

General Comments on Mosiah 12-16

These chapters contain Abinadi's second set of public sermons (cf. 12:1-8, cp. 11:20-26 for his first set) and his final private sermon to king Noah and his priests (cf. 12:17-16:15). Aside from the surrounding events, the sermon itself is quite dramatic. Abinadi's private sermon addresses two main issues: the contents and nature of the Law of Moses (cf. 13:11-26), and the condescension of the Lord as the Messiah (cf. 13:27-15:31). He connects the two themes, showing the Law of Moses and Prophets do in fact present the Lord as a condescending and redeeming Messiah (cf. 16:13-15). This is because the priests of Noah have presently rejected the Messiah, and will ultimately completely secularize (cf. 24:5).

Setting

Addressing the more overtly dramatic portions of the text, the general setting is one of a formerly religious society gone decadent and secular. It is clear from his comments in 11:27 Noah does not know or fear the Lord. His "priests" are apparently somewhat familiar with the Law of Moses, but are more secular lawyers than spiritual teachers (note in 24:1-5 these priests end up abandoning the Law of Moses and completely secularized when they become the intelligentsia of the Lamanites). As such, when Abinadi comes on the scene again his spiritual approach to the Law collides with their secular approach. The result is violence on the part of the secular majority over the religious minority, a common pattern in the scriptures.

Another pattern commonly employed by prideful, unrepentant people is to employ irrelevant personal insults (cf. 13:1), irrational arguments (cf. 17:8), and, most tellingly of all, threats of physical violence (cf. 11:28, 13:1, 17:1, 17:7) in order to avoid admitting their error and taking responsibility. As Abinadi points out, these people are "carnal and devilish, and the devil has power over them" (16:3). Thus, by their fruits ye shall know them. This is what ultimately leads to the martyrdom of Abinadi.

Religious Context

It is likely Abinadi's first and second speeches were set at the time of Shavuot, or the Feast of Weeks (cf. Exod. 34:22,

Deut. 16:9-12). The public portion of the second speech occurs two years after the first and the second speech addresses two key topics: bondage and famine, both of which are key themes of Shavuot:

Deut. 16:9 Seven weeks shalt thou number unto thee: begin to number the seven weeks from such time as thou beginnest to put the sickle to the corn. 10 And thou shalt keep the feast of weeks unto the Lord thy God with a tribute of a freewill offering of thine hand, which thou shalt give unto the Lord thy God, according as the Lord thy God hath blessed thee: 11 And thou shalt rejoice before the Lord thy God, thou, and thy son, and thy daughter, and thy manservant, and thy maidservant, and the Levite that is within thy gates, and the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow, that are among you, in the place which the Lord thy God hath chosen to place his name there. 12 And thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in Egypt: and thou shalt observe and do these statutes .

The festival is a celebration of first fruits of the grain harvest, where Israel is free from Egyptian captivity in their own lands to eat the crops they grew themselves for themselves in freedom, having been delivered by their God. For the Lord to threaten them in 12:2-8 with famine and captivity is exactly the opposite of the theme of Shavuot. Particularly compare the bondage of 11:21, 11:23 and 12:2 with that of Deut. 16:12 above and the burdens of 12:5 with those of Exod. 1:11.

The other major theme of Shavuot is the tradition the Law was given to Moses at Sinai fifty days after the original Passover. The holiday represents the granting of the Law of Moses to Israel.

Although Shavuot receives relatively little attention in the US compared to its sister holidays (Passover and Sukkot), it is a major Jewish holiday of the same status. Shavuot is a celebration of the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai—the moment when God and Israel sealed their covenant together.

Shavuot is one of the three pilgrimage festivals in Jewish tradition. These festivals—Passover, Shavuot, and Sukkot—were originally agricultural celebrations that later imbued with historical significance. Passover celebrates the redemption of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, Shavuot celebrates the subsequent receiving of the Torah on Mount Sinai, and Sukkot recalls the 40 years that the Israelites wandered through the wilderness on the way to the Promised Land. Together, these three festivals are a way that Jews reenact their sacred myth—from slavery to redemption and revelation—every year. (<https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/why-is-shavuot-significant/>)

This theme fills the private arguments of ch. 12:17 through ch. 16. Abinidi tells them they do not live the Law and recites the Ten Commandments, and his face shines brightly, similar to Moses' face on Sinai (cf. Exod. 34:29-30), causing them to recoil in fear.

As Shavuot is one of the three Regalim, or feasts of ingathering, having Abinidi prophesy at this time means the more religiously observant individuals among the people would be gathering at the Temple to bring up their sacrifices as commanded in the Law. This would have also provided Abinidi cover to enter the city, as people from the surrounding countryside would be coming into the Temple. He could more easily blend in with the crowds. It could have also provided him cover to escape after his first speech, as documented in 11:25, as there would have been more people in the city, and those people would have been more sympathetic to Abinidi's message.

Structure

The entire text of these chapters is highly structured. We would expect this of the portions of the text which are Abinadi's, but even the reactionary and negative statements of the people are structured as well (cf. 12:9-16). This suggests a later editing hand was applied to the text. We know Alma documented Abinadi's words (cf. 17:4), and presumably some of the related historical events as well. But, the text of these chapters is not presented in the first-person with Alma writing, as was the case with Zeniff in ch. 9-10. Instead, it follows the typical third-person style of Mormon's editorial hand. Thus, in all likelihood in composing the text of these chapters Mormon applied rhetorical and textual devices. In the case of 12:9-16, note how the people quote Abinadi in v. 9-13 and then flatly contradict him in v. 14-16. Thus, Mormon's intent would have been to characterize the people as being spiritually rebellious while ingratiating themselves to the king to curry his favor. One would assume the quotes provided are accurate, just arranged such that they fit Mormon's intended pattern.

Characters

A speculative side issue is the composition of the body of Noah's priests. In 17:2 it says "there was one among them whose

name was Alma, he also being a descendant of Nephi. And he was a young man...". This suggests his being a Nephite and young were atypical for the priests. If this was the case, then one would assume the priests were older and were of Mulekite extraction. If they were predominantly of Mulekite extraction and were older, then they may have been more influenced by their Mulekite heritage, which we know from Omni 1:17 was secularized. And the general context of king Benjamin's speech was to persuade the Mulekite descended majority to accept a Messianic approach to the Law of Moses, they not having the same benefit the Nephites had of being taught such things over time. Abinadi is pushing the same Messianic approach (cp. ch. 16 with ch. 3), but with considerably less success. These things taken together suggest Noah made up his priests largely of "old school" Mulekites who were quite secularized to begin with. This would also explain why the Lamanite king so readily makes Amulon et al. the intelligentsia of the Lamanites, because they aren't Nephites. If they were Nephites, it seems unlikely the Lamanite king would so readily adopt them as educators. Also, in 25:12, the children of the Amulon reject their father's names and declare themselves Nephites, suggesting they were Mulekites.

Arguing against the idea that Noah's priests were Mulekites is the fact that Zeniff and the others go back to the ancestral Nephite land of their forefathers (cf. 9:1-3). Why would Mulekites be interested in going to the land of the Nephi? It is possible they had married into Nephite families, or was there a drought in the land, or were simply struck by wanderlust? Mulekites would not have been impelled by the same desire Zeniff speaks of when it comes to inheriting the land of his fathers.

Traditional Reading

And a final point regarding the traditional approach to this text. Looking at the painting by Arnold Friberg, the one included in the blue missionary editions of the Book of Mormon which shows Abinadi as an old man confronting Noah with stunned and toppled guards behind him, it clearly presents the guards as the ones who attempted to take Abinadi in 13:2. Note the priests are behind the latticework. However, a careful examination of the text makes it clear Noah tells the priests to take Abinadi in both 13:1 and 17:1. They are thwarted both times, first by the Lord's power in Abinadi and then by Alma's dissension. It is not until after Alma flees and Noah sends his servants after him that Noah has the guards surround and take

Abinadi (cf. 17:5). The guards and servants were probably not present at all prior to 17:3 or 5, as why would he tell the priests to take Abinadi if there were guards or servants present?

In 13:5 it says, "the people of king Noah durst not lay their hands on him". Can "the people" refer to the guards or servants? Perhaps. But, still, why would Noah command the priests to take Abinadi if there were guards or servants present? The only people identified as present are the priests, Noah, and Abinadi. In 12:17 it says Noah held a council with the priests, suggesting it was just himself and them, and then they decide to summon Abinadi to cross-examine him. No others are mentioned until 17:3 and 5.

Additionally, there is nothing explicit in the text regarding the ages of the people involved, except for Alma. Alma is identified as younger, and the rest of them are assumed to be older. But, there is nothing in the text requiring that.

So, while Friberg's painting is very well done, it does not necessarily accurately reflect what is happening in the text. Recognizing the priests as the aggressors creates a very different picture as to how angry they were and how violent their reaction was to Abinadi's statements. It also shines greater light on their motives in 17:12.

Chapter Summary

A breakdown of these chapters by subject is as follows:

- | | |
|----------|---|
| 12:1-8 | Abinadi returns to preach repentance and imminent destruction |
| 12:9-16 | The people reject Abinadi's warning and turn him over to the king, bootlicking the king and slandering Abinadi |
| 12:17-24 | King and priests react to Abinadi, they try to find fault with him through questioning, they then ask him what a quotation from Isa. 52:7-10 means |
| 12:25-37 | Abinadi initially ignores the question on the quotation and instead questions their alleged expertise on the Law and Prophets, he then rails on them for their many gross |

- sins, identifying this as the reason they know nothing concerning the Law or Prophets
- 13:1-10 Stung by the accusation, they cannot defend themselves, so they resort to insults and attempt to have him executed, but he withstands them with the power of the Lord and warns them whatever they do to him will happen to them
- 13:11-26 Abinadi then recites the Ten Commandments, the core of the Law of Moses, and states they have not taught the people to obey them
- 13:27-15:31 Abinadi then turns his attention to answering the question they asked regarding Isa. 52:7-10, and in the process of doing so presents the doctrine of the condescending Lord as Messiah
- 16:1-15 Abinadi concludes his speech by summarizing his condemnation of their sinful nature and telling them the Law of Moses points to Christ and without Christ they are damned

Comments on Mosiah 12

1 AND it came to pass that after the space of two years that Abinadi came among them in disguise, that they knew him not, and began to prophesy among them, saying: Thus has the Lord commanded me, saying--Abinadi, go and prophesy unto this my people, for they have hardened their hearts against my words; they have repented not of their evil doings; therefore, I will visit them in my anger, yea, in my fierce anger will I visit them in their iniquities and abominations. 2 Yea, wo be unto this generation! And the Lord said unto me: Stretch forth thy hand and prophesy, saying: Thus saith the Lord, it shall come to pass that this generation, because of their iniquities, shall be brought into bondage, and shall be smitten on the cheek; yea, and shall be driven by men, and shall be slain; and the vultures of the air, and the dogs, yea, and the wild beasts, shall devour their flesh. 3 And it shall come to pass that the life of king Noah shall be valued even as a garment in a hot furnace; for he shall know that I am the Lord. 4 And it shall come to pass that I will smite this my people with sore afflictions, yea, with famine and with pestilence; and I will cause that they shall howl all the day long. 5 Yea, and I will cause that they shall have burdens lashed upon their backs; and they shall be driven before like a dumb ass. 6 And it shall come to pass that I will send forth hail among them, and it shall smite them; and they shall also be smitten with the east wind; and insects shall pester their land also, and devour their

grain. 7 And they shall be smitten with a great pestilence--and all this will I do because of their iniquities and abominations. 8 And it shall come to pass that except they repent I will utterly destroy them from off the face of the earth; yet they shall leave a record behind them, and I will preserve them for other nations which shall possess the land; yea, even this will I do that I may discover the abominations of this people to other nations. And many things did Abinadi prophesy against this people.

v1-8 Having previously been rejected by the people two years earlier (cf. 11:20-26), Abinadi comes among them in disguise to preach. He warns them the Lord will destroy them if they do not repent (v. 1). They will be made captive and killed by the Lamanites (v. 2, 5), and the king's life will be worthless (v. 3). Then the people will be struck with famine, disease, and plagues of insects (v. 4, 6-7). Unless they repent, they will be annihilated, and leave behind only a record of their sin to expose it to other nations (v. 8).

v2-7 The various curses they are threatened with are standard OT covenant curses, cf. Lev. 26, Deut. 28. While some of the curses do ultimately come to pass among them, others do not. The subsequent chapters make no mention of hail, disease, famine, or insects, and the people are not annihilated. This is because under Limhi's leadership and the great afflictions, the people do repent. So, the imminent disaster is averted. This is the purpose of covenant curses, to get people to repent, cf. Lev. 26:40-45. Once they truly repent, the curses stop and the blessing start.

v2 "vultures...dogs...wild beasts", cp. Lev. 26:22, 2 Kings 2:24, Alma 2:38.

v8 "they shall leave a record behind them", this is probably the source of Limhi's considerable curiosity in the 24 gold plates discovered among the Jaredite ruins, cf. 8:12-20.

9 And it came to pass that they were angry with him; and they took him and carried him bound before the king, and said unto the king: Behold, we have brought a man before thee who has prophesied evil concerning thy people, and saith that God will destroy them. 10 And he also prophesieth evil concerning thy life, and saith that thy life shall be as a garment in a furnace of fire. 11 And again, he saith that thou shalt be as a stalk, even as a dry stalk of the field, which is run over by the beasts and trodden under foot. 12 And again, he saith thou shalt be as 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. And he pretendeth the Lord hath spoken it. And he saith all this shall come upon thee except thou repent, and this because of thine iniquities.

13 And now, O king, what great evil hast thou done, or what great sins have thy people committed, that we should be condemned of God or judged of this man? 14 And now, O king, behold, we are guiltless, and thou, O king, hast not sinned; therefore, this man has lied concerning you, and he has prophesied in vain. 15 And behold, we are strong, we shall not come into bondage, or be taken captive by our enemies; yea, and thou hast prospered in the land, and thou shalt also prosper.

16 Behold, here is the man, we deliver him into thy hands; thou mayest do with him as seemeth thee good.

v9-16 The people are incensed at Abinadi's rebuke so they bind him and take him to king Noah (v. 9). They then repeat what Abinadi has said, but they characterize it as being a personal attack against the king (v. 10-12). They then flatly contradict Abinadi's testimony with their own testimony flattering the king (v. 13-15). Then they feign impartiality by turning Abinadi over to him (v. 13).

v9 "a man before thee who has prophesied evil", when the society becomes secular what is "evil" becomes relative and self-serving. Anything unpleasant that happens to them is "evil" and anything they do is "good". Thus, even though they are gross sinners according to the Law, they consider themselves "good" and when Abinadi tells them they are about to be destroyed then that's "evil", cp. Isa. 5:20.

The same thing happens today when religiously minded people reject self-destructive behaviors and are branded "intolerant", "hateful", or "bigoted" for it. All the while the people who engage in the name calling are in fact guilty of what they accuse. They are intolerant of the religious viewpoint, they hate religion, and are bigoted against religious people.

v10-14 Note the way the people twist Abinadi's words so as to pit him against the king. Everything in their comments is geared towards "thy people...thy life...thou...thou...thee...O king...thou...thy people...O king...thou...O king...you". They are catering to a massive ego. This sheds greater light on why the king is so easily persuaded in the manner he is in 17:12. To a person with such an enormous ego, this kind of praise simply becomes a means of manipulating that ego.

v10-12 The threat recounted in v. 10 is documented as actually being said in v. 3, but the threats recounted in v. 11-12 are not actually documented. While the end of v. 8 says Abinadi said many other things as well, given the gross bias against

Abinadi, one has to wonder if these people inflated the accusations to the point of bearing false witness against him.

v13 The people do not suggest any punishment overtly, instead they leave it up to the king to decide his fate. But, clearly, their grossly biased recounting of Abinadi's speech and their ingratiating attitude towards the king indicates their motives. In all probability they remember his statement some two years earlier that Abinadi should be brought to him for execution, cf. 11:28.

17 And it came to pass that king Noah caused that Abinadi should be cast into prison; and he commanded that the priests should gather themselves together that he might hold a council with them what he should do with him. 18 And it came to pass that they said unto the king: Bring him hither that we may question him; and the king commanded that he should be brought before them. 19 And they began to question him, that they might cross him, that thereby they might have wherewith to accuse him; but he answered them boldly, and withstood all their questions, yea, to their astonishment; for he did withstand them in all their questions, and did confound them in all their words.

20 And it came to pass that one of them said unto him: What meaneth the words which are written, and which have been taught by our fathers, saying: 21 How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings; that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good; that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth; 22 Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice; with the voice together shall they sing; for they shall see eye to eye when the Lord shall bring again Zion; 23 Break forth into joy; sing together ye waste places of Jerusalem; for the Lord hath comforted his people, he hath redeemed Jerusalem; 24 The Lord hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God?

v17-24 Noah has Abinadi thrown in prison and summons his high priests to a council (v. 17). The priests tell king Noah to have Abinadi brought forth and they will question him (v. 18), so they can use sophistry to trip him up and find fault with him. But, Abinadi does not fall victim to their treachery, and they are surprised at his ability to withstand them (v. 19). As the questions wear on, one of the priests quotes Isa. 52:7-10 and asks him what it means (v. 20-24).

v20 Mormon does not directly explain why this particular passage is chosen by the priests. However, from the ensuing dialog it becomes plain the priests have adopted a view of the Law that rejects Messianic readings, while Abinadi forwards a Messianic view.

Abinadi asks them in v. 31-32 if salvation comes by the

Law, then he states the Lord Himself will bring about salvation (cf. 13:33-35) in his quotation and explanation of Isaiah 53, and he closes his argument in 16:13-15.

The priests favor a secularized view of the Law that rejects Messianism, and they quote Isa. 52:7-10 believing the messenger walking on the heights of the mountain is Moses on Mount Sinai bringing the Law, not the Messiah and those heralding the good news of the Messiah. Also, given the context of Shavuot, the festival where they celebrate the giving of the Law of Moses, the priests would be arguing that since they are celebrating Moses bringing them the Law, Abinadi is out of line for criticizing them, when they are doing what the Law requires.

There are some other possible additional ulterior motives. It is plain from Mormon's comment in v. 19 the priest's intent is to trip Abinadi up and they cannot do it. Assuming their motives have not changed, one would assume they chose this passage because it has a possible eschatological reading. Thus, it would have been relatively easy to adopt the opposite position of whatever Abinadi presents and attack his using sophistry.

Aside from this, v. 21, the quotation of Isa 52:7, praises those who herald good news about salvation to Zion. Perhaps their implicit message is Abinadi is contradicting Isaiah by cursing them, and thus they seek to find fault in him.

Or, perhaps their intention might be to question the prophetic nature of the text itself. The passage they quote is one of redeemed Jerusalem. As they knew from their Israelite history, Jerusalem was sacked and their ancestors were forced to flee, hence their presence in the New World. If this is the case, then how can Isaiah be talking about a redeemed Jerusalem when it is lying in waste under Babylon's rule? If they are retreating to solely the Law of Moses and actively rejecting a Messianic viewpoint, then this approach would make sense as they were looking for justification to reject the prophetic portions of the text based upon the apparent lack of fulfilled prophecies.

25 And now Abinadi said unto them: Are you priests, and pretend to teach this people, and to understand the spirit of prophesying, and yet desire to know of me what these things mean? 26 I say unto you, wo be unto you for perverting the ways of the Lord! For if ye understand these things ye have not taught them; therefore, ye have perverted the ways of the Lord. 27 Ye have not applied your hearts to understanding; therefore, ye have not been wise.

Therefore, what teach ye this people? 28 And they said: We teach the law of Moses. 29

And again he said unto them: If ye teach the law of Moses why do ye not keep it? Why do ye set your hearts upon riches? Why do ye commit whoredoms and spend your strength with harlots, yea, and cause this people to commit sin, that the Lord has cause to send me to prophesy against this people, yea, even a great evil against this people? 30 Know ye not that I speak the truth? Yea, ye know that I speak the truth; and you ought to tremble before God. 31 And it shall come to pass that ye shall be smitten for your iniquities, for ye have said that ye teach the law of Moses.

And what know ye concerning the law of Moses? Doth salvation come by the law of Moses? What say ye? 32 And they answered and said that salvation did come by the law of Moses. 33 But now Abinadi said unto them: I know if ye keep the commandments of God ye shall be saved; yea, if ye keep the commandments which the Lord delivered unto Moses in the mount of Sinai, saying: 34 I am the Lord thy God, who hath brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. 35 Thou shalt have no other God before me. 36 Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing in heaven above, or things which are in the earth beneath. 37 Now Abinadi said unto them, Have ye done all this? I say unto you, Nay, ye have not. And have ye taught this people that they should do all these things? I say unto you, Nay, ye have not.

v25-37 Abinadi initially ignores the question (he later addresses it in ch. 15) and instead turns his attention to what he considers the core issue, namely their apostasy. They have changed the subject away from what he is there to do, and he appears to have grown tired of their sophistry.

Abinadi rails on them for feigning their priesthood when they do not teach the people and do not even understand spiritual things (v. 25). He casts woe upon them for perverting the ways of the Lord, because either they don't understand something they should understand, or of they do understand it they aren't teaching it (v. 26). He says they have no desire to understand the Scriptures, and are therefore unwise.

He then asks them what it is they teach the people (v. 27). They say they teach the Law of Moses (v. 28), and Abinadi rails on them for their hypocrisy in not living it because they worship their riches as idols, are sexually immoral, and have led the entire people astray (v. 29). They know what he is saying is true, so they ought to fear God and humble themselves before Him (v. 30) because He will punish them for their hypocrisy.

He then asks them if salvation comes by observing the Law of Moses (v. 31), since they think they are observing it. They say that salvation does come by the Law (v. 32). And Abinadi agrees with them that salvation does come by keeping the commandments, but the commandments of the Law include prohibitions of worshiping other things before the Lord when

they should be putting the Lord first (v. 33-36). He tells them plainly they have not kept this commandment of the Law, and have not taught the people to keep it either.

v29 Abinadi repeatedly characterizes their secularized materialism as a form of idolatry (cf. 12:29, 12:35-36, 13:12-13; Mormon does the same in 11:6-7). There is nothing in the text to suggest literal idolatry, so Abinadi is attacking them for spiritual idolatry, for loving their wealth more than their God.

This strikes at the heart of the matter, at what people's motives are and where they really come from. People love their wealth, or any other sin, more than God, so they abandon God for their wealth and adopt a self-serving view of religion they believe substantiates their position. Noah rejected the priests of his father (cf. 11:5) and consecrated new priests who shared his love of wild living. Which then came first? His love of wild living, or his secularized viewpoint? He adopted the latter in an effort to legitimize the former.

v31-32 Abinadi gets them to admit observing the Law is essential for salvation, and then points out to them they are not observing major points of the Law.

Copyright © 2024 by S. Kurt Neumiller <kurt.neumiller@gmail.com>. All rights reserved. No part of this text may be reproduced in any form or by any means for commercial gain without the express written consent of the author. Digital or printed copies may be freely made and distributed for personal and public non-commercial use.