

INTRODUCTION

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The Book of Mormon has received increasing attention in the last two decades from scholars who seek to understand its literary forms, its structure and teachings, and its reception history as it came forth in the nineteenth century and into the present day. Scholars inside and outside of the Latter-day Saint faith continue to use current academic tools and theories to produce work that takes the Book of Mormon seriously but that also seeks to be accessible to those who do not believe in the book's divinely inspired nature. In some ways, these studies are similar to respectful, scholarly analysis of the Jewish Talmud or of the Qur'an. They are neither polemic in nature nor "apologetically" designed to provide conclusive proof that the book of scripture is of ancient origin.¹

This Abinadi volume is designed to build upon the foundation provided by this type of scholarship. It is written by Latter-day Saint scholars who are members of or contributors to the Book of Mormon Academy

(BOMA), an academic think tank and research group begun at Brigham Young University in October 2013 to promote scholarship and teaching on the Book of Mormon. Members of the academy primarily pursue their own research agendas, but from time to time the academy produces studies that can be combined into one volume, such as this work on the Abinadi narrative.

This study attempts to begin filling a gap in attention to those figures who could be called “minor prophets” in the Book of Mormon, whose important teachings only span pages instead of full books but whose recorded sermons have a powerful impact on the rest of the book and on its modern-day readership. We have chosen to focus the current work on Abinadi. Giving attention to the ministry of Jacob, Enos, Samuel the Lamanite, Amulek, or Nephi (in Helaman 7–11) and to the short books of Jarom, Omni, and the Words of Mormon would also bear fruit and may provide material for future publications by the academy. Readers who find the critical text of Mosiah 11–17 (appendix 1) useful may be pleased to learn that the academy may eventually publish a similar resource for the entire Book of Mormon.

For the purposes of this study, Abinadi seemed the logical choice as a figure whose page count is significantly smaller than his prophetic imprint. Once it is realized that Abinadi’s great discourse occurred chronologically prior to that of King Benjamin,² his unique position comes more clearly into focus as a prophet with an unknown lineage and background, a brief ministry leading to an ignominious death, and teachings that changed the course of Nephite thought all the way to Moroni. Numerous concepts and phrases that deeply influence Latter-day Saint thinking still today show up for the first time (chronologically) in the Book of Mormon from the mouth of the enigmatic Abinadi: the deeply personal nature of Christ’s atoning sacrifice (Mosiah 15:5–9), the reality of infant salvation (Mosiah 15:25),³ the first resurrection (Mosiah 15:22–26),⁴ the breaking of “the bands of death” (Mosiah 15:8, 20, 23), and many, many more.

Each chapter of this book engages the Abinadi narrative using a different scholarly tool or lens, based on the academic training and expertise of the contributing authors. Although this is often the case with edited volumes,⁵ this book represents a small but significant shift in approach.

When the academy was first created, the organizers worked to include members with diverse academic skills, representing a wide variety of the tools that would be useful in Book of Mormon research. These include training in textual criticism, historical criticism, literary criticism, form criticism, theological thought, philosophical thought, and religious history. The fields of study range from the Hebrew Bible to the Greek New Testament, from Mesoamerica to nineteenth-century America. The group believes that the Book of Mormon text shines best when the best tools are used to illuminate it. Thus, in one sense, these studies are centered in the text of the Abinadi narrative, illuminating the text as it is found. In another sense, this volume demonstrates how students or researchers of a text use different tools to uncover meaning. Many chapters not only highlight and explain key aspects of the Abinadi narrative, but also help the reader gain skills that can be used elsewhere in the Book of Mormon (such as Jared Ludlow's chapter using narratology, Nicholas Frederick's chapter on New Testament intertextuality, Amy Easton-Flake's chapter analyzing nineteenth-century theological viewpoints, and others). Each chapter points the way for similar work that could be done (and, in some cases, much work that has already been done) in other sections of the Book of Mormon.⁶

Since each author focuses on the same brief material, overlap in some of the content and conclusions will be found. Notwithstanding that reality, each chapter finds something unique of great value in the text, and illuminates the text in new ways. At times, the conclusions drawn by the various essays differ. The conclusions and approaches are not meant to be definitive. As will be seen, each contributing scholar has a deep appreciation for the Book of Mormon text undergirding each chapter, influencing both the approaches and the conclusions. Notwithstanding that foundational respect toward the text, each has worked to describe what is found there without either defending or attacking the Book of Mormon.

The volume begins with three chapters that help frame and explain the Abinadi narrative as a story—how the narrative itself progresses and holds together, how it fits into the broader framework of the Book of Mormon, and how it connects with themes in the biblical book of Isaiah. In the first chapter, “A Messenger of Good and Evil Tidings’: A Narrative Study

of Abinadi,” Jared W. Ludlow provides a narratological study of the conflict sequences. This academic approach separates out and emphasizes the various aspects of a narrative: the characters, their background, and their identity; the setting of each scene of the narrative and how it contributes to the overall arc and progression of the story; the protagonists and antagonists and how the story sets them against each other; the conflict itself and how it is resolved. Ludlow’s skillful identification and description of these components serves as an excellent opening chapter to the volume as it clearly lays out the general contours of the Abinadi story and then highlights the contest of Abinadi versus Noah and his priests in ways that mirrors the conflict of Elijah versus the priests of Ba’al, thus pointing to the cosmic struggle of Jehovah versus false gods.

The chapter by Daniel L. Belnap, “The Abinadi Narrative, Redemption, and the Struggle of Nephite Identity,” focuses on the sociopolitical situation of the Nephites throughout the Book of Mormon and, therefore, reaches a variety of differing conclusions from these of Ludlow. Rather than isolating the narrative sequence of Abinadi’s storyline, Belnap begins the analysis of that sequence with King Benjamin’s discourse, forcing the reader to ask the questions, “Why did Mormon put these two stories side by side?” and “What were the driving concerns that motivated him to use so much precious space on Abinadi’s story, which was in many ways a side-trail in the overall Nephite saga?”

Frank F. Judd Jr.’s paper, “Conflicting Interpretations of Isaiah in Abinadi’s Trial,” takes a different point of departure than that of either Ludlow or Belnap, and serves to connect the preceding two chapters together. Although all three scholars recognize the importance of Isaiah 52:7–10 as an organizing feature of the conflict in Abinadi’s story, Judd begins with an analysis of how Isaiah 52:7–10 fits into the broader themes of biblical Isaiah, thus creating a foundation for the issues at stake in the contest between Abinadi and the priests. After the reader better understands the thrust of the section of Isaiah in which Isaiah 52 is located—commonly referred to as 2nd Isaiah—with its focus on redemption and on the work of the servant, it is easier to recognize how those themes might have been misunderstood by Nephites who were relying on the teachings of Isaiah.

The second section of the book moves to three intertextual studies, each with varying motives and approaches. John L. Hilton III's chapter, "Abinadi's Legacy: Tracing His Influence through the Book of Mormon," might more appropriately be called an intratextual study because it analyzes the influence of Abinadi's teachings over time as they were used by various prophetic figures within the Book of Mormon. Hilton's paper is placed as the first of the three intertextual studies for two reasons. First, Hilton devotes space in his essay to fundamental issues connected to intertextuality, introducing that field of study in ways that will help readers understand all three contributions. Second, since he looks at intertextuality by subsequent writers in the Book of Mormon, his study continues to demonstrate the relevance of Abinadi's narrative in the overall work and to show that Abinadi's teachings fit into Mormon's larger goals. One of the interesting contributions provided by Hilton is evidence that King Benjamin's discourse has clear textual connections with Abinadi's teachings, a surprising conclusion since there is no evidence that Benjamin or someone else residing in Zarahemla could have been present for Abinadi's sermon. Hilton provides possible explanations for this unexpected intratextual influence.

Nicholas J. Frederick's chapter, "If Christ Had Not Come into the World," moves from intratextuality to intertextuality, analyzing ways in which Abinadi's discourse appears to build upon New Testament passages. Rather than shy away from these apparently anachronistic quotations and allusions, Frederick challenges readers of the Book of Mormon to seek them out and then skillfully demonstrates how recognizing these passages can enhance both one's understanding and appreciation of the Book of Mormon text. As he demonstrates, Abinadi relies on wording found in the New Testament without simply repeating New Testament arguments. Rather, he adopts New Testament language, sometimes combining it from a variety of New Testament sources, and uses that language to craft new arguments, strengthened by the allusions to New Testament language and logic, but not limited or controlled by them.

The chapter written by the volume's editor, Shon Hopkin, "Isaiah 52–53 and Mosiah 13–14: A Textual Comparison" shifts focus somewhat from preceding chapters in this section. In it, I analyze the way in

which Abinadi's quotations, as found in their modern, English translation, connect with and differ from the King James Version of Isaiah's writings and the Hebrew of the Masoretic text that underlies that translation. For each variant between Abinadi's quotations and the King James text, I provide, where possible, ancient versions that show a similar variant. More importantly, I suggest possibilities for why the change may have been made in Abinadi's discourse to support his theological positions. A close analysis of the variants thus becomes an opportunity to better understand Abinadi's message. It also provides the opportunity to discuss the Book of Mormon's reliance on the King James Version, and what that reliance may mean.

The first two sections either analyze Abinadi's teachings within the context of cues and clues provided in the Book of Mormon or view the Book of Mormon in connection with biblical literature and versions. The third section moves to the use of information and potential cues found outside of the Book of Mormon or the Bible. Kerry Hull's chapter, "An 'East Wind': Old and New World Perspectives" analyzes a phrase used by Abinadi that has surprised some readers. In his prophecies of destruction to come upon the wicked Nephites, Abinadi threatens that an "east wind" will come upon them (Mosiah 12:7). Since the "east wind" is a biblical phrase, tied to a geographical setting in the Old World, how could the Nephite people, living over four hundred years after departure from Palestine, possibly understand Abinadi's warning? In his analysis of the phrase, Hull moves carefully and methodically from attestations in Old and New Testament literature and lands to geographical manifestations of the "east wind" in Mesoamerica and attestations of a destructive "east wind" in Mesoamerican literature. He concludes by proposing three main reasons why the phrase may have appropriately been used by Abinadi.

Next, Mark Alan Wright and Kerry Hull team up to bring their academic acumen of New World literature to bear. Although both are primarily Mesoamerican scholars, they have not limited their study only to that region but also have demonstrated how both a North American and Mesoamerican setting can illuminate Abinadi's painful martyrdom at the hands of Noah and his priests. Using supporting New World literature and art, they provide a detailed analysis of the strange Book of Mormon

description that Abinadi was “bound” with cords, and was “scourged . . . with faggots, yea, even unto death” (Mosiah 17:13). This chapter will likely remain a definitive piece of scholarship regarding Abinadi’s death for decades to come.

The final section of the book moves to theological approaches to Abinadi’s narrative. First, Amy Easton-Flake’s article, “Infant Salvation: Book of Mormon Theology in a Nineteenth-Century Context,” provides an in-depth analysis of how nineteenth-century religions that were influential in Joseph Smith’s day viewed the topic of infant baptism and salvation. She suggests that if the ancient authors were prophetically familiar with the day in which the Book of Mormon would come forth, then modern readers should not be surprised to see many of the issues that were important in the nineteenth century be purposefully addressed. She carefully traces the doctrinal approaches of Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists, Restorationists, and Universalists. She then compares those positions to viewpoints expressed by Abinadi and others in the Book of Mormon, demonstrating that the Book of Mormon did not fully mirror any of the views prevalent in its day but took a different approach that nevertheless provided a corrective to some positions on the necessity of infant baptism. Easton-Flake’s article paves the way for important future work that will situate Book of Mormon theology among other theological currents of the nineteenth century.

Those who have read other work on the Book of Mormon by Joseph Spencer will recognize his unique voice and approach to Book of Mormon texts. In the final chapter, “‘As Though’: Time, Being, and Negation in Mosiah 16:5–6,” Spencer elucidates two connected statements by Abinadi. The first (16:5) describes the state of the rebellious “as though there was no redemption made.” The second (16:6) then describes Abinadi’s own viewpoint of the redemption, “speaking of things to come as though they had already come.” Spencer adeptly uses philosophical and theological tools to analyze how the faithful interweave future, redemptive events into their present as concrete realities, in contrast to the rebellious, who reject that redemptive (but very real) future in favor of a possible (but unreal) world in which no redemption will be made. Interestingly, although he focuses on only two verses, Spencer’s chapter pinpoints the main thrust

of Abinadi's discourse, the reality of the redemption made in and through Jesus Christ.

Readers may be surprised to find that the theological section of a book devoted entirely to the Abinadi narrative does not contain a discussion of what have been, for many, the most theologically difficult verses in the entire Book of Mormon. Although Abinadi's statement about Jesus Christ's role as the Father and the Son (Mosiah 15:1–5) is mentioned in a few chapters of this book, excellent work by other scholars has been done previously, providing clear analysis of those teachings. Rather than retreading ground that has already been plowed by others, only to contribute little in the way of new insights, we decided instead to point new readers to that previous scholarship. This is accomplished in the comprehensive bibliography (appendix 2) under the subheading "Doctrine and Theology."

Finally, the entire Book of Mormon Academy is pleased to provide the two appendices as a collaborative contribution. We hope that the first appendix, a critical text of Mosiah 11–17, based on the 1840 edition of the Book of Mormon (the last edition edited during Joseph Smith's lifetime), will become an important resource for all who hope to continue their study of the Abinadi narrative. Its numerous footnotes contain a wealth of combined textual knowledge regarding how the Abinadi narrative builds upon, interacts with, and alludes to other texts in the Book of Mormon and in the Bible. If the first appendix demonstrates how to read the Abinadi narrative in conversation with other scriptural texts, the second appendix, a comprehensive bibliography, shows readers where they can find other excellent scholarship on these chapters. As volume editor, I wish to gratefully acknowledge the contributions of all members of the Book of Mormon Academy for their united work on these two offerings and to recognize the extra efforts of Joseph Spencer and Nicholas Frederick. A skilled research assistant at Brigham Young University, Alex Criddle, also provided significant help in compiling the bibliography.

I would be remiss to not acknowledge the contributions of many others to the shape and content of this volume. Numerous qualified scholars reviewed and helped improve the various chapters of this book. Among them, Heather Hardy, Charles Swift, Joseph Spencer (outside of his own chapter contribution), and Brant Gardner gave extra effort. They certainly

should not be held responsible for the contents of this volume, but each of them had a hand in elevating many of the offerings found herein. Brian Hauglid, editor (at the time) of the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* gave early and important encouragement and advice to the project. The guidance of Thomas A. Wayment, publications director of the Religious Studies Center, along with those who anonymously reviewed this work in its entirety, have also helped it take its current form. Thanks also to his team of Joany O. Pinegar, Brent R. Nordgren, R. Devan Jensen, Tyler Balli, Mandi Diaz, Emily Strong, Shannon Taylor, and Madison Swapp. Finally, a number of seasoned scholars were influential in the organization of the Book of Mormon Academy that produced this volume. They are Camille Fronk Olson, Dennis L. Largey, Robert L. Millet, Paul Y. Hoskisson, and Daniel K Judd. These organizers and advisers continue to give important encouragement and support to the educational, research, and teaching efforts of the academy. All who have contributed to this volume are grateful for their support.

NOTES

1. Examples include, but are certainly not limited to: Brant Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon 1-6* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2007); Terryl L. Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture that Launched a New World Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Paul C. Gutjahr, *The Book of Mormon: A Biography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012); Grant Hardy, *The Book of Mormon: A Reader's Edition* (University of Illinois Press, 2005); Grant Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon. A Reader's Guide* (Oxford University Press, 2010); Dennis L. Largey, ed., *Book of Mormon Reference Companion* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003); Royal Skousen, ed., *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text* (Yale University Press, 2009); and Joseph Spencer, *An Other Testament: On Typology* (Salem, OR: Salt Press, 2012).
2. See the chapter by John Hilton III for a clear discussion of this chronology.
3. See the chapter by Amy Easton-Flake.
4. See the chapter by John Hilton III, herein.
5. Different organizing principles for edited volumes have their own strengths and weaknesses. Examples of edited volumes that combine academic research

from a variety of viewpoints on a small text in the Book of Mormon include: Stephen D. Ricks and John W. Welch, eds., *King Benjamin's Speech: That Ye May Learn Wisdom* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998); Donald W. Parry and John W. Welch, eds., *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998); and Stephen D. Ricks and John W. Welch, eds., *The Allegory of the Olive Tree* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1994). Other edited volumes analyze the Book of Mormon with one particular theme or a particular academic approach, such as: Adam S. Miller, ed., *An Experiment on the Word: Reading Alma 32* (Provo, UT: Salt Press, 2011), which could be included here or with the former examples; and John W. Welch, ed., *The Legal Cases in the Book of Mormon* (Salem, OR: Brigham Young University Press and the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2008). These allow a unified textual or thematic focus in the volume and produce much excellent work, but, in the effort to cover topics that are deemed crucial, may encourage some authors to roam beyond their fields of expertise. Other edited volumes such as those produced by the annual Sperry Symposium (which, each four years, focuses on the Book of Mormon), allow scholars to write from their own training, but at times lack a central, organizing focus that holds the volume together.

6. This approach was inspired by a joint reading of John H. Hayes and Carl R. Holladay, *Biblical Exegesis*, 3rd ed. (Westminster John Knox Press: London, 2007).