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Abinadi's Commentary on Isaiah

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Monte S. Nyman

ABOUT 150 BC a group of Nephites living in the land of Lehi-Nephi fell into bondage to their Lamanite neighbors. Previously the Lord had raised up a prophet named Abinadi who called the Nephites to repentance, but “they were wroth with him, and sought to take away his life; but the Lord delivered him out of their hands” (Mosiah 11:20, 26). Two years later, Abinadi returned and prophesied of their impending bondage to the Lamanites and of the fiery fate of Noah, their king. Abinadi was carried before the king and cast into prison until he could be tried before a council of the king’s priests. In questioning Abinadi, the priests attempted to “find something” with which they could accuse him and either imprison or execute him. To their astonishment, he boldly confounded them in all their words (Mosiah 12:1–19).

One of the priests asked Abinadi the meaning of a passage from Isaiah, one of the greatest prophets of the Old Testament (Mosiah 12:20–24; compare Isa 52:7–10). Since the priest obviously did not understand the Isaiah text, he seemed to assume Abinadi wouldn’t understand it either because Isaiah was not generally understood by the people of Nephi (2 Nephi 25:1) and was not understood particularly by those in a state of spiritual decline. But Abinadi was a prophet of the Lord, “filled with the spirit of prophecy”; he chastised the priests for

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their lack of understanding and accused them of perverting the ways of the Lord and not applying their hearts to understanding. Then he asked them what they taught their people (Mosiah 12:25–28). To their answer, “We teach the law of Moses,” he queried further, “Why do ye not keep it?” Another question probed still deeper: “Doth salvation come by the law of Moses?” (Mosiah 12:28–31). To their answer that it did, Abinadi skillfully refuted their false preaching and showed how the law of Moses was a type and shadow of Jesus Christ (Mosiah 13:27–35). He then declared that Moses and all of the prophets who had ever prophesied had testified that Jesus Christ would come into the world in the form of a man, and that he would bring to pass the resurrection of the dead (Mosiah 13:33–35). As evidence that all the prophets had testified of Christ, Abinadi quoted and commented on what is now Isaiah 53 in the King James Bible.

Abinadi's Commentary on Isaiah 53

Isaiah 53 is a well-known prophecy among Christians and Jews. Christians generally interpret it as a prophecy of the life and suffering of Jesus Christ. The Jewish interpretation is that Isaiah is describing the suffering of the entire nation of Israel, not a specific person. Abinadi's commentary sustains the Christian interpretation with details not found in the writings of other Christians. Abinadi's commentary on Isaiah 53, although sometimes confusing to Church members, amplifies the beautiful message of Isaiah. Abinadi's great doctrinal insights and explanations of the true role of Jesus Christ are textual proofs that “Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God” (BofM title page).

After discussing the great truths of Isaiah 53, Abinadi returned to the original question raised by king Noah's priest—the meaning of the text of Isaiah 52:7–10. His answer is also a commentary on that passage. But before he interpreted those verses, Abinadi explained the messiahship of Jesus Christ and

his gospel as the message of peace. Only then would the priests be prepared to understand this passage of Isaiah. In the analysis that follows, I will first quote Isaiah's words as written by Mosiah, then I will add relevant phrases from Abinadi's commentary and other interpretative helps from the New Testament and modern revelation. I will then draw conclusions from the collective commentaries.

Mosiah 14:1

Yea, even doth not Isaiah say: Who hath believed our report, and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed? (Compare Isa 53:1)

Although Abinadi does not comment directly on this verse, the context in which he quotes it makes his interpretation clear. He had just declared that all of the prophets since the world began testified of Christ. To support this statement, he said, "Yea, even doth not Isaiah say" and proceeded to quote the entirety of Isaiah 53. Clearly Abinadi understands this passage not to be a prophecy of suffering Israel, but a prophecy of Jesus Christ, of whom all the prophets have testified. And yet, the people were receptive neither to Isaiah's prophecies of Christ, nor to Abinadi's, nor to those of the other prophets. It was the hard hearts of the people and their lack of understanding of the law that brought Isaiah to cry, "Who hath believed our report?"

Other scriptures support Abinadi's interpretation. For example, Jacob, the brother of Nephi, had prophesied "that none of the prophets have written, nor prophesied, save they have spoken concerning this Christ" (Jacob 7:11, see also 4:4-6). The Savior himself, when he ministered in the flesh, showed how the law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms, the three divisions of the Hebrew bible, had all foretold of him (Luke 24:27, 44). Paul's Epistle to the Romans confirmed that many of the people would not accept the testimony of the ancient prophets. He said, "But they have not all obeyed the gospel" (Rom 10:16), and quoted the first phrase of Isaiah 53:1 to

support his statement. Thus, both the Book of Mormon and the Bible give us the correct meaning of Isaiah's words "who hath believed our report?"

Abinadi does not comment on the last half of Isaiah 53:1, "and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" However, John interprets the many miracles that Jesus did among the Jews during his sojourn in the flesh as a fulfillment of Isaiah's words that the arm of the Lord would be revealed (John 12:37–38). The performance of miracles exhibited his power as the Son of God. Thus the people rejected the written testimony of their Redeemer as well as the physical evidence provided by his manifestations of miracles. Although both testimonies were rejected, the two types of witnesses established the divinity of the Messiah.

Mosiah 14:2

For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of dry ground; he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him there is no beauty that we should desire him. (Compare Isa 53:2)

This verse gives only a vague picture of Christ and his nature on earth. However, Abinadi teaches quite specifically about Christ and his nature. In Mosiah 15:1–4 Abinadi comments on the nature of Christ as both the father and the son:

I would that ye should understand that God himself shall come down among the children of men, and shall redeem his people. And because he dwelleth in flesh he shall be called the Son of God, and having subjected the flesh to the will of the Father, being the Father and the Son. The Father, because he was conceived by the power of God; and the Son, because of the flesh; thus becoming the Father and Son. And they are one God, yea, the very Eternal Father of heaven and of earth. (Mosiah 15:1–4)

Jesus Christ attained Godhood in the premortal life (JST John 1:1–2). He was the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and the leader of the children of Israel out of Egypt (1 Nephi 19:10; 1 Cor 10:1–4). Jesus' coming among humankind begins with his birth and childhood. Isaiah had previously foretold the

Redeemer's birth (Isa 7:14; 9:6), but in Isaiah 53 he describes his childhood. When studied in its context, Abinadi's commentary provides a beautiful explanation of the life, the nature, and the roles of our Lord and Savior as he came "down among the children of men" (Mosiah 15:1).

Abinadi's specific commentary in Mosiah 15:2 is difficult to understand on a first or even a second reading.

And because he dwelleth in flesh he shall be called the Son of God, and having subjected the flesh to the will of the Father, being the Father and the Son. (Mosiah 15:2)

This verse refers to Jesus' mortal ministry, when he would come to earth as a mortal and be called the Son of God; however, he would subject himself while in his mortal tabernacle to do the will of his Father in Heaven. The will of the Father was that Christ "be lifted up upon the cross; and after that [he] had been lifted up upon the cross, that [he] might draw all men unto [him], that as [he had] been lifted up by men even so should men be lifted up by the Father, to stand before [him], to be judged of their works, whether they be good or whether they be evil" (3 Nephi 27:14). In other words, the Father's will was for Christ to come and atone for all humankind. Thus while he would live upon the earth as the Son of God, he would carry out the will of the Father, and through divine investiture of authority would represent the Father. Therefore, he would be the Father and the Son while living upon the earth.

The above explanation by Abinadi qualifies as a commentary on the first phrase of Isaiah 53:2: "For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of dry ground." By substituting nouns for pronouns, we get a clearer picture: "For [Christ] shall grow up before [Elohim] as a tender plant." A tender plant is one that must be given special care by the gardener. It may need to be covered at night to protect it from frost, uncovered during the day to enable it to absorb the light and sunshine, and watered at frequent or regular hours. In like

manner, the Father cared for his Son throughout his early childhood.

Luke records that “the child [Jesus] grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him” (Luke 2:40). At age 12, he went with his parents on their annual passover trek to the temple. Upon their return, Jesus tarried behind—unknown to his parents. Missing him at the end of the first day’s journey, they spent three days searching for him and found him conversing with the learned doctors of Judaism (vv 41–48). In response to his mother’s mild chastisement he responded, “How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father’s business? And they understood not the saying which he spake unto them” (vv 49–50). Even his mother seems not to have known the extent to which his Heavenly Father had tutored him. He had indeed been cared for by the Father as a tender plant.

The phrase, “root out of dry ground,” may be interpreted as Christ growing up in apostate Judaism. In Revelation 22:16, Christ identifies himself as “the root and the offspring of David.” Both Mary, his mother, and Joseph, his stepfather, were descendants of David and of the lineage of Judah (Matt 1:1–17; Luke 3:23–38). Judah, as a nation, was spiritually barren and could not give him the nurturing he needed to prepare him for his ministry; that nurturing was given to him instead by his Father. His nurturing was perfect and prepared Christ for his ministry in due time. Joseph Smith taught that Jesus was prepared for his ministry long before he was thirty years of age, but waited to begin his ministry until the Father directed him.

When still a boy He had all the intelligence necessary to enable Him to rule and govern the kingdom of the Jews, and could reason with the wisest and most profound doctors of law and divinity, and make their theories and practice to appear like folly compared with the wisdom He possessed; but He was a boy only, and lacked physical strength even to defend His own person; and was subject to cold, to hunger and to death. (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* 392)

Being thus prepared, he carried out the will of the Father when the time came for him to fulfill his ministry.

Having referred to the ministry of Jesus, Abinadi comments on the nature on the Son of God during mortality that would enable him to finalize his ministry by bringing about the Resurrection. Christ is

the Father, because he was conceived by the power of God; and the Son, because of the flesh; thus becoming the Father and Son. (Mosiah 15:3)

Because he was conceived by an immortal being, his immortal Father in Heaven, Jesus had immortality as a part of his own nature. Because he was born of a mortal woman, he was also part mortal. Being mortal he was subject to death and had power to lay down his life; being immortal he had power to break the bands of death, or take up his life. This he clearly taught to the Jews during his earthly ministry:

Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father. (John 10:17–18)

Possessing the power of the Father enabled him to overcome the grave and bring about the Resurrection. Through his dual nature he was the Father and Son, being immortal as well as mortal.

Abinadi's explanation of Christ's nature seems to be a commentary on the latter part of Isaiah 53:2: "He hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him there is no beauty that we should desire him" (Mosiah 14:2). That Jesus had "no form nor comeliness" is the prophet Isaiah's way of saying that he looked like a normal Jewish boy and was not distinctive in his looks because he was the Son of God. People in Nazareth did not look upon him as different from his brothers and sisters or other children in the community. They referred to him as "the carpenter's son" (Matt 13:54–56) or "the son of Joseph whose father and mother we know" (John 6:42). His having

“no beauty that we should desire him” is not an indication of ugliness or plainness but is poetic parallelism, a repetition of the same thought in the second line. It was another expression of the fact that he looked like any other child growing up in Nazareth. Abinadi’s commentary explains how this was possible: Christ was both mortal and the divine Son of God.

After describing the dual nature of the mortal Messiah, Abinadi adds one more dimension to his description of the Savior:

And they are one God, yea, the very Eternal Father of heaven and of earth. (Mosiah 15:4)

Verse 4 is a summation of the two previous verses. The one God referred to is Jesus Christ. The plural “they” refers to the dual roles in his ministry and to his dual nature as the Father and the Son. He is the Son of God, but by divine investiture of authority he represents the Father in his ministry; having immortality and mortality in his nature he has power over life and death. Thus he has all power in heaven and in earth. He is the divine Son of God with all the attributes of his Father to make the Atonement and bring about the Resurrection. His is the role of the Father and the Son, and he is thus one God.¹

Abinadi’s statement that Christ is “the very Eternal Father of heaven and of earth” (Mosiah 15:4) undoubtedly refers to the creative power of Christ as the Father of this earth and of other earths in the heavens. That Christ created this and other worlds is repeatedly taught in the New Testament (John 1:3, 10; Col 1:16; Heb 1:2). It is also confirmed in modern scripture (D&C 14:9; 76:24; 93:10; Moses 1:31–33). A diagram of Abinadi’s teaching in Mosiah 15:2–4 would be thus:

¹ It should be kept in mind that Abinadi is not instructing prospective members of the Church. He is accusing, chastising, and refuting a group of apostate priests who claim to be scriptural authorities. Recall his words to them earlier: “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? 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” (Mosiah 12:25–26).

TABLE 1 *Summary of Abinadi's Commentary on Isaiah 53:2*

<i>A. How Christ Is Both the Father and the Son</i>		
	<i>The Father</i>	<i>The Son</i>
Christ's Ministry Provides the Atonement	He is the Father because he does the will of the Father (Mosiah 15:2)	He is the Son because he dwelt in the flesh (Mosiah 15:2)
Christ's Nature Provides the Resurrection	He was immortal because he was conceived by the power of God (Mosiah 15:3)	He was mortal because he was born of a mortal mother with the power to lay down life (Mosiah 15:3)
<i>B. Christ's Dual Nature</i>		
Christ's Role Jesus Is the Creator of Heaven and Earth	There is one God—Jesus Christ (Mosiah 15:4)	

The prophet Abinadi had masterfully shown the apostate priests the role of Christ as the Father by divine investiture of authority and the divine nature that would enable him to atone for the sins of humankind and provide for their resurrection. In addition, he testified that Christ was the Father as the Creator of heaven and earth.

The supposedly complex definition of Jesus Christ given by Abinadi is really quite simple and beautiful when seen in the light of Abinadi's commentary on Isaiah, which is supported by modern revelation. In a revelation to Joseph Smith that was at least in part originally of the record of John, the Lord proclaimed: "And that I am in the Father, and the Father in me, and the Father and I are one—The Father because he gave me of his fulness, and the Son because I was in the world and made flesh my tabernacle, and dwelt among the sons of men" (D&C 93:3–4). This shows that John, as well as Abinadi, and certainly all of the prophets, knew and appreciated the role of Jesus Christ.

Other Book of Mormon prophets also understood and taught the position of Christ as fulfilling the role of the Father as well as the Son. Nephi, son of Lehi, taught that “there is a God, and he is Christ, and he cometh in the fulness of his own time” (2 Nephi 11:7). Amulek taught the repentant lawyer Zeezrom that there is only one God who is the Son of God and that “he is the very Eternal Father of heaven and of earth, and all things which in them are; he is the beginning and the end, the first and last” (Alma 11:39; see vv 26–40).

In the meridian of time as Nephi prayed on behalf of his people concerning the coming of the sign of Christ’s birth as prophesied by Samuel the Lamanite, the voice of the Lord came to Nephi saying that the sign would be given that night and that on the morrow He would come into the world to fulfill what the prophets had spoken and made known from the foundation of the world. He further testified that he would come “to do the will, both of the Father and of the Son—of the Father because of me, and of the Son because of my flesh” (3 Nephi 1:13–14). And as a last example, hundreds of years before the Nephite prophets taught these truths, the Lord appeared to the brother of Jared and identified himself as “he who was prepared from the foundation of the world to redeem [his] people. Behold, I am Jesus Christ. I am the Father and the Son. In me shall all mankind have life, and that eternally, even they who shall believe on my name” (Ether 3:14). Thus we see that this eternal truth of Christ’s true position was taught throughout the history of the Nephites and among the Jaredites as well. Hopefully, as we understand the role of Jesus Christ as the Father and the Son as taught in the Book of Mormon, we will also appreciate more fully the subtitle of the Book of Mormon, “Another Testament of Jesus Christ.”

A further verification of Christ’s various roles as the Father was given in “A Doctrinal Exposition by the First Presidency and the Twelve” on 30 June 1916. On this occasion, the Brethren gave detailed information and scriptural evidence about the four uses of the term Father which appear in the

scriptures. Their exposition is really the key to understanding Mosiah 15. Because of the length and detail of this exposition, I will just outline its four major points here and suggest further study at another time. It has been printed in *Messages of the First Presidency* by James R. Clark (5:26–34) and *The Articles of Faith* by Elder James E. Talmage (Appendix 2, pp 466–73):

1. Father as literal parent: Heb 12:9; Ether 3:14
2. Father as Creator: Ether 4:7; Mosiah 15:4; Alma 11:38–39
3. Jesus Christ, the Father of those who abide in his gospel:
John 17:6–12, 20–24; D&C 9:1; 25:1; 34:3; 121:7
4. Jesus Christ, the Father by divine investiture of authority:
John 14:28; Rev 22:8, 9; D&C 93:21

All the scriptural uses of the term *Father* thus refer to Jesus Christ, except our being the spirit offspring of our Father in Heaven. The title page of the Book of Mormon declares that a major purpose of the book is “the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God” (see also 2 Nephi 26:12–13). Understanding Abinadi’s commentary on Isaiah helps fulfill this major purpose.

Mosiah 14:3–5

He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows; yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. (Compare Isa 53:3–5)

Abinadi gives but one verse of commentary:

And thus the flesh becoming subject to the Spirit, or the Son to the Father, being one God, suffereth temptation, and yieldeth not to the temptation, but suffereth himself to be mocked, and scourged, and cast out, and disowned by his people. (Mosiah 15:5)

Here Abinadi explains Isaiah’s prophecy of Christ’s ministry. Not only would Christ be rejected and humiliated, but he would also be tempted. However, he will not yield to temptation. This

comment by Abinadi helps us better understand the Savior's ministry and also the perfect example he set as part of the overall Atonement for humankind. As he commanded the Nephites, we are also to be the manner of beings that he was in his ministry (3 Nephi 27:27). We must be "willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon [us], even as a child doth submit to his father" (Mosiah 3:19), or, as Abinadi says, to submit our flesh to the Spirit as the Son had to the Father.

The writings of the New Testament Apostles also support Abinadi's commentary. Matthew paraphrased Isaiah 53:4—"Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses"—to show its fulfillment in Jesus' casting out devils and healing the sick in Capernaum (Matt 8:16–17). Paul taught the Hebrews that Jesus "was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (Heb 4:15). And Peter quotes or paraphrases parts of Isaiah 53:4–5 and equates it with Jesus' being on the cross: "Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed" (1 Peter 2:24). While his mission culminated on the cross, his entire life and particularly his ministry was one of temptation: being mocked, scourged, cast out, and disowned by his people. Mark records that Jesus taught his disciples "that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and of the chief priests, and scribes, and be killed" (Mark 8:31). With the support of these scriptures, we may conclude that Abinadi gave us a briefer but very accurate commentary of the Savior's ministry.

Mosiah 14:6

All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.
(Compare Isa 53:6)

Abinadi explains the relationship between Christ and the Father after he had completed his ministry:

Having ascended into heaven, having the bowels of mercy; being filled with compassion towards the children of men; standing betwixt them and justice; having broken the bands of death, taken upon himself their iniquity and their transgressions, having redeemed them, and satisfied the demands of justice. (Mosiah 15:9)

This commentary sheds further light on the role of Jesus Christ as the Father and the Son. Having suffered for all humankind's sins, Jesus Christ fulfilled the demands of justice in his role as the Father. His compassion to those who repent illustrates his role as the Son as his mercy satisfies the demands of justice. While the New Testament tells us that the Atonement was accomplished, we must turn to the Book of Mormon to enlarge our understanding of the roles of mercy and justice. Further sections of the Book of Mormon, such as Amulek's testimony to the apostate Zoramites (Alma 34:15–16) and Alma's instructions to his wayward son Corianton (Alma 42), are also most enlightening on these principles of mercy and justice. An analysis of these references will be left to another time.

Mosiah 14:7

Isaiah prophesies of Jesus' being judged before Pilate and Herod:

He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth. (Compare Isa 53:7)

Abinadi's commentary on this verse is little more than a repetition of Isaiah:

And after all this, after working many mighty miracles among the children of men, he shall be led, yea, even as Isaiah said, as a sheep before the shearer is dumb, so he opened not his mouth. (Mosiah 15:6)

The New Testament records Jesus' appearance before Pilate and Herod. While Jesus did answer Pilate, he did so only sparingly, and on one occasion he gave him no answer (John 19:9). When Pilate sent him to Herod, Jesus answered him not

a word. Herod could only retaliate by mocking him (Luke 23:8–11). Peter described the trials this way: “Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously” (1 Peter 2:23). Isaiah’s prophecy was fulfilled.

Mosiah 14:8

The following verse contains the prophecy of Christ’s crucifixion and death:

He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken. (Compare Isa 53:8)

In his commentary (Mosiah 15:7–13), Abinadi elaborates on the death of the Savior, speaking of the resurrection following the crucifixion and then answering Isaiah’s question: “Who shall declare his generation?” Abinadi first comments on the Savior’s crucifixion and death, “Yea, even so he shall be led, crucified, and slain, the flesh becoming subject even unto death, the will of the Son being swallowed up in the will of the Father” (Mosiah 15:7), and then concludes, “And thus God breaketh the bands of death, having gained the victory over death; giving the Son power to make intercession for the children of men” (v 8). Today we find the concept of breaking the bands of death and gaining a victory over death in Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians; however, Paul is quoting what “is written” (1 Cor 15:54–55). Where was it written? Some have supposed it to be a quotation from Hosea 13:14, but if so, the Hosea text has been greatly modified. It seems more logical that this quote is a part of the plain and precious parts that have been lost from the Bible (1 Nephi 13:23–29). Nonetheless, that the resurrection of Christ would break the bands of death and gain victory over the grave was known to the Old Testament prophets. Abinadi would probably not have coined a phrase so close to what Paul was reading from the Hebrew Bible. Of course the Spirit could have dictated the same words, but it

seems most logical that both Paul and Abinadi were quoting from an earlier text.

After speaking of the resurrection and atonement of Christ (Mosiah 15:8–9), Abinadi answers the question posed by Isaiah: “And now I say unto you, who shall declare his generation?”

Behold, I say unto you, that when his soul has been made an offering for sin he shall see his seed. And now what say ye? And who shall be his seed? (Mosiah 15:10)

Abinadi combines his answer to “who shall declare his generation” with Isaiah’s declaration that when Christ made “his soul an offering for sin he shall see his seed.” The question and the declaration go hand in hand. Those who are spiritually begotten of Christ through being born again are adopted as his sons and daughters (Mosiah 5:7; see also Gal 4:1–7; Rom 8:14–17; and the Exposition by the First Presidency and the Twelve cited above). Thus the adopted, born-again sons and daughters of Jesus Christ will declare the message of the gospel that Jesus Christ was sent to the earth to redeem all humankind. Following his death, Christ’s Apostles and others were to take this message to all the world (Mark 16:15–16). Abinadi explains at some length who these messengers will be, the prophets and those who have accepted and lived their message:

Behold I say unto you, that whosoever has heard the words of the prophets, yea, all the holy prophets who have prophesied concerning the coming of the Lord—I say unto you, that all those who have hearkened unto their words, and believed that the Lord would redeem his people, and have looked forward to that day for a remission of their sins, I say unto you, that these are his seed, or they are the heirs of the kingdom of God. For these are they whose sins he has borne; these are they for whom he has died, to redeem them from their transgressions. And now, are they not his seed? Yea, and are not the prophets, every one that has opened his mouth to prophesy, that has not fallen into transgression, I mean all the holy prophets ever since the world began? I say unto you that they are his seed. (Mosiah 15:11–13)

Although Isaiah’s prophecy continues, Abinadi has laid the groundwork and returns to the original question about the

meaning of Isaiah 52:7–10, posed by Noah's apostate priest. (For Professor Nyman's analysis of the rest of Isaiah 53, see Appendix B at the end of this article.)

Abinadi's Response to the Priests

Mosiah 12:21

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! (Compare Isa 52:7)

Abinadi's commentary on this verse is too long to quote here, but it constitutes the rest of Mosiah 15. Because of Abinadi's extensive discussion of Isaiah 53, king Noah's priests are prepared to understand not only the meaning of the verse in question but also the plan of salvation. Abinadi's commentary begins with an interpretation of Isaiah 52:7 and ends with a call to repentance. Abinadi had already established the idea that the seed of Christ are those spiritually begotten of him as their Father of eternal life. He now states that these same servants are the publishers of peace, and how beautiful upon the mountains were their feet and the feet of those who are now and who will yet publish peace (Mosiah 15:14–17). True peace comes only from the gospel, so those who travel (upon their feet) to preach the gospel upon the mountains of the earth are beautiful in the eyes of the people who accept their message.

This verse also refers to the founder of that peace—Jesus Christ. Without him there would be no peace. In Abinadi's words:

And behold, I say unto you, this is not all. For O how beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that is the founder of peace, yea, even the Lord, who has redeemed his people; yea, him who has granted salvation unto his people; For were it not for the redemption which he hath made for his people, which was prepared from the foundation of the world, I say unto you, were it not for this, all mankind must have perished. (vv 18–19)

Christ broke the bands of death, and as the Son of God he reigns and has power over the dead that he may bring about their resurrection (v 20). The first resurrection includes those who “have been, and who are, and who shall be, even until the resurrection of Christ” (v 21). It includes the prophets and those who believed in their words and kept the commandments. They will dwell with Christ, who redeemed them, and have eternal life (vv 22–23). The first resurrection also includes those who died in ignorance before Christ came, not having had salvation declared to them (v 24). Although Abinadi does not expound upon this group, Peter and modern revelation qualify their salvation upon the condition of their accepting the gospel in the spirit world (1 Peter 3:18–20; 4:5–6; D&C 137:7–9). Abinadi also announces that little children shall have eternal life (Mosiah 15:25; see also D&C 137:10).

Abinadi closes his commentary on Isaiah 52:7 with a warning to those who rebel against Christ and die in their sins, those who have known the commandments and would not keep them. These ought to tremble and fear, for salvation does not come to such, and justice will claim them instead of mercy (Mosiah 15:26–27).

Mosiah 12:22–24

The next verses questioned by the wicked priests were:

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. Break forth into joy, sing together, ye waste places of Jerusalem: for the Lord hath comforted his people, he hath redeemed Jerusalem. 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. (Compare Isa 52:8–10)

Abinadi’s commentary paraphrases Isaiah’s words: “And now I say unto you that the time shall come that the salvation of the Lord shall be declared to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people” (Mosiah 15:28). Abinadi prefaced and followed his commentary on this verse with a paraphrase of Isaiah 52:10,

which states that the salvation of the Lord shall be declared to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people (Mosiah 15:28–16:1). Isaiah's declaration that salvation would come when the Lord would bring again (gather) Zion and when the Lord comforted (gathered) his people in Jerusalem designates the two major gathering places of the latter days. It also sheds light upon the reference to the mountains where peace is published, or, in other words, where the gospel will be taught. Both Zion and Jerusalem are designated, in scripture, as the tops of the mountains (Isa 40:9; 1 Nephi 19:13; 2 Nephi 12:2; D&C 133:12–13). While the gospel will eventually be taught to all peoples, the major centers of administering the gospel will be from Zion (the Americas) and Jerusalem. The people who accept the gospel shall see eye to eye and confess that God's judgments are just because they will understand the gospel taught by the prophets and the missionaries.

Abinadi proceeds to warn those who have become wicked, carnal, sensual, and devilish because of the Fall (Mosiah 16:2–5). He speaks of Christ as though he had already come (v 6) and then either quotes or paraphrases the lost scripture concerning Christ's breaking the bands of death (vv 7–8). He comments further on Christ as the light and life of the world and on the power of the resurrection and judgment that is to come (vv 9–12).

Abinadi concludes his comments with a warning to Noah's wicked priests:

And now, ought ye not to tremble and repent of your sins, and remember that only in and through Christ can ye be saved? Therefore, if ye teach the law of Moses, also teach that it is a shadow of those things which are to come—Teach them that redemption cometh through Christ the Lord, who is the very Eternal Father. Amen. (Mosiah 16:13–15)

The priests did not hearken to Abinadi's warning; rather, they put him to death because he would not recall the words he had taught about God (Mosiah 17:1–13). Sometime after Abinadi's death, Limhi, king of a group of Nephites in bondage to the

Lamanites, also witnessed that Abinadi was martyred for his testimony of Christ:

And a prophet of the Lord have they slain; yea, a chosen man of God, who told them of their wickedness and abominations, and prophesied of many things which are to come, yea, even the coming of Christ. And because he said unto them that Christ was the God, the Father of all things, and said that he should take upon him the image of man, and it should be the image after which man was created in the beginning; or in other words, he said that man was created after the image of God, and that God should come down among the children of men, and take upon him flesh and blood, and go forth upon the face of the earth—And now, because he said this, they did put him to death; and many more things did they do which brought down the wrath of God upon them. (Mosiah 7:26–28)

Thus Abinadi was killed because he taught the truth about Christ as the God of the Nephites. The Prophet Joseph Smith was also killed because he taught the same concept of Christ and the Godhead. As members of the Church and true disciples of Jesus Christ, we have the responsibility of taking this great truth to the world. We can do this through the message given in the Book of Mormon.

The theme of this symposium is that salvation comes only through Christ. It is taken from this courageous and great defense of the Lord Jesus Christ by Abinadi. Similar testimony is borne in the book of Mosiah by king Benjamin and others. Their testimonies are just as valid and timely in this day as they were in Abinadi's. Souls are precious in the eyes of the Lord in all ages of the world. We all need to learn that there is no salvation except through Christ, who is the very Eternal Father of our salvation.

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APPENDIX A

TABLE A-1 *Abinadi's Commentary on Isaiah*

<i>Abinadi's Thesis: Mosiah 13:33–35</i>		
<i>Abinadi speaks in . . .</i>	<i>Commenting on . . .</i>	<i>Other Commentary</i>
Mosiah 14:33–34	Isa 53:1 (Mosiah 14:1)	Rom 10:16; John 12:37–38
15:1		
15:2	53:2a (14:2)	Luke 2:40–50
15:3	53:2b (14:2)	Rev 22:16; Matt 13:55–56; John 6:42
15:4	53:2 (14:2)	
15:5	53:3–5	3 Nephi 27:27; Mosiah 3:19; Matt 8:16–17; Heb 4:15; 1 Peter 2:24; Mark 8:31
15:9	53:6	Alma 34:15–16; chapter 42
15:6	53:7	
15:7–8	53:8	1 Cor 15:54–55; Mosiah 5:7
15:11–13	53:10b	
15:14–27	52:7	1 Peter 3:18–20; 4:5–6; D&C 137:7–10
15:28–16:1	52:8–10	
16:2–12	Lost Scripture?	
16:13–15	Conclusion	

APPENDIX B

Isaiah 53:9

And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth. (Compare Mosiah 14:9)

Abinadi does not comment on this verse from Isaiah. Did the priests understand it? Jesus was crucified between two thieves (Matt 27:38; Mark 15:27; Luke 23:32–33; John 19:18). He was buried in the tomb of a rich man, Joseph of Arimathea (Matt 27:57–60; Mark 15:42–46; Luke 23:50–53; John 19:38–42). Isaiah's announcement that he had done "no *evil*" (Mosiah 14:9; emphasis added) is the only word change between the text of the King James Bible and the Book of Mormon. (A capitalization difference will be discussed later.) The KJV records, "He had done no violence." "No evil" is consistent with Abinadi's earlier declaration that he yielded not to temptation (Mosiah 15:5). No "deceit in his mouth" proclaims that he spoke truth at all times. Peter varies slightly the same Isaiah passage: "Neither was *guile* found in his mouth" (1 Peter 2:23; emphasis added). The message is clear, there was no reason or basis that justified his crucifixion. However, his death was not only foreknown but was foreordained (1 Peter 1:20; Ether 3:14). Isaiah understood this clearly.

Isaiah 53:10

Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. (Compare Mosiah 14:10)

The wording of the opening phrase of this verse may have two meanings depending on the interpretation of the word *Lord*, as capitalized in the Book of Mormon text. In the King James text, the word is all in capital letters, LORD. Some would

interpret this to mean Jehovah, and others would interpret it to refer to Elohim. Since there are no original manuscripts, the correct interpretation can only be determined by the context. Through the years, scribes have altered the word for God back and forth to fit their own understanding.² If the person referred to as Lord is Elohim, then the phrase would read that it pleased Elohim to bruise Christ or allow him to suffer affliction and grief as a part of the Atonement. This interpretation was nicely summarized by John in his Gospel: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

If the word *Lord* is interpreted to refer to Jehovah, then it would read that it pleased Jehovah to bruise Christ. Since Jehovah is the Old Testament name for Christ, this may sound like an impossible interpretation. However, it could be interpreted to say that Christ was willing to suffer to bring about the Atonement. This interpretation is sustained in modern revelation. In a revelation to Orson Pratt, Jesus Christ identified himself as he “who so loved the world that he gave his own life, that as many as would believe might become the sons of God” (D&C 34:1–3). Perhaps both interpretations are valid. Certainly Elohim was the author of the plan of salvation that provided for a Savior (Abr 3:27–28; Moses 4:1–2), and, as revealed to Orson Pratt, Christ did make a free-will offering.

The offering of Christ’s soul for sin was done in the Garden of Gethsemane. There he suffered as a God “temptations, and pain of body, hunger, thirst and fatigue, even more than man can suffer, except it be unto death; for behold, blood cometh from every pore, so great shall be his anguish for the wickedness and the abominations of his people” (Mosiah 3:7; see also 2 Nephi 9:20–21; Alma 7:11; and Luke 22:44). As he

² Illustrations of the variant use of the word *God* may be seen in a comparison of the almost identical Psalms 14 and 53, or in Psalm 110 and Matthew’s quotation of it in Matthew 22:44. It seems apparent that scribes have pondered and altered these quotations to fit their private interpretations of the text.

paid this all-encompassing price for sin, he apparently had a panoramic view of all the world's experiences, past, present, and future, and, in some way beyond our comprehension, he placed himself in the position of every inhabitant of the earth, that he might satisfy the demands of justice for the punishment of every broken law of humankind. He was able to prolong his days, at least in a figurative sense, that he might pass through this agonizing ordeal for the entire period of the earth's habitation by mortal beings, from Adam to the final scene. With the payment of this eternal debt, the pleasure (will) of the Lord (Jehovah or Christ) and LORD (Elohim) was fulfilled, and Christ prospered by fulfilling the mission of his atonement. With the sacrifice of his soul and the end of his mortal life, Christ's seed became responsible for prolonging his days in another way, that of carrying on his mission. His seed, as stated above, are the prophets and teachers of the gospel and all who accept the gospel message (Mosiah 15:10–13).

Isaiah 53:11

Isaiah's prophecy continues:

He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities. (Compare Mosiah 14:11)

An understanding of verse 11 comes by substituting nouns for the pronouns. From the context of the verse, it is clear that Elohim shall see the travail of Jesus Christ's soul and shall be satisfied. Jesus suffered in Gethsemane and had "taken upon himself [the people's] iniquity and their transgressions, having redeemed them, and satisfied the demands of justice" (Mosiah 15:9). Jesus' knowledge of the sins of all humankind (2 Nephi 9:20) and his sinlessness—a "a righteous servant"—enabled him to make an eternal sacrifice. Many people will thus be able to justify themselves and obtain salvation because Jesus paid for their sins. Some have interpreted the servant's justifying of "many" as evidence that Jesus, in his foreknowledge, only

suffered for those who he knew would repent. This interpretation is not consistent with Jacob's declaration that Jesus "suffereth the pains of all men, yea, the pains of every living creature, both men, women, and children, who belong to the family of Adam" (2 Nephi 9:21); or with Jacob and Amulek's pronouncement that the Atonement must be an infinite atonement (2 Nephi 9:7), or an infinite and eternal sacrifice (Alma 34:10). Samuel the Lamanite taught that the Atonement brought *all* humankind back into the presence of God (Hel 14:17). However, Jacob taught that only those who repent, are baptized, and have perfect faith in the Holy One of Israel will be saved—and if not they will be damned (2 Nephi 9:23–24). Therefore, although Jesus paid for the sins of all humankind, not all will meet the criteria for obtaining those blessings in their lives (D&C 19:16–19). Those who do meet the criteria will be part of the fulfillment of Isaiah's further prophecy, which follows.

Isaiah 53:12

Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors. (Compare Mosiah 14:12)

The context shows that Elohim, or the Father, is still speaking in this verse. Because Jesus had fulfilled his role as the Redeemer of humankind, he "ascended into heaven" (Mosiah 15:9) and took his position on the right hand of the Father in the council of the Gods (D&C 20:24). In turn, Jesus was willing to divide his blessings, or spoils—a term referring to what was obtained after winning a battle—with those who accept and remain strong in the gospel. He taught this principle to his disciples at the end of his ministry:

Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations. And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me; That ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. (Luke 22:28–30)

Jesus was able to do this because he had poured out his soul unto death, or had freely given his life that “I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself” (John 10:17–18). In accomplishing this momentous task he was numbered with the transgressors, or suffered the most degrading of deaths at that time (McConkie 1:814–16). Prior to his death he had gone to Gethsemane and there, as Isaiah foretold, bore the sins of those who repented and also paid for those who ignorantly sinned. As explained earlier, Christ paid for the sins of all humankind, both the repentant and unrepentant, but the context of Isaiah describes only those who benefitted from the Atonement by repenting of their sins. Having completed his prophecy of Christ’s suffering, Isaiah returned to prophesy of the gathering of Israel (Isa 54), the subject he had left to insert this inspiring and now well-known prophecy of Christ’s mission.