

General Comments on Mosiah 11-17

These chapters recount the story of Noah and Abinidi. Noah is an unrighteous king and the prophet Abinidi calls him and his crony priests to repentance. Chapter 11 documents the slide into apostasy under Noah's rule and Abinidi's initial call to repentance, which elicits a hostile response. Two years pass, and ch. 12-17 document the second and final confrontation between the two.

Comments on Mosiah 11

Zeniff's son Noah leads the people into sin, and the Lord has a prophet call them to repentance.

1 AND now it came to pass that Zeniff conferred the kingdom upon Noah, one of his sons; therefore Noah began to reign in his stead; and he did not walk in the ways of his father. 2 For behold, he did not keep the commandments of God, but he did walk after the desires of his own heart. And he had many wives and concubines. And he did cause his people to commit sin, and do that which was abominable in the sight of the Lord. Yea, and they did commit whoredoms and all manner of wickedness. 3 And he laid a tax of one fifth part of all they possessed, a fifth part of their gold and of their silver, and a fifth part of their ziff, and of their copper, and of their brass and their iron; and a fifth part of their fatlings; and also a fifth part of all their grain. 4 And all this did he take to support himself, and his wives and his concubines; and also his priests, and their wives and their concubines; thus he had changed the affairs of the kingdom. 5 For he put down all the priests that had been consecrated by his father, and consecrated new ones in their stead, such as were lifted up in the pride of their hearts. 6 Yea, and thus they were supported in their laziness, and in their idolatry, and in their whoredoms, by the taxes which king Noah had put upon his people; thus did the people labor exceedingly to support iniquity.

7 Yea, and they also became idolatrous, because they were deceived by the vain and flattering words of the king and priests; for they did speak flattering things unto them. 8 And it came to pass that king Noah built many elegant and spacious buildings; and he ornamented them with fine work of wood, and of all manner of precious things, of gold, and of silver, and of iron, and of brass, and of ziff, and of copper; 9 And he also built him a spacious palace, and a throne in the midst thereof, all of which was of fine wood and was ornamented with gold and silver and with precious things. 10 And he also caused that his workmen should work all manner of fine work within the walls of the temple, of fine wood, and of copper, and of brass. 11 And the seats which were set apart for the high priests, which were above all the other seats, he did ornament with pure gold; and he caused a breastwork to be built before them, that they might rest their bodies and their arms upon while they should speak lying and vain words to his people. 12 And it came to pass that he built a tower near the temple; yea, a very high tower, even so high that he could stand upon the top thereof and overlook the land of Shilom, and also the land of Shemlon, which was possessed by the Lamanites; and he could even look over all the land round about. 13 And it came to pass that he caused many buildings to be built in the land Shilom; and he caused a

great tower to be built on the hill north of the land Shilom, which had been a resort for the children of Nephi at the time they fled out of the land; and thus he did do with the riches which he obtained by the taxation of his people. 14 And it came to pass that he placed his heart upon his riches, and he spent his time in riotous living with his wives and his concubines; and so did also his priests spend their time with harlots. 15 And it came to pass that he planted vineyards round about in the land; and he built wine-presses, and made wine in abundance; and therefore he became a wine-bibber, and also his people.

v1-15 Zeniff's son Noah takes over as king, but does not fear God as did his father (v. 1). Noah engages in polygamy, has concubines, and permits prostitution even among the priests (v. 2, 14). He taxes the people for 20% of all their metals, flocks, and grain (v. 3) and spends it on himself and his people (v. 4). He rejects the priests of his father and sets up his own priests (v. 5), all of whom are supported by the taxation of the people (v. 6). The people are led astray as well by the selfish and appealing words these priests speak to them (v. 7).

Using the tax collections Noah has all kinds of elaborately ornamented buildings constructed, including a palace for himself containing an elevated and ornamented sitting area for his priests (v. 8-11). He has a very high tower built so that he could look out over all the surrounding lands (v. 12). He also has another tower built on the highest hill north of Shilom, a location which was popular among the first settlers of the land, the original Nephites (v. 13). He also has a wine press built and vineyards planted all about (v. 15).

Thus, Noah was very much caught up in his wealth and wild living, as were his priests (v. 14).

v5 Noah consecrates self-serving arrogant priests in place of the ones his father consecrated. Consecration is not the same as ordination (on consecration see 23:17, 2 Ne. 6:2, Alma 2:9; on ordination see Alma 13:1-3). Consecration means to be dedicated to a particular service. There is no mention of ordination, only consecration. Thus, these priests were probably already ordained priests, they were just the more arrogant self-promoting ones whom Zeniff had little use for.

This would explain where Alma gets his authority from. He was already an ordained priest under Zeniff, but did not rise to a position of authority under Zeniff because of his vanity. Under Noah he is consecrated and elevation to a position of power, and abuses it. But, when confronted by Abinadi, he repents and spearheads a reform movements wherein he baptizes and so on, having obtained the authority to baptize (cf. 18:13-14) during Zeniff's reign but doing little or nothing with

it until sometime later.

v7 "they also became idolatrous", note there is no mention whatsoever of literal idols. What is mentioned is greed, pride, sexual immorality and wealth, with the last being particularly emphasized in v. 8-13 and the others commented on in v. 2-6 and 14-15. These are the spiritual "idols" men truly worship, whether or not they bow down to literal images of false gods. The literal idol is merely an edifice or projection a man creates as a manifestation of his arrogance and pride, and frequently as a means of obtaining wealth and to justify sexual immorality as well. As Christ taught, "Man cannot worship God and mammon". The mammon becomes the "idol" whether it be in the shape of a coin or a calf.

16 And it came to pass that the Lamanites began to come in upon his people, upon small numbers, and to slay them in their fields, and while they were tending their flocks. 17 And king Noah sent guards round about the land to keep them off; but he did not send a sufficient number, and the Lamanites came upon them and killed them, and drove many of their flocks out of the land; thus the Lamanites began to destroy them, and to exercise their hatred upon them. 18 And it came to pass that king Noah sent his armies against them, and they were driven back, or they drove them back for a time; therefore, they returned rejoicing in their spoil. 19 And now, because of this great victory they were lifted up in the pride of their hearts; they did boast in their own strength, saying that their fifty could stand against thousands of the Lamanites; and thus they did boast, and did delight in blood, and the shedding of the blood of their brethren, and this because of the wickedness of their king and priests.

v16-19 After some time, the Lamanites begin to encroach upon their lands again, plundering isolated people (v. 16). Noah sends a few guards to protect the people, but there aren't enough of them so the Lamanites killed them and plundered more of the land (v. 17).

So, Noah sends out all of the armies to repulse the Lamanites, and they do so, and also apparently plunder the Lamanites as well, obtaining spoil from them (v. 18). This causes them to rejoice and boast in great pride over their military prowess, taking pleasure in war (v. 19).

v16 Enemies attacking you is a classic covenant curse, cf. Lev, 26:17, Deut. 28:25. This group slides into apostasy and is subsequently attacked.

v19 "because of this great victory", this could easily be read as sarcasm by Mormon, a man with extensive military experience against the Lamanites.

"and this because of the wickedness of their king and priests", Mormon is placing the blame at the feet of the leadership. In doing so, he is deliberately drawing a sharp contrast between Zeniff and Noah. Where Zeniff leads his people to the Lord, Noah leads them away.

20 And it came to pass that there was a man among them whose name was Abinadi; and he went forth among them, and began to prophesy, saying: Behold, thus saith the Lord, and thus hath he commanded me, saying, Go forth, and say unto this people, thus saith the Lord--Wo be unto this people, for I have seen their abominations, and their wickedness, and their whoredoms; and except they repent I will visit them in mine anger. 21 And except they repent and turn to the Lord their God, behold, I will deliver them into the hands of their enemies; yea, and they shall be brought into bondage; and they shall be afflicted by the hand of their enemies. 22 And it shall come to pass that they shall know that I am the Lord their God, and am a jealous God, visiting the iniquities of my people. 23 And it shall come to pass that except this people repent and turn unto the Lord their God, they shall be brought into bondage; and none shall deliver them, except it be the Lord the Almighty God. 24 Yea, and it shall come to pass that when they shall cry unto me I will be slow to hear their cries; yea, and I will suffer them that they be smitten by their enemies. 25 And except they repent in sackcloth and ashes, and cry mightily to the Lord their God, I will not hear their prayers, neither will I deliver them out of their afflictions; and thus saith the Lord, and thus hath he commanded me. 26 Now it came to pass that when Abinadi had spoken these words unto them they were wroth with him, and sought to take away his life; but the Lord delivered him out of their hands.

v20-26 A man in their midst named Abinadi has not been corrupted by Noah or his priests, so the Lord fills him with the Spirit of prophesy. He goes among his fellow people and warns them the Lord will punish them (v. 20) by delivering them into the hands of the Lamanites unless they repent (v. 21). Then they will know the Lord gets angry and punishes them for their sins (v. 22), because they will be put into slavery to the Lamanites, and none will deliver them except God Himself (v. 23). When the people cry to Him, He will be slow to hear their cries and allow them to be smitten by the Lamanites (v. 24). Until they truly humble themselves, the Lord will not hear them or deliver them (v. 25). Those who hear what Abinadi says are angry at him and try to kill him for it, but he is delivered from them by the Lord (v. 26).

Abinadi delivers a classic set of covenant curses from Lev. 26 and Deut. 28. When Israel rebels the Lord punishes them, until they really repent. These few verses of text predict exactly what happens with this Nephite splinter group as they are brought into subjection by the Lamanites and are ultimately

delivered after they humble themselves under the reign of king Limhi (cf. ch. 7).

v20 "there was a man among them", Abinadi was internal to the population. It is likely he is one of the priests of Zeniff who was put down by Noah, cf. v. 5. The people of the city and Noah's priests never question Abinadi's authority, instead they badmouth him and try to argue doctrine with him. This suggests they knew they couldn't argue his authority, and the only way they couldn't do that would be because they all knew he was one of Zeniff's priests.

If he was, then Abinadi's statements would be a particularly stinging rebuke given his connection to the prior monarchy and religious leadership. It is also possible that Abinadi is the son of one of on Zeniff's priests, and was therefore raised righteously. The traditional reading that Abinadi was an old man is not supported by the text, as the text is entirely mute on his age.

"Abinadi", the name in Hebrew would be "avi-nadi", meaning "my father is Nadi". Perhaps "Nadi" was one of Zeniff's priests.

v22 "a jealous God", Smith stayed true to the KJV in translating this phrase, cp. Exod. 20:5. A contemporary translation would be "an impassioned God" as the Jewish Publication Society translates Exod. 20:5.

v24-25 Not reading v. 24 in conjunction with v. 25 it sounds like the Lord is being merciless. However, when taken together with v. 25 it becomes clear what the issue is. The Lord will be slow to hear their cries because they are slow to repent. Until they truly humble themselves, as in sackcloth and ashes, He will not deliver them.

27 Now when king Noah had heard of the words which Abinadi had spoken unto the people, he was also wroth; and he said: Who is Abinadi, that I and my people should be judged of him, or who is the Lord, that shall bring upon my people such great affliction? 28 I command you to bring Abinadi hither, that I may slay him, for he has said these things that he might stir up my people to anger one with another, and to raise contentions among my people; therefore I will slay him. 29 Now the eyes of the people were blinded; therefore they hardened their hearts against the words of Abinadi, and they sought from that time forward to take him. And king Noah hardened his heart against the word of the Lord, and he did not repent of his evil doings.

v27-29 Word gets back to Noah what Abinadi was saying and he is

angry as well, angry enough to have him executed. He questions both Abinadi and the Lord, flouting them both with his command to have Abinadi killed (v. 27-28). Noah's rationalization for the death penalty is an accusation of sedition (v. 28). The king and his people are all blinded by their sin and harden their against what Abinadi has said, so none of them repent (v. 29).

v27 Noah's statement echoes that of Pharaoh in Exod. 5:2. In a confrontation with the Lord's prophet, it doesn't matter who the unrepentant despot is, the response is the same.

v28 Noah's accusation of sedition suggests there was some portion of the population which was not favorably disposed to his leadership style, and he knew it. Given the high taxes, promiscuous lifestyle, and profligate ways, this is to be expected. Noah doesn't want Abinadi persuading those who already don't like him any further, and he is probably concerned about them becoming organized under one outspoken leader.

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.