
MOSIAH 9-17

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INTRODUCTION

With Mosiah 9, the storyline of the Book of Mormon jumps back about 80 years or three generations. Chapter 8 discusses Ammon and King Limhi and their desire to escape Lamanite bondage. With chapter 9, we learn how they got into bondage through a multiple chapter 'flashback.'

MOSIAH 9-10 THE RECORD OF ZENIFF

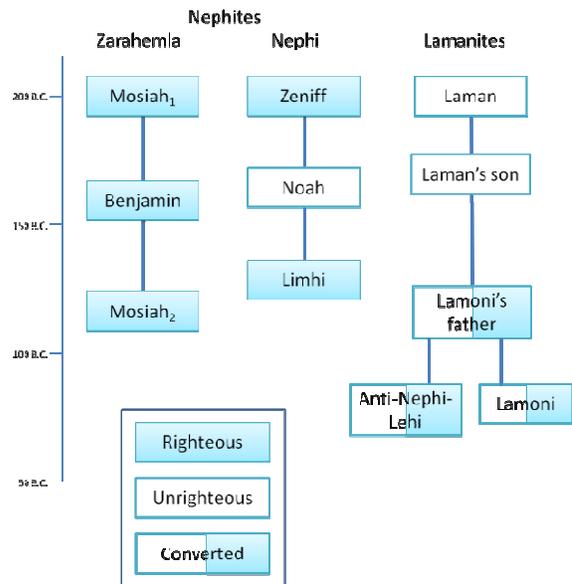
The italicized heading preceding this chapter ("The Record of Zeniff...") was part of the original Book of Mormon text. Chapters 9-10 here were Chapter VI in the 1830 publication.

MOSIAH 9:1-9 ZENIFF AND HIS PEOPLE RETURN TO NEPHI

1 I, Zeniff The father of Noah and grandfather of Limhi from Mosiah 8, Zeniff was the leader of a group of people who desired to go back and possess the Nephite ancestral lands in Lehi-Nephi and Shilom. The date of chapter 9 is given in the footnote: about 200 B.C. These first two chapters appear to be his record, quoted by Mormon, but written by Zeniff's hand.

having been taught in all the language of the Nephites. This could either mean that Zeniff was well-educated in the Nephite language or that he didn't speak the language of the Nephites natively, so had to be taught. If the latter, he was probably one of the people of Zarahemla. Other phrases hint, though, that he was a Nephite from the land of Nephi, because he "had a knowledge of the land of Nephi," which was the land of "our fathers' first inheritance (emphasis added)." However, the context of the verse makes it sound like Zeniff gained his knowledge during this trip during his time as a

Nephite and Lamanite Kings, circa 200-50 B.C.



harting the Book of

spy among the Lamanites, because it is armed with this knowledge that he contends with those who want to attack.

having been sent as a spy. This story was briefly told in Omni 1:27-30. Here in Zeniff's first-hand account, we get many more details about what happened.

I saw that which was good. The Nephite force had the goal of attacking the Lamanites, but Zeniff thought otherwise. The contention became so strong that it led to battle.

2 I would that our ruler should make a treaty. Zeniff and those who supported him felt that a peaceful settlement was possible. Though Zeniff's group won the battle, they were actually wrong—the Lamanites would never allow a peaceful co-existence with the Nephites.

commanded that I should be slain. Zeniff was condemned, their "austere" and "blood-thirsty" leader not tolerating his ideas.

until the greater number of our army was destroyed. Instead of fighting Lamanites, they fought each other, and most of them died in the process. In fact, Omni 1:28 says all but 50 were killed. The survivors returned to Zarahemla to report their failure.

3 I being over-zealous...slow to remember the Lord. In retrospect (for he clearly wrote his record in his old age—see Mosiah 10:22), Zeniff feels that he had too much zeal for this cause, because he can see what trouble it has brought him and the people who went with him. He also recognized that they were not living God's commandments at this time, and they were smitten with "famine and sore afflictions."

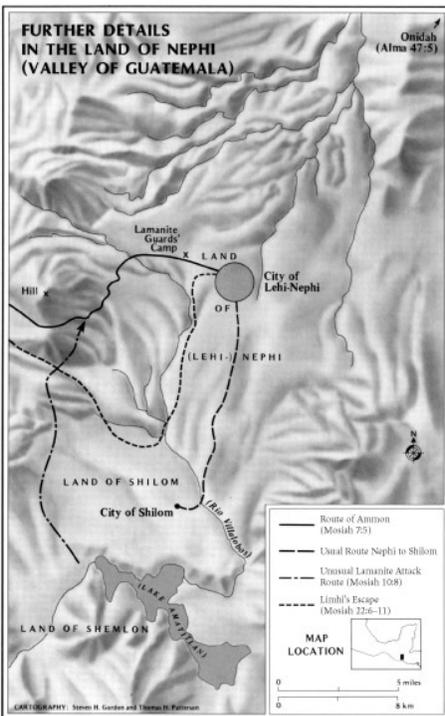


Figure 2: Land of Nephi, from Welch, *Charting the Book of Mormon*; originally from Sorenson, *An American Setting for the Book of Mormon*.

4 near to the land of our fathers. He didn't specify where this camp was, but it was likely closer to the Lamanite capital than the old Nephite capital, since from here they went in to see the king.

5 with four of my men...in unto the king. The king's name is Laman, as we learn in verse 10. This may have been his name, or like the earlier Nephites, the Lamanites may have given throne names to their kings following the name of their first king, Laman.

6 the land of Lehi-Nephi, and the land of Shilom. "Lehi-Nephi" is also simply called "Nephi" in many scriptures. Shilom was mentioned back in Mosiah 7, but this is the first chronological reference to the land of Shilom. It was obviously a Nephite city prior to their departure under Mosiah's leadership (Omni 1:12-13). After Limhi's people's departure, the city returned to Lamanite control, which is how the sons of Mosiah found it when they converted many of its inhabitants (Alma 23:11-12).

7 commanded that his people should depart. Like a page taken from modern history where the Jews were told to pull out of disputed territories to let Palestinians settle there, so king Laman

made his people leave what was surely a recent acquisition, taken over by the Lamanites after Mosiah and his people left to go north to Zarahemla.

8 to build buildings, and to repair the walls. The Zeniffites intended to be there for the long-term, and set about rebuilding the city and putting up new building.

9 with neas, and with sheum. This is the only reference to these two plants, whose identities are unknown. It is possible that they are grains, since they are mentioned in a list with corn, wheat, and barley.

MOSIAH 9:10-19 BATTLE WITH THE LAMANITES

10 bring my people into bondage. The Lamanite king, Laman, had a plan to let the Nephites build up their economy for a time, then bring them into servitude to take advantage of their prosperity.

11 twelve years. Laman's plan was patient and long-term. But after a dozen years, he saw the Nephite population growing stronger, and felt it was time to make his move. The date was about 188 B.C.

12 a lazy and an idolatrous people. Zeniff's assessment sounds like a traditional farmer versus hunter judgment; the hard-working farmer viewed the hunter as lazy, while the hunter saw the farmer as tied down. In this case, though, Laman's intent to enslave the Nephites surely contributed to this statement.

14 on the south of the land of Shilom. It's not clear where the Lamanite king lived, but it appears that since the Lamanites attacked from the south first, they lived somewhere between the land of Nephi and the land of first inheritance. Shilom was south of Nephi, where Zeniff had his capital and where the survivors of the attack fled for safety (verse 15).

16 I did arm them. It appears that some time passed after the initial attack allowing the Nephites to arm themselves. The Lamanites no doubt were enjoying the flocks and crops and slaves they had acquired and perhaps saw Nephi as much harder to attack with its fortifications and larger population.

17 in the strength of the Lord did we go forth into battle. "Because they had been a good people and because their cause was just, they went into battle knowing that the strength of the Lord would be theirs" (McConkie and Millett, 2:195-196).

18 one day and a night we did slay three thousand and forty-three. The battle raged on all day and into the darkness of night, rare for their day. We don't know the size of either army, but the Nephite losses were considerably less (279, as reported in verse 19) than the Lamanite.

MOSIAH 10:1-22 WHY LAMANITES HATE NEPHITES

This section provides the clearest explanation for the long-running hatred of the Lamanites and Nephites.

1-2 Knowing the Lamanites hostile intent, Zeniff armed his people and set guards around their settlements.

3-5 **twenty and two years**. The Lamanites had either given up on winning against these Nephites, or were busy with other distractions, or Laman was just too old to want to go to war again. Whatever the reason, they left the Nephites alone for nearly ten years, during which time the Nephite economy prospered as they enjoyed peace.

6 **king Laman died, and his son began to reign**. We don't know the name of the son, but given the timing, he could have been the grandfather of king Lamoni, who was converted by Ammon (see Alma 18).

7 **land of Shemlon**. The land south of Shilom, bordering on the Lamanite lands.

8 **came upon the north of the land of Shilom**. Following a new attack pattern and perhaps having scouted out a weakness in the Nephite defenses, the Lamanites attacked from the north this time.

heads shaved that they were naked. Clothed with only a loincloth, this was what Lamanites wore into battle for many years.

9-10 Zeniff anticipated a fierce battle, perhaps to the death, because he hid the women and children and armed every able-bodied man, regardless of age—including himself, who was in his “old age.”

12 **wild, and ferocious, and a blood-thirsty people**. The Lamanites culture had prioritized on fierceness, hunting, and skills of war.

12-17 **the tradition of their fathers**. Laman and Lemuel clearly taught their children a different version of history than did Nephi and Sam with their families. This version included the following:

- “they were wronged in the wilderness by their brethren” (v. 12)
- “they were wronged crossing the sea” (v. 12)
- “they were wronged in the land of their first inheritance” (v. 13)
- “he [Nephi] had taken the ruling of the people out of their hands” (v. 15)
- “he [Nephi] departed into the wilderness...and took the...plates of brass” (v. 16)

Zeniff says this is only because “Nephi was more faithful in keeping the commandments of the Lord—therefore he was favored of the Lord...And his brethren were wroth because they understood not the dealings of the Lord...because they hardened their hearts against the Lord” (vv. 13-14). The result is that the Lamanites taught their children that revenge against the Nephites was justified, that they should “hate them...murder them...rob and plunder them, and do all they could to destroy them” (v. 17). Like the proverbial Hatfields and McCoys, they just kept fighting for generations, the real reasons long lost and forgotten in their cultural hatred that persisted. See also Elder Richard G. Scott's comments about giving up traditions that are contrary to God's laws (*Institute Manual*, 150).

18 **king Laman...deceived me**. It would be truly fascinating to hear the Lamanite side of this story. They had two big battles in 22 years, which doesn't seem like a lot. Laman died without achieving his goal of destroying the Nephites and taking advantage of their efforts (except for a short time they took flocks and food from Shilom, in 9:14-19).

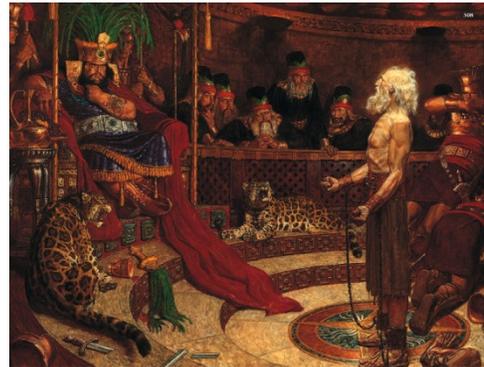
19 **told all these things unto my people**. Zeniff ‘stimulated’ the anger of his own people by telling them about the Lamanite hatred for them.

20-21 ***we did drive them again out of our land.*** Having rallied the people, Zeniff led them to victory against the invading Lamanites again, establishing peace for the remainder of his days.

22 ***did confer the kingdom upon one of my sons.*** The son's name, we learn in the next chapter, was Noah. Given Zeniff's apparent desire to obey the Lord, you have to wonder why he choose Noah. He had other sons. Perhaps Noah was the oldest and so Zeniff felt like he should have that. Or perhaps Noah started out better than he finished—or was a good pretender until his father gave him the throne.

MOSIAH 11-17 THE RECORD OF ABINADI

The next seven chapters are the record of a prophet named Abinadi. The image we have from the Arnold Friberg painting is that Abinadi was an old man. But the Book of Mormon never gives his age. He could have been any age, and perhaps was much younger than the picture (right). A recent fictional account (*Abinadi* by H. B. Moore) takes the position that he was a young father. Whatever his age, Abinadi knew the scriptures and was completely willing to deliver the Lord's message regardless of personal sacrifice. His teachings are a powerful message to us about the atonement of Christ and another reason why the Book of Mormon is Another Testament of Jesus Christ.



MOSIAH 11:1-19 NOAH BEGINS TO REIGN

1 ***Noah...did not walk in the ways of his father.*** As with Abinadi, the image we have of Noah from the Friberg painting of an overweight man may not be entirely correct. Certainly he was one who indulged himself in many ways, and valued his personal comforts over other things, but he was also able to climb towers and run through the wilderness. Perhaps like some who seek after pleasure and power, he valued what a healthy body could provide, and spent some of his time, at least, keeping his body in shape. Speculative, to be sure, but so is the painting.

Notice that the writing changes from first person during Zeniff's time to second person during Noah's time. The record doesn't state who kept the records during this time. Alma was, of course, a source of much of the account about Abinadi in particular (Mosiah 17:4). But starting with chapter 11, Mormon appears to be editing and abridging again, whereas chapters 9-10 look like direct quotes from Zeniff's record.

2 ***he did cause his people to commit sin.*** Noah's sins were that "he did walk after the desires of his own heart"; "he had many wives and concubines"; and, perhaps most significantly, he persuaded others to follow his lead, committing "whoredoms and all manner of wickedness." Personal sin is bad enough, but using your position to promulgate wicked behavior among others under your influence compounds that wickedness. Noah's evil reign was one of Mosiah's chief arguments later (Mosiah 29:16-18) to eliminate the office of king from the Nephite government.

3 ***he laid a tax of one fifth part of all they possessed.*** Comparing this to what many in our society pay in taxes doesn't sound so bad. But note that Noah didn't just tax income but all their

possessions. It would be like the government saying today, 'You must give us 20% of all of your saving, your 401K retirement account, the equity of your home, and any other assets that you own.' The 20% value may not have been arbitrary, either; John W. Welch suggested that it was "a double tithe," ("Counting to Ten," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, 12:2) meaning that Noah was deliberately making himself more important than God.

ziff. This is one of several untranslated words in the Book of Mormon. Ziff is mentioned only twice, here and in verse 8. In both cases, it appears to be a metal, based on the context. Noah taxed it from people and used it to ornament his buildings. John A. Tvedtnes has speculated that ziff might be related to the Hebrew *ziw*, meaning "splendor, brightness" (also, see the footnote in the scriptures for this verse). In terms of identifying what metal it is, some have suggested zinc, tumbaga (copper and gold), electrum (gold and silver), kharsini (arsenic and antimony), tin, or lead. (See Tvedtnes, 344-345; and Largey, 540.)

4 **wives and concubines.** A concubine can be either a lawful wife or a woman kept for sexual purposes (McConkie and Millett, 2:200). From the context, Noah and his priests (including Alma) had both.

he had changed the affairs of the kingdom. Zeniff probably modeled his leadership after the kings he had seen, who did not make slaves of others, but labored with their own hands and did not lay heavy burdens on the people (Mosiah 2:13-14). Noah changed all of that, becoming a leader who demanded much and gave back very little.

5 **put down all the priests...and consecrated new ones.** It's not clear what authority Zeniff or Noah had to "consecrate" priests. One of the new priests Noah put into place was Alma, who said he had "authority from God" (Mosiah 18:18), and that proved to be true, but we don't know if he received that authority from Noah's court or some other source.

6 **thus did the people labor exceedingly to support iniquity.** An important lesson can be gleaned from Noah's court about how *not* to run a government. It is good for us to be vigilant today so that our labors do not support government-sponsored or supported iniquity.

7 **deceived by the vain and flattering words of the king and priests.** The people did not support the king unwillingly. Using great words, the king and priests had convinced the public that the funds being diverted to the king and his court were also beneficial to the people.

8 **Noah built many elegant and spacious buildings.** Like Herod who was king when Jesus was born, Noah was a builder, who took the great taxes he collected and used them for beautiful public works projects. This was surely part of the vain and flattering things he promised the people, and when they saw these great buildings, it likely felt to them that Noah was being somehow magnanimous in his efforts.

9 **built him a spacious palace, and a throne.** However, Noah spared no expense on himself, constructing a huge palace for him and his wives and concubines to live in.

10 **fine work within the walls of the temple.** He also improved the temple, making it more ornate and rich in appearance (but notice no gold or silver, like in his palace, except for the seats of the priests).

12 **a tower near the temple.** This was a watchtower to enable the people to see all the way to Lamanite territory in Shemlon, bordering their lands. This tower will help save Noah's life later when Gideon sets out to slay him (Mosiah 19:5-8).

13 **a great tower to be built on the hill north of the land Shilom.** The tallest tower in the land was built on a high hill between Nephi and Shilom to allow observation in all directions against a Lamanite attack.

14-15 **he became a wine-bibber.** Drunkenness often accompanies other sins, and Noah's court was no exception. "riotous living" and "time with harlots" were part of their regular activities.

16 **slay them in their fields.** The Lamanites were attacking the outlying areas, picking off farmers and shepherds, no doubt to steal their food and animals, as before.

17 **he did not send a sufficient number.** Noah put a token assignment of troops out to protect these families, but the Lamanites numbers overwhelmed and killed the troops, and continued to harass the Nephites.

18-19 **delight in blood, and the shedding of blood.** Noah's armies were able to defeat the Lamanites, but not because they relied on the Lord. The victory would be short-lived, but they celebrated it, taking pride in their own strength and boasting in their accomplishments. The result was a thirst for blood, that our author also attributes to "the wickedness of their king and priests."

MOSIAH 11:20-29 ABINADI'S FIRST PREACHING

20 **a man among them whose name was Abinadi.** One of the great Book of Mormon prophets, we know almost nothing about him except his message, which is delivered with power and skill.

Behold, thus saith the Lord. Abinadi's first message starts here and continues through verse 25. He was a fully authorized prophet, speaking in the name of the Lord.

except they repent. In this first message, there is still time to repent to avoid bondage. When Abinadi returns two years later, that time will be past. Instead, repentance will only save them from destruction.

21-23 Bondage awaits the people of Noah if they do not repent, and "none shall deliver them, except it be the Lord the Almighty God."

24 **I will be slow to hear their cries.** The people had become so wicked that Abinadi warned that even if they repented, they would still suffer and "be smitten by their enemies." Compare D&C 101:7-8.

25 **in sackcloth and ashes.** No half-hearted repentance was acceptable. The people had to repent fully, following the traditional manifestation of that sincerity and deep humility—putting on scratchy black goat or camel hair clothing, and putting ashes from a fire on the head.

26 **the Lord delivered him out of their hands.** Abinadi's words engendered anger and the people tried to capture him and kill him, but the Lord helped him escape, though the details are missing as to how that happened.

27 **who is Abinadi...or who is the Lord.** Not only did Noah reject the message of the Lord's prophet, but he rejected the Lord himself. This is a man who trusts completely in the arm of flesh, as do many today who similarly cry out, 'Who is God that I should worship him?'

28 **therefore I will slay him.** Though Abinadi escaped, Noah swore he would die. His statement here possibly contributed later to the prophet's death, since Noah was prepared to free him at that time but was egged on by his priests, who perhaps reminded him of this.

MOSIAH 12:1-16 ABINADI RETURNS

1 **after the space of two years.** The footnote dates this to about 148 B.C. We do not know where Abinadi was or what he was doing for the two years between his two appearances.

came among them in disguise. This is often recounted with some humor—Abinadi sneaks into the city then accidentally blows his cover by announcing his name in the first sentence. But I don't think that was a mistake. He needed the disguise to get into the city because the guards were looking for him still (he was certainly on Noah's 'ten most wanted' list). But once inside, he boldly announced his name without fear or concern, because he was on the Lord's errand. I think he *wanted* people to know he was back—with a new message from the Lord.

they have repented not. The two years' grace period was up since he first warned them, and the people had not chosen to repent. Therefore, the previous warning was going to come to pass, with additional consequences.

2-5 **shall be brought into bondage.** This was no longer a conditional punishment; it was going to happen now. They will be "smitten on the cheek," "driven by men," "slain," and animals will eat their flesh, a representation of a curse since burial was denied. They will also be smitten "with sore afflictions," with "famine and with pestilences," and be "driven before like a dumb ass."

3 **life of king Noah shall be valued even as a garment in a hot furnace.** As Abinadi is dying, he said something similar (Mosiah 17:15-18), which it is sometimes interpreted to be about Noah. But Alma 25:4-12 makes it clear that his dying words applied to the priests who orchestrated and oversaw his death. The prophecy about Noah is given here in the public teaching, and was fulfilled in Mosiah 19:20, though we need to be careful about applying the metaphor too literally (see verses 11-12 below).

6 Even the elements will be called upon against these people—hail and east wind (dry, destructive wind) and insects to devour their crops.

8 **except they repent I will utterly destroy them.** They still had the opportunity to repent and lessen their punishment. It could stop at bondage and suffering, as described above. But if they do not repent, it will include death and the destruction of their entire civilization.

many things did Abinadi prophesy. Just a few of his words are captured here. Perhaps the rest of his public testimony greatly resembled his private one with the king and priests, so Mormon edited out the redundancy.

9 **they were angry with him; and they took him.** Note that it was the people who heard his message in the streets that bound him and took him to the king. None of this would have happened had the people been more receptive.

10-12 We get a sample of Abinadi's words that were not recorded as the people try to anger the king by quoting him. Besides Noah's life being like "a garment in a furnace of fire" which is quickly destroyed, he was also "a dry stalk in a field, which is run over by beasts," meaning he is ignored and valued little, and he is like "the blossoms of a thistle, which, when it is fully ripe, if the wind bloweth, it is driven forth upon the face of the land," meaning it is taken against its will and driven away.

The earliest one about the garment in fire is often cited as a prophecy of Noah's death, and it's true that he died by fire. But taken together, we realize that not all three of these can be prophecies of Noah's type of death, so perhaps we miss the Lord's point in having Abinadi give them. They are metaphors for how little Noah's life is valued by the Lord, because of his personal wickedness and the great sins he has led others to do.

13-14 ***we are guiltless, and thou, O king, has not sinned.*** The people who captured Abinadi and took him to the king cannot see anything wrong in Noah's behavior, because they're doing the same things.

15 ***we shall not come into bondage.*** The phrase fits perfectly here: 'Past performance is not a strong indicator of future returns.' It is true that thus far, under Zeniff and even under Noah, the people had been successful in their battles against the Lamanites. They believed that would never change, just as the people in Jerusalem in Lehi's day believed that Jerusalem could not fall, because it never had.

MOSIAH 12:17-37 ABINADI TEACHES THE COURT

17 ***cast into prison.*** Noah appears to be uncertain what to do here, even though previously he had condemned Abinadi to death. So he buys some time by putting Abinadi in prison and calling for a meeting of his priests to deliberate his case.

18 ***bring him hither.*** The priests determined that they wanted to question him directly. Like Paul before Festus or Jesus before Agrippa, this encounter was perhaps driven as much by curiosity as anything—they'd had not seen or heard him in person last time.

19 ***question him, that they might cross him.*** The priests were the elite, at least in their own minds. They probably considered Abinadi to be an uneducated peasant or something and figured they could easily trip him up. But "to their astonishment," he completely confounded them, answering boldly and withstanding all their questions.

20-24 This is a curious question. The quotation is from Isaiah 52:7-10, identical to what is in the KJV. It's hard to see how this question could have been asked to trip up Abinadi, especially because all he said was, "What meaneth the words" (though McConkie and Millett see it as a test: 'Why do you speak gloom and doom when this prophet calls for good tidings and peace?'; see 2:208). Was the question sincere? Did Alma ask it as the beginning of his conversion? We don't know. But whatever the circumstances, Abinadi spent the rest of his comments answering this very question, pulling in other scriptures and taking a broad interpretation, so it was a timely question, perfectly teed up for this prophet-prisoner.

25 ***pretend to teach this people.*** The priests taught the people many things, but not the great truths of the gospel or the scriptures.

27 ***Ye have not applied your hearts to understanding.*** The phrase ‘apply our hearts’ or similar is found only in the wisdom literature of the Old Testament—Psalms, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes—and in this verse. In the Old Testament, it literally means, ‘bring our hearts near to...’ or ‘cause to come into our hearts...’ So Abinadi, paraphrasing or at least alluding to Proverbs 2:2, said, in effect, ‘You have not let understanding come into your hearts, therefore, you have not been wise.’

29 ***If ye teach the law of Moses why do ye not keep it?*** Abinadi fearlessly declares their sins unto them. Not only do they not keep the law of Moses, but they grossly sin, seeking riches, chasing after harlots, and causing others to sin.

30 ***ye know that I speak the truth.*** Abinadi knew that the Spirit was bearing testimony to them of their own wickedness—they were not doing these things in ignorance. They “ought to tremble before God,” as should we for our own sinful natures.

31 ***Does salvation come by the law of Moses? What say ye?*** Abinadi turns the tables on them, becoming the interrogator instead of the captive.

32 ***salvation did come by the law of Moses.*** How long the priests deliberated is not said. Perhaps one of them answered for the group and all agreed.

33 ***if ye keep the commandments of God ye shall be saved.*** Abinadi is not going to directly answer their question for a few minutes (13:27-28), but for now, he gives a general answer and begins to quote the most common list of commandments in the law of Moses: the Ten Commandments.

34-36 This is a quote from Exodus 20:2-4 with minor differences from the KJV (deletions marked with ~~strikeout~~, additions with **bold**):

I am the LORD thy God, ~~which have~~ **who hath** brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other ~~gods~~ **God** before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness *of any thing* ~~that is~~ in heaven above, or ~~that is~~ **things which are** in the earth beneath, ~~or that is in the water under the earth:~~

37 ***Have ye done all this?*** Abinadi got no further than the first two commandments (speaking of idolatry) before he had to stop and ask if they were obedient. He answered his own question: “Nay, ye have not.” Not only that, but they have not taught the people to live these same commandments.

MOSIAH 13:1-35 ABINADI TEACHES THE COMMANDMENTS

1 ***Away with this fellow, and slay him...for he is mad.*** This irrational comment shows just how frustrated Noah was with Abinadi. Even a king did not have the authority to kill someone because they were crazy. Abinadi has done nothing but prophesy, which had made them angry, but was no crime.

3 ***Touch me not.*** Compare to 1 Nephi 17:48, where Nephi said the same words with similar results—it kept his brothers from laying their hands on him until he said what the Spirit had directed him to say. So with Abinadi. He was not done delivering his message, to make his own garments clean and lay the full responsibility upon Noah and his priests.

neither have I told you that which ye requested. Abinadi had not yet answered the question about the meaning of Isaiah 52 yet either.

5 **his face shone with exceeding luster.** There are not many records of transfigurations in scripture, and none before the time of Abinadi as well known as Moses, who is cited in this verse. In the New Testament, there are at least two: Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17:2) and Stephen as he was being tried (Acts 6:15).

9 **it matters not whither I go, if it so be that I am saved.** Abinadi's faith was such that he trusted in God to preserve him, but if not, he was still saved in God's kingdom (compare Daniel 3:18).

10 **what you do with me...shall be a type and a shadow.** Not just the manner of their death, but how they would be treated by others, including the Lord, was a reflection of how they determined to treat Abinadi on this day.

11 **I read unto you the remainder of the commandments.** Not stated in the text, but it would appear that Abinadi called for a scroll or record of some kind that contained the law of Moses so he could read from it to them.

ye have studied and taught iniquity. Teaching iniquity is one thing, but Noah and his priests actually *studied* it (can you get a degree in sin?).

12-24 Abinadi picks up where he left off, overlapping one verse. This quotation is from Exodus 20:4-17, with some slight differences (deletions marked with ~~strikeout~~, additions with **bold**):

⁴ Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness ~~of any thing that is~~ **things which are** in heaven above, or ~~that is~~ **which are** in the earth beneath, or ~~that is~~ **which are** in the water under the earth: ⁵ Thou shalt not bow down thyself ~~to~~ **unto** them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God *am* a jealous God, visiting the ~~iniquity~~ **iniquities** of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth ~~generation~~ **generations** of them that hate me; ⁶ And ~~showing~~ **showing** mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments. ⁷ Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain. ⁸ Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. ⁹ Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: ¹⁰ But the seventh day, ~~is~~ the sabbath of the LORD thy God; ~~in it~~ thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that *is* within thy gates: ¹¹ For *in* six days the LORD made heaven and earth, **and** the sea, and all that in them *is*, ~~and rested the seventh day~~: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it. ¹² Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee. ¹³ Thou shalt not kill. ¹⁴ Thou shalt not commit adultery. ¹⁵ Thou shalt not steal. ¹⁶ Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour. ¹⁷ Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that *is* thy neighbour's.

25-26 **Have ye taught this people.** After completing the recitation of the Ten Commandments, Abinadi asked if Noah and the priests have been teaching these most fundamental commandments from God, but he didn't wait for an answer: "I say unto you, Nay." He knew it was not possible or God would not have sent him.

27 ***it is expedient that ye should keep the law of Moses.*** He now directly responds to their answer about salvation coming by the law of Moses. It is still the right time, he explains, to keep the law, but that will not always be the case.

28 ***salvation doth not come by the law alone.*** Obedience is the first law of heaven, but without the atonement of Christ, it would all be for nothing.

29-30 ***it was expedient that there should be a law given.*** See D&C 84:23-27.

31 ***all these things were types of things to come.*** Nearly every aspect, and certainly the ceremonial ones, all point to Christ, testify of his mission and atonement, and point us to him.

32 ***there could not any man be saved except it were through the redemption of God.*** Another great Book of Mormon statement about our belief in salvation by grace.

33-35 ***even all the prophets.*** Compare Jacob 4:4.

MOSIAH 14:1-12 ABINADI QUOTES ISAIAH 53

In this chapter, Abinadi quotes Isaiah 53, the text almost immediately after the one that one of Noah's priests used to ask his question. Coming right after his statements about grace, redemption, the atonement, and how "God himself should come down among the children of men," there are not many chapters he could have quoted that are more appropriate. If the priests had handed him a copy of Isaiah when they asked their question, he was simply reading a column over. If he was not handed such a document, he was quoting Isaiah from memory.

There are only six words that are changed in the Book of Mormon version of Isaiah 53, and they are not significant except one, in verse 9: "...because he had done no ~~violence~~ **evil**, neither was any deceit in his mouth." The word in the Hebrew, translated "violence" in the KJV and "evil" in the Book of Mormon, is violence, cruelty, or injustice. The Book of Mormon version is nearly the same as the translation in 1 Peter 2:22: "Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth." The word used in the Greek translation (the Septuagint or LXX) of Isaiah is *anomian*, which means wickedness or sin, matching Abinadi's quotation. This indicates that the word in our current Hebrew version may not match the original, because both the brass plates and the Greek Septuagint translation. It's also good doctrine, because Jesus actually did some violence in his life (at least driving out the money changers) but he did no sin or evil.

MOSIAH 15:1-31 ABINADI TESTIFIES OF CHRIST

Having quoted Isaiah 53, Abinadi next offered commentary on that marvelous piece of poetry.

1 ***God himself shall come down.*** "This prophesy I just quoted to you was not about a prophet or messenger from God, but God himself, the Son of God, who will become mortal."

3-4 ***The Father...and the Son.*** Jesus is both the Father and the Son, theologically. Here, Abinadi explained that he was the Father "because he was conceived by the power of God." He was the Son "because of the flesh." See *Institute Manual*, 153. See a lengthier explanation in McConkie and Millett, 2:226-229.

5 ***mocked, and scourged, and cast out, and disowned.*** Abinadi was drawing on more than Isaiah 53 for this, probably including prophecies from Zenos and Zenoch.

6 ***as a sheep.*** Quoting Isaiah 53:7 again.

7 McConkie and Millett point out that the two phrases should be considered parallel:

the flesh becoming subject even unto death,
the will of the son being swallowed up in the will of the Father.

8 ***having gained victory over death.*** Compare Isaiah 25:8 and 1 Corinthians 15:54-55.

9 This is just a beautiful verse about the many messages about the person and mission of Jesus and his atonement for us.

10 ***who shall declare his generation.*** Quoting Isaiah 53:8.

when his soul has made an offering for sin. Isaiah 53:10-11.

11 ***these are his seed.*** All who hearken to the prophets and look forward with faith to the coming of the Messiah to give them redemption from sin, these are those who are his seed, including the prophets who bear the message (v. 13). See comments on these verses in *Institute Manual*, 153.

12 ***these are they for whom he has died.*** Jesus' atonement was for every person who ever lived, but if we do not repent and surrender our wills and sins to God, the atonement is of little value to us. So in that sense, those who do the things in verse 10 do become those for whom he died.

14 ***published peace, who have brought good tidings.*** Finally, Abinadi turns back to the text of the original question (Isaiah 53:7-10) that sparked this remarkable teaching experience.

15-18 For Abinadi, many feet are beautiful—those who teach the message of Christ in the past, present, and future, and especially Christ himself.

19 ***the redemption which he hath made.*** We comfortably read this some 2000 years after Jesus' mortal life. But Abinadi was declaring it almost 200 years before the atonement happened—as if it had already happened. This speaking about a future event in the past tense as if it were an accomplished fact has been called the 'prophetic perfect' verb form.

21-25 Abinadi is the first prophet in the Book of Mormon to have teachings recorded regarding the "first resurrection," and provides a clear explanation of that doctrine. To him, that first resurrection is for "all the prophets, and all those that have believed in their words." Two other classes may participate as well: those who "died before Christ came, in their ignorance," meaning those who lived before his mortal ministry but never heard this gospel taught; and "little children." See the helpful chart of the resurrection on p. 154 of the *Institute Manual*.

26 ***those that have perished in their sins...have no part in the first resurrection.*** If we know the eternal truths and reject them and die unrepentant, Abinadi taught that our resurrection will come later.

28 ***to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people.*** It was not in Abinadi's day or even in Jesus' day, but in ours (and we're not there yet by any means), but one day every person on earth and who

ever lived on earth through the ministries of those in the spirit world, will hear the message of salvation through Jesus Christ.

29-31 Quoting Isaiah 52:8-10.

MOSIAH 16:1-15 ABINADI CONCLUDES HIS TESTIMONY

1-4 An understanding of the Fall is the foundation for understanding the Atonement. There is no purpose to the Atonement unless you first realize that “all mankind were lost...endlessly lost were it not that God redeemed his people from their lost and fallen state.”

5 If we are not redeemed and justified (forgiven of sins and made clean) and sanctified (changed from our carnal nature to become more like God), it is as if there was never an atonement made, as far as we would be concerned. We either surrender ourselves to the Lord or, by default, we surrender ourselves to Satan.

6 ***speaking of things to come as though they had already come.*** The definition of the “prophetic perfect.”

7-8 ***the sting of death is swallowed up in Christ.*** Paul will later use the same language (1 Corinthians 15:55-56) as will, not surprisingly because of Abinadi’s influence, the sons of Mosiah (Alma 22:14). This appears also to be a reference to Isaiah 25:8.

9 ***the light and the life of the world.*** Critics say Joseph Smith lifted this from John, but John never uses this phrase. It first appears in latter-day scripture right here, from the mouth of Abinadi. Another Book of Mormon prophet will use afterwards (Alma 38:9), but Abinadi has surely created this inspired phrase not from John but from Psalms (27:1; 36:9) and Proverbs (6:23). Most significantly, Jesus himself used it when he visited the Nephites (3 Nephi 9:18; 11:11)—Jesus was quoting Abinadi! In fact, the Lord appears to have liked this phrase so much that he used it regarding himself at least six times in the Doctrine and Covenants in our dispensation (D&C 10:70; 11:28; 12:9; 34:2; 39:2; 45:7).

10-12 A stark characterization of the final judgment—we have either done the works or God or of the devil, thereby sealing our final fate. No one will be surprised by their eternal condition because God gives us every opportunity: “the arms of mercy were extended towards them, and they would not; they being warned of their iniquities and yet they would not depart from them; and they were commanded to repent and yet they would not repent.”

13 ***ought ye not to tremble and repent of your sins.*** Abinadi was speaking to Noah and his court, but his words clearly echo to our day and to each of us, who are just as lost and just as judged if we do not rely on the grace of Christ and his Atonement.

14-15 Abinadi’s final words were both a plea and a commandment: “if ye teach the law of Moses [which they claimed to teach], also teach that it is a shadow of those things which are to come—Teach them that redemption cometh through Christ the Lord.”

MOSIAH 17:1-20 ALMA’S CONVERSION AND ABINADI’S DEATH

1 ***he should be put to death.*** With his message done, the power the Lord had granted him that held them back was apparently lifted, and they were able to seize him.

2 ***Alma.*** This is our introduction to one of the most important Book of Mormon leaders. We learn that he was “a descendent of Nephi,” a “young man,” (he was 25, doing the math from Mosiah 29:45) and that “he believed the words which Abinadi had spoken.” (I note that Alma is not said to be a priest of Noah, though we assume that from the phrase, “one among them.” But perhaps he was just part of the court, a more minor player, given his youth?) Knowing Abinadi’s words to be true, he boldly stood before the king and court and plead for Abinadi’s release.

3-4 ***the king was more wroth.*** Noah was already angry at Abinadi, but now to have Alma, too, stand up to him was too much, and he ordered Alma to be cast out. Then still in anger, he changed his mind and ordered Alma killed also. Somehow Alma was able to hide himself and escape capture.

4 ***write all the words which Abinadi had spoken.*** While they were fresh in his mind and surely driven by the Spirit, Alma recorded Abinadi’s words. Unknown the Abinadi until he got to the spirit world, he had made one convert, but that one convert would impact not only the entire Nephite nation in his day, but the whole history of the people, since his family became prophets, leaders, and keepers of the plates. President Wilford Woodruff was an amazing record keeper in the days of Joseph Smith. He said, “Whenever I heard Joseph Smith preach, teach, or prophesy, I always felt it was my duty to write it; I felt uneasy and could not eat, drink, or sleep until I did write it; and my mind has been so exercised upon this subject that when I heard Joseph Smith teach and had no pen or paper, I would go home and sit down and write the whole sermon, almost word for word and sentence by sentence as it was delivered, and when I had written it, it was taken from me, I remembered it no more. This was the gift of God to me” (McConkie and Millett, 2:249).

5-6 ***after three days.*** Abinadi was cast into prison for three days, then brought back before the king. Many of Abinadi’s teachings pointed to the Savior, but so did his life become a type of Christ, including this symbol of three days in prison, as Jesus was three days in the tomb.

7-8 ***we have found an accusation against thee.*** Part of the reason it took three days was that they really didn’t have justification to put Abinadi to death. I’m sure the scribes and priests were working overtime trying to find something in their law that would support Noah’s ruling. What they found was an amazing twist of the law: “thou has said that God himself should come down among the children of men; and now, for this cause thou shalt be put to death.” These men would thus also condemn Isaiah, Nephi, Jacob, Zenos, and many other prophets.

9-10 ***I will not recall the words which I have spoken.*** With his errand from the Lord, he stood firm in what he had declared. Abinadi could have saved his life just by hedging a bit and softening the blow, but he held fast and was willing to suffer even death that his words might “stand as a testimony” against them. Moreover, if they killed him, they were killing an innocent man, which would “also stand as a testimony against you at the last day.”

11 ***Noah was about to release him.*** Like other leaders who faced true priesthood holders speaking by the Spirit, Noah began to fear the judgments of God.

12 ***the priests lifted up their voices against him.*** The wicked priests would have none of it. They were so hardened that they pushed the king, reminding him how Abinadi’s words had angered him, and perhaps reminding him of the judgment he had already made two years ago and at this time.

Their words turned Noah the other way, dismissing the feelings he had of guilt and judgment, and the king ordered Abinadi killed.

13 **bound him, and scourged his skin with faggots.** Several interesting factors come into play here. First, the phrase “and bound him” was in the printer’s manuscript and the 1830 edition, but somehow got left out of the printing starting in 1837. It was restored in 1906. Second, the phrase “scourged his skin with faggots” is likely an error. We don’t have the original manuscript for this verse, and the printer’s manuscript does indeed say “scourged,” but Royal Skousen has documented how Oliver Cowdery often mistaked the two words, how the context might have led him to write it (Jesus was scourged), but how scorched is still the better choice. Nowhere else does it say Abinadi was whipped (the meaning of scourged) but also he is killed by fire. Not only that, but it makes no sense to say he was whipped with faggots (burning pieces of wood) but it does make sense that he was scorched by them (see <http://mi.byu.edu/publications/insights/?vol=22&num=3&id=234> and Skousen, Royal, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon*, Part Three, 1362; though Brant Gardner found some evidence of people being beaten with burning sticks among the Aztecs: see <http://mi.byu.edu/publications/insights/?vol=21&num=7&id=205>). In other words, after they tied Abinadi up, they took burning wood and held it next to his skin or even hit him with them to burn him but not kill him. The pain must have been tremendous.

14-18 At some point during this suffering but before he died, Abinadi mustered the strength for one last prophetic declaration, the fulfillment of which is noted in Alma 25. He told the priests that his death by fire would not be the last, that “thy seed shall cause that many shall suffer the pains of that I do suffer.” This is noted in Alma 25:7. But also, in Alma 14, the people of Ammonihah burned believers. Though we don’t know the origins of the people of Ammonihah, there are several ties to the priests of Noah, in terms of culture, practice, and even language (which we’ll explore when we get to Alma 14). So this prophesy of Abinadi could be fulfilled in those actions.

He also said they would be “afflicted with all manner of diseases.” The fulfillment of this is not noted in the Book of Mormon.

He said they would be “smitten on every hand,” “driven and scattered.” This is noted in Alma 25:12.

Finally, he said they would be “hunted” and “taken by the hand of your enemies,” and then suffer “the pains of death by fire.” This was noted in Alma 25:9.

19 **O God, receive my soul.** Compare Acts 7:59.

20 **sealed the truth of his words by his death.** Abinadi is the first recorded martyr in the Book of Mormon. See *Institute Manual*, 155.

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