the people of Zarahemla came out [not "were driven out"] from Jerusalem at the time that Zedekiah, king of Judah, was carried away captive into Babylon." This would place the departure from Jerusalem of at least some of Mulek's party, perhaps the bulk of it, sometime in late 586 BC, more than a year after the point suggested for teenage Mulek himself to have gone to Egypt.

in order to leave by sea for America, he would have to reach a port. Since the Babylonians controlled the ports of Israel and Phoenicia at the time, going south to Egypt (among his father's allies) would be about the only possibility."²⁸

What the Book of Mormon Says about Mulek

Would the model of a teenage Mulek going to Egypt at the behest of his father, King Zedekiah, before the actual fall of Jerusalem fit with the references to Mulek in the Book of Mormon? There are only three places in the Book of Mormon, as we now have it, that mention Mulek, and one of them (Helaman

Addressing these passages in reverse order, Helaman 8:21 suggests that Mulek and his people "were driven out of the land of Jerusalem." In the technical sense, whether Mulek was an infant or a teenage prince acting on behalf of his father, his travel to Egypt would not have been the result of having been "driven out." Rather, it was an escape. The passage does not address whether Mulek escaped from Jerusalem earlier than the party that eventually crossed the ocean with him or whether they all left Jerusalem at once. It is worth noting that the very next verse maintains that "Lehi was driven out of Jerusalem" (v. 22), which is also technically incorrect—Lehi, too, made an orderly

and planned departure from Jerusalem. The inaccurate idea of the parties of Lehi and Mulek being “driven out” of Jerusalem may have developed late in Nephite thought. In any case, Helaman 8 says nothing that would contradict the idea of a teenage Mulek leaving Jerusalem for Egypt before the city’s fall to the Babylonians.

The reference in Mosiah 25:2 is of interest because it specifically identifies Zarahemla as a descendant of Mulek. In other words, had the Judean monarchy survived, a direct heir to the throne of Jerusalem, Zarahemla, would ironically have been found in ancient America. A key phrase in the verse mentions Mulek’s party going “into the wilderness.” This theme also appears in Omni. But, again, nothing in Mosiah 25:2 contradicts the proposition that Mulek went to Egypt before Jerusalem’s fall.

Omni 1:15–16 gives the most specific information. Written upon the small plates of Nephi (not the plates of Mormon), the words of Amaleki in Omni represent a far earlier record of events than the other two references. Curiously, Mulek is not mentioned by name in Omni. The passage correctly specifies that “the people of Zarahemla came out [not “were driven out”] from Jerusalem at the time that Zedekiah, king of Judah, was carried away captive into Babylon.” This would place the departure from Jerusalem of at least some of Mulek’s party, perhaps the bulk of it, sometime in late 586 BC, more than a year after the point suggested for teenage Mulek himself to have gone to Egypt.

However, since Omni 1:15 does not specifically mention Mulek by name, it does not contradict the proposal that he went to Egypt earlier than the party with whom he eventually came across the sea. It is certainly possible that the party included some of the people who left Jerusalem in Jeremiah 43, as Sorenson suggested. And with the later reference in Mosiah 25:2, Omni 1:16 specifies that the group “journeyed in the wilderness.” That wilderness might have been the trail across northern Sinai from Judah to Egypt, as also suggested by Sorenson,²⁹ or it could even refer to a subsequent trip from Egypt westward across the desert of North Africa.³⁰ But returning to the subject at hand, nothing in Omni contradicts the model of a teenage Mulek going to Egypt a year before the fall of Jerusalem.

The Stamp Seal Left Behind

So was Mulek the “Malkiyahu the son of the king” mentioned in Jeremiah 38:6? Nothing in the Bible or the Book of Mormon negates this identification. And the evidence rehearsed above lends significant support to it. The *m-l-k* basis of both Hebrew names is clear, and the case of Berekhyahu/Baruch demonstrates that there is theoretical precedent for a person being called both Malkiyahu and Mulek—the one a longer, more formal version of the name with a theophoric *yahu* element, and the other a shorter form lacking that element but featuring a different vowel vocalization.³¹ Malkiyahu/Mulek would not have been killed by the Babylonians before Zedekiah’s eyes, as were his brothers (all younger than himself), because as the king’s oldest son and heir to the throne, he was likely sent to Egypt by his father well before the fall of Jerusalem and the capture of the royal family. Whether Mulek was sent to Egypt as a royal messenger or ambassador or in an effort to ensure his safety, it is unlikely that he could have taken all of his possessions with him to Egypt. Other men in Judah with the *ben hamelek* title are known to have possessed multiple stamp seals,³² and if Malkiyahu/Mulek did also it would have been easy for him to have left one behind. Some 2,570 years or so later, that seal was found by someone digging in Jerusalem and was surreptitiously sold. The stamp seal of “Malkiyahu son of the king” now in the London collection of Shlomo Moussaieff seems to be authentic. In answer to the question posed at the outset of this article—and the significance of this can hardly be overstated—it is quite possible that an archaeological artifact of a Book of Mormon personality has been identified. It appears that the seal of Mulek has been found. ■