

## Chapter Two

# THE ABINADI NARRATIVE, REDEMPTION, AND THE STRUGGLE OF NEPHITE IDENTITY

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Though there is no question that the Book of Mormon's primary purpose is to impart an understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ, this message is generally embedded by its editors and authors in very distinct historical and political settings. This is particularly true of Mormon, who often crafted his narratives so that a given prophetic ministry intersected and interacted with the sociopolitical concerns of the contemporary Nephite population. One such concern emerging again and again in Nephite history was their identity or relationship as Israel. This question lay at the heart of a number of social and religious movements described by Mormon and reflected confusion on the part of the Nephites as to how they were to understand their place in the promised land. Significantly, these movements often reflected disagreements with prophetic instruction, thus suggesting that Mormon wished to highlight those disagreements. One such narrative is the recolonization attempt of the land of Nephi that makes up

Mosiah 7–24, which describes both a movement and the resulting prophetic ministry of Abinadi, each one attempting to provide a definition as to what it meant to be Nephite and how that definition affected the Nephites' understanding of redemption. This chapter will use a sociopolitical lens to demonstrate that Mormon's interest in the Abinadi narrative was closely connected to the views of redemption that were most important to him and to the entire Book of Mormon narrative.

## KING BENJAMIN AND THE DISSENTERS

Though the majority of these chapters deal directly with the Nephites and their presence in the land of Nephi (approximately 56 percent of the book of Mosiah), the history of this group actually began with the reign of King Benjamin. Indeed, these chapters are preceded by almost fifteen pages concerning the last speech of Benjamin (approximately 24 percent), suggesting that any full understanding of Abinadi's teachings may be enhanced by placing them within the larger context of the political and religious concerns of Benjamin's reign.<sup>1</sup>

With that said, currently, we have only twelve verses in the Book of Mormon, spread across the writings of Amaleki and the Words of Mormon, that actually discuss the reign of Benjamin. It is not clear whether this dearth of words is because his reign was described in greater detail in the text lost when Joseph Smith handed the manuscript to Martin Harris or whether it reflects redaction choices by Mormon.<sup>2</sup> Regardless, the twelve verses are surprisingly informative concerning the external and internal challenges to Benjamin's reign. Stressed in both the Words of Mormon and in the book of Omni, Benjamin's reign experienced a major military conflict with Lamanites in the land of Zarahemla, labeled as "a serious war" by Amaleki. Mormon informs the reader that Benjamin wielded the sword of Laban and fought directly against the Lamanites, distinguishing himself both in terms of courage and leadership.

Internally, political and ecclesiastical conflict also appear to have defined at least a portion of Benjamin's reign. According to the text, Benjamin had to deal with a number of false Christs, as well as false prophets and teachers (Words of Mormon 1:15–16), and he himself instituted ecclesiastical reforms, perhaps in response to these individuals, by appointing

new priests “to teach the people, that thereby they might hear and know the commandments of God, and to stir them up in remembrance of the oath which they had made” (Mosiah 6:3). Elsewhere we are told that Benjamin worked hand in hand with “holy men” who “did speak the word of God with power and with authority,” doing so with “much sharpness” (Words of Mormon 1:17). We are also told that the false Christs and teachers were “punished for their crimes,” suggesting that these individuals weren’t merely apostates but were lawbreakers as well. Finally, it is mentioned that there was “much contention” and “many dissensions away to the Lamanites,” indicating the political and religious conflicts within the greater Nephite polity were widespread.<sup>3</sup> In any case, at least one group of Nephites who left Zarahemla during Benjamin’s reign sought to establish a unique political and religious identity, that being the recolonizers ultimately led by Zeniff.

While Mormon never identifies Zeniff’s group as one of the “many dissensions,” the text suggests that this may have been the case. Explicitly, the purpose of the expedition was to reclaim the land of Nephi or “possess the land of their inheritance” (Omni 1:27). Zeniff, a member of the original expedition and the leader of the second expedition, described the purpose in similar terms as one in which they sought to “inherit the land of our fathers” (Mosiah 9:3).<sup>4</sup> The use of such terminology to describe the expedition’s purpose suggests that it was more than mere exploration but an attempt to return and restore former Nephite glory.<sup>5</sup> Associating the land of Nephi with “lands of inheritance” or “land of our fathers” suggests that, at least to the members of the expedition, Zarahemla did not qualify as such, as we shall see.

## THE NEPHITES AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO “LANDS OF INHERITANCE”

The Nephite experience with the “land of inheritance” concept was a complicated one. The biblical understanding of land of inheritance referenced a geographic territory designated to a particular person, family, or tribe for multiple generations. The land could be taken away from the inheritor through disregard to the stipulations by which the land was granted but also returned or restored if later generations exhibited righteous behavior.<sup>6</sup>

This last element lay at the heart of most Israelite prophecy and may be understood as a primary indicator of Israel's election and chosen status. From early on, Nephite identity, like that of biblical Israel, included a relationship between the Nephites' seed and land. The earliest mention of this promise is in 1 Nephi 2:20, where Nephi is told that if his family would be obedient they would be led to a land of promise, a promise reiterated in 1 Nephi 5:5 as Lehi, responding to Sariah's concerns, states that he had "obtained a land of promise." The promise is fulfilled, according to Nephi, since upon their arrival in the New World he states, "We did call it the promised land" (1 Nephi 18:23).

The recognition of the land of promise as a land of inheritance occurs as early as 1 Nephi 13 as part of the angelic vision Nephi received, but significantly it is not until the last discourses of Lehi that it is made clear for all in the community that the land of promise and the land of inheritance were one and the same (2 Nephi 1:5). What is not clear is how much of the land was considered the land of inheritance. Theoretically, all the land in the New World, whether known or unknown, was included, but it appears that the only land the Nephites were aware of and actually settled was understood as the land of inheritance by segments of the Nephite population. Though this tension would have been present from the beginning, it became an issue only when the Nephites were required to leave the "promised land"—that is, the original settlement—and journey into the wilderness, eventually settling the land of Nephi.

Though this second migration was divinely appointed, it does not appear that the Nephites believed the new settlement to be the land of inheritance. The material concerning this significant event is limited, but Nephi includes an entire speech by his brother Jacob which seems to address the concern as to how the Nephites were going to experience lands of inheritance. After introducing the subject via the use of Isaiah, Jacob adds his own commentary and concludes with the following observation: "Nevertheless, we have been driven out of the land of our inheritance; but we have been led to a better land, for the Lord has made the sea our path, and we are upon an isle of the sea" (2 Nephi 10:20).

It is clear that Jacob alludes to a Nephite migration, but which migration is not certain. The specific context appears to refer to the first

migration, from the Old World to the New, with Jacob's allusions to the Lord making the sea a path and their present location as one of the "isles of the sea." But the overall context of the speech—including chapter 8, with its Isaianic promise to turn the wilderness into paradise—suggests it is the second migration, from the "promised land" to the land of Nephi. Jacob concludes that, like the first migration, the second migration was a movement to a "better land," even though it came about through a loss of an earlier land of inheritance.

This, in turn, suggests that the Nephites differentiated between the promised land, which was a land of inheritance, and the land of Nephi, which was not. Yet twenty-five years later, Jacob, again speaking to the Nephite community in the land of Nephi, warned, "Except ye repent [the Lamanites] shall possess the land of your inheritance, and the Lord God will lead away the righteous out from among you" (Jacob 3:4). In this case, the land of inheritance appears to refer specifically to the land of Nephi, indicating that a generation later at least some of the community now understood the land of Nephi to be the land of inheritance. But even this is not guaranteed, since Jacob ends his record stating, "The time passed away with us, and also our lives passed away like as it were unto us a dream, we being a lonesome and a solemn people, wanderers, cast out from Jerusalem, born in tribulation, in a wilderness . . . ; wherefore, we did mourn out our days" (Jacob 7:26).<sup>7</sup>

The Nephites remained in the land of Nephi for approximately four hundred years following Nephi's migration, at which point the Nephites experienced a third migration, as Mosiah<sub>1</sub> was told to flee the land of Nephi and go into the wilderness, eventually entering into the land of Zarahemla. But unlike the earlier migrations, this one was distinguished by their explicit encounter with native inhabitants in Zarahemla, who had an established city, culture, and language.<sup>8</sup> Hints within the Book of Mormon text suggest that the relationship between the two culturally distinct groups of the people of Nephi and the people of Zarahemla was an uneasy one. In Mosiah 1, King Benjamin tells his son Mosiah<sub>2</sub> "to make a proclamation throughout all this land among all this people, or the people Zarahemla, and the people of Mosiah who dwell in the land," thus revealing that one generation following the Nephite arrival, the two

communities still distinguished themselves as separate entities. Following his admission that there were two distinct communities, Benjamin goes on to declare that he hoped to give the two communities a new, common name that would erase the former distinctions: “And moreover, I shall give this people a name, that thereby they may be distinguished above all the people which the Lord God hath brought out the land of Jerusalem . . . , a name that shall never be blotted out.”<sup>9</sup>

Why the integration was met with such hostility is not explained in the text, but part of the issue may have been reflected in the Nephite belief that the covenant, and therefore the land, should pertain to Nephites only, a belief reinforced to some degree by the biblical text. According to the law and those narratives surrounding Israel’s migration into the promised land, Israel was explicitly told not to tolerate native culture or identity but rather to eradicate it as part of receiving the land as its inheritance. In light of this precedent, it is possible that some Nephites, as a result of the governmental policy of integration, were concerned with what they saw as political and religious apostasy altering the very definition of what it meant to be Nephite. This would have necessitated either speaking out against this policy (thus the accusation of contention) or leaving (thus the accusation of dissension). Moreover, a departure and return to the former territory would have been understood as very much an Israelite thing to do, as the return to the land of inheritance lay at the heart of much of Israelite prophecy. Thus, to a Nephite who may have felt overwhelmed by the Mulekite cultural and social influence, a return to the perceived land of inheritance would have been considered a righteous act, especially if such a move could have been validated through prophetic writings, such as Isaiah 52.

Yet the legitimacy of a Nephite return to a land of inheritance would have been problematic for two reasons. First, because the land of inheritance included all actual territory and not just perceived or experienced territories, one never technically left the land of inheritance, even if driven out from a longstanding settlement. This leads to the second, and more important, issue—there is no evidence in the Book of Mormon that God ever commanded any Nephite to return to a land of inheritance *at any time*. Although there are promises of restoration, an actual return like

that promised to biblical Israel, a promise that is found throughout the prophetic writings of the Book of Mormon, was not anticipated in the Nephites' future.<sup>10</sup> This striking difference between biblical and Nephite Israel is no doubt a consequence of the different approaches to lands of inheritance. Since Nephites could not actually lose the land of inheritance except through death or leaving the continent, restoration to a knowledge of their original relationship with God was emphasized.<sup>11</sup> Thus, regardless of the prophetic justification for doing so, the attempt to reclaim the land of Nephi because it was the land of inheritance may have been understood as being contrary to the will of God, a fact that would, as we shall see, have a direct bearing on Zeniff's colony.

## SOCIAL STATUS OF ZENIFF AND THE COLONISTS

Zeniff's colony was actually the second of two expeditions that sought to reclaim the land of Nephi. The first failed, leading Zeniff to try again. Admittedly, we do not know the full makeup of the two expeditions that resulted in the recolonization of the land of Nephi. In fact, only three original colonists are explicitly mentioned in the text: the unnamed brother of Amaleki, the record keeper; the unnamed leader of the first expedition; and Zeniff, a scout for the first expedition and then the leader of the second. Yet these three do not appear to be "average" Nephites but members of an elite, perhaps even a royal, class. Amaleki's brother, while unnamed, was a direct descendant of Jacob, high priest and Nephi's brother. Amaleki suggests that this man was supposed to have received the plates following the death of Amaleki, thereby establishing his elite, priestly status.

We know nothing about the second individual, the unnamed leader of the first expedition, except that he was a "strong and mighty man" and "stiffnecked." Zeniff describes him further as an "austere" and "bloodthirsty" man, characteristics that were exposed during the failed first expedition, whose members returned bloodied because of internal strife.<sup>12</sup> Yet the very fact that he spearheaded an expedition to return to the land of Nephi in the first place suggests that he possessed enough leadership and oratory skills to make such a ploy possible. Moreover, his designation as a *strong and mighty man* may have had more to do with his social standing than

his physical stature. Similar terminology is found in the Old Testament where it describes those who are of a high social standing, often associating them with military responsibilities.<sup>13</sup> Likewise, the terms appear elsewhere in the Book of Mormon, often denoting the same meaning. Thus, for instance, Laban, as a captain of fifty and as one of the elders of Jerusalem, may be designated a *mighty man*. With this in mind, it appears that this individual was a man of some standing with military skills and leadership abilities, all suggestive of elite status.

The use of this designation and the apparent elite status of Amaleki's brother suggest that many in the expedition came from high-ranking Nephite families. This, in turn, may explain the composition of the group sent out by Mosiah<sub>2</sub>, as recorded in Mosiah 7. Following the death of Benjamin, Mosiah<sub>2</sub>, at the behest of the "people," sent a small group to find out what happened to the expedition. Whether the term *people* meant the entire population or representatives of the families affected is unknown, but it does suggest that the expedition did not leave in secret and that the entire event was well known. The party selected by Mosiah<sub>2</sub> consisted of sixteen "strong men," a term similar in scope and meaning as *mighty man*, as well as Ammon, a direct descendant of Zarahemla and thus one of the highest, if not the highest, ranking member of the old Mulekite royal line. The explicit declaration of Ammon's lineage, while at the same time not providing the lineage of the others, suggests that the sixteen were Nephite rather than Mulekite. Thus, the makeup of this party apparently included sixteen Nephite *strong men*, or Nephite elite associated with the military, and Ammon, a strong and mighty man who would have been the king if the Mulekite royal line had still been in power. The selection of such pre-eminent men for the express purpose of locating and interacting with the expedition suggests that Mosiah<sub>2</sub> desired to recognize the status of the colonists, while the sending of the highest-ranking Mulekite (or one of them) would have also highlighted the ongoing policy of integration.

The third individual was Zeniff, the leader of the second expedition. Though his lineage is never provided, there are hints within the text of his elite status. One such hint in particular is his mention that he had been "taught in all the language of the Nephites" (Mosiah 9:1). Similar faculty in the Nephite language is ascribed to Benjamin's sons, who "were taught in

all the language of [the] fathers” according to the will of their father so that “thereby they might become men of understanding” (Mosiah 1:2). That their language training is explicitly mentioned as integral to their becoming leaders among the Nephites attests to the importance of it as well as suggests that such an education was not especially common among the greater society.

The relationship between receiving an education and one’s elite status is attested elsewhere in the Book of Mormon. Indeed, Nephi<sub>1</sub> states that he received at least a partial education because he had “goodly parents,” which alludes not only to their moral character but also to their ability to provide an education to their fourth and youngest son. Approximately a century and a half after Benjamin’s words to his sons, Nephite society was described as one in which “the people began to be distinguished by ranks, according to their riches and their chances for learning” (3 Nephi 6:12). Though this sounds as if the Nephites had a functioning meritocracy, the truth of the matter is that they were simply returning to the status quo after years of a de facto Zion-like existence following the destruction of the Gadianton robbers. It would seem then that riches and education had always defined the elite members of society.<sup>14</sup>

This, then, is the scene which Mormon has set up—a group of Nephites, some of whom were Nephite elites and believed that the land of Zarahemla was not part of their inheritance and certainly not the land of their fathers, left Zarahemla to reclaim the old Nephite territory, apparently believing that the greater Nephite population had gone astray through the policy of integration and that their own group therefore represented the true Nephite identity.

As for the resettlement itself, following the failure of the first attempt, Zeniff’s group was successful in negotiating with the Lamanites for the cities of Lehi-Nephi and Shilom. Contact between the two peoples appears limited. There were two conflicts in the first twenty-two years, one in the thirteenth year and the other in the twenty-second year, but in both there may have been some justification on the part of the Lamanites. Concerning the first, Zeniff admits that the rapid development of the Nephite settlement, which included the restoring of a defensive wall around both cities, made King Laman “uneasy,” and therefore the first battle may have

been to keep the Nephites in check. As for the second, it occurred at the death of Laman and may have been a way in which the new Lamanite king sought to establish his own credentials or perhaps to stage a preemptive attack that would forestall a Nephite offensive during the unstable period of his new reign.<sup>15</sup> In any case, the history of the expedition during the first two decades of its existence appears overall to be one of both peace and prosperity, and this remained the state when Zeniff conferred the kingdom to his son Noah, presumably sometime in the third decade of the expedition's settlement.

## **NOAH, ISAIAH, AND NEPHITE IDENTITY IN THE LAND OF NEPHI**

The assumption for the succession is that Noah was selected because he was the oldest son, but this is not clear. Primogeniture, while present among the Nephites, is not as explicit in leadership selection as one might expect. Moreover, it is possible that, primogeniture aside, Noah was selected for attributes or abilities deemed beneficial for the kingdom. Though this aspect of Noah is rarely explored, Mormon gives a surprising amount of detail concerning one such aspect—Noah's renovation plan for the territories.

According to the text, under Noah's leadership many "elegant and spacious" buildings were built, including a new palace, each decorated with high-quality ornamentation and noted for its excellent craftsmanship. The temple complex in particular is addressed, with emphasis on the quality of adornment as well as innovations concerning the space in which priests and the community interacted. According to Mosiah 11:11, a unique bench was built, allowing the priests to "rest their bodies and their arms" when interacting with the people. Though the interaction itself is described by Mormon as one in which the priests spoke "lying and vain words," the function of the innovative benches was to make it possible for the priests to interact with the greater community for longer periods of time than previously.<sup>16</sup> The reader is also told of the construction of a monumental tower that overlooked the entire region, including the territories of Shilom and Shemlon, the latter described as a Lamanite territory. The strategic value of the tower seems clear and was demonstrated

explicitly in chapter 19, when Noah, fleeing from Gideon, ascended the tower and saw the Lamanites emerging from Shemlon, thereby giving advanced notice of the attack.

Noah's building efforts were not limited to the city of Nephi. In Mosiah 11:13 we are informed that many buildings were built in the adjoining territory of Shilom, including a sister tower, described in verse 13 as a "great tower," on the hill north of the city, the same hill where Ammon and his party set up tents upon their arrival in the land of Nephi. Though not described in terms of elevation, as is the tower in Nephi, the location of the sister tower on the Shilom hill suggests its defensive importance. Both Shemlon and Shilom were defensively vulnerable, and Noah's building efforts continued a policy of defensive watchfulness that began with his father, Zeniff, and the rebuilding of the city walls.

Though the function of the towers is easily determined, the rest of the city renovation reveals a Noah who may have been a canny, competent king (at least in this one area), recognizing the value of renovation in the establishing of communal identity. While the rebuilding or renovating of previous structures would have emphasized continuity between the current generation and those that came before, effectively expunging the years in which the Nephites had abandoned these territories as well as erasing the previous Lamanite occupation, the new buildings would have projected the power of the new state by suggesting that it could provide permanency, stability, and security to those who interacted with these public spaces.<sup>17</sup> Outside of the ideological value, the renovation of Nephi and Shilom, like other large, monumental building projects, would have strengthened the local economy, rewarding skilled artisans and common laborers alike. This is not to say that hardship was not experienced by the workers, but nothing in the text suggests that the people themselves felt they were under a particularly onerous hardship, Mormon's comments notwithstanding.<sup>18</sup>

The status-affirming aspect of Noah's project is not revealed so much in Mormon's description of the buildings but in the later declaration by the general population of both their righteousness and the righteousness of Noah: "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 [Abinadi]? And now, O king, behold, we are guiltless, and thou, O king, hast not sinned. . . . Behold, we are strong. . . . Yea, thou hast prospered in the land (Mosiah 12:13–15).<sup>19</sup> The twin conditions of strength and prosperity are often associated in the Book of Mormon and Bible with righteous behavior, but in this case the declaration, following so closely on the heels of the description of Noah’s works, appears to allude to the king’s projects as evidence, in the people’s minds, of righteousness.

Finally, the very construction of these projects may have been understood as the fulfillment of the Isaianic prophecy used to justify the recolonization effort in the first place. Though we first encounter Isaiah 52:7–10 in Abinadi’s confrontation with the priests of Noah, their mention that the passage had been “taught by [their] fathers” suggests that Isaiah 52 had a history of interpretation among the people, who sought to “inherit the land of [their] fathers,” and appears to have been used to justify both the initial recolonization and the continued existence of the community.<sup>20</sup> Isaiah 52 seems to be a salient prophecy in Nephite prophetic tradition. The chapter is alluded to explicitly by Nephi’s angelic guide in 1 Nephi 13:37, Jacob uses the first two verses of the chapter in his speech a generation later in the land of Nephi, Christ creatively uses the entire chapter in the second day of his ministry, and Moroni concludes his record with a paraphrase of the prophecy.<sup>21</sup> Thus, the colony’s usage of this passage is not surprising. But its interpretation appears to reflect a different usage than the others listed. In fact, each verse of the prophecy, when viewed through the ideology of this group and Noah’s building programs, may be understood as referring to the specific experiences of this community and thereby used to validate its overall attempt.<sup>22</sup>

Verse 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.*

The first verse of the quartet associates the righteous individual with bringing peace and goodness, traversing the geographical locale of mountains. Book of Mormon geography indicates that the land of Nephi was “up” from both the land of first inheritance and the land of Zarahemla, an indicator of elevation rather than direction.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, it was situated in the territory commonly known as the wilderness, from which the

headwaters of the river Sidon emerged. If we assume that the prophecy had been specifically applied to the colonists and their reclamation of Nephi, the mountains can be understood as the elevated territory of Nephi, and the colonists themselves as the rightful messengers bringing goodness to the land again, while the proclamation “Zion, thy God reigneth” may be an allusion to the renovated temple, the house of God, established again by the Nephites as a declaration of God’s presence in the promised land.

*Verse 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.*

Building on the preceding verse, now we find Zion has not always been established but was in need of restoration. The righteous messenger of verse 21 now becomes associated with the watchmen of Zion, who will see “eye to eye” when Zion is brought back to its earlier prominence. Highlighted is the divine approval of a return, as the prophecy states that the Lord will bring “again” Zion. Though the land of Nephi is never explicitly called Zion, the designation is often given to any community made up of the righteous, and while the colonists are condemned by Abinadi, the text states they believed themselves to be righteous, at least worthy of divine approval.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, in light of what appears to be the specific application of this prophecy to the recolonization effort, it is possible that the mention of watchmen would not only reflect the people of Noah’s understanding of themselves as divinely appointed caretakers but also lead to the actual construction of the two towers built in Nephi and Shilom, with the promise of seeing “eye to eye” reflecting a tangible, concrete fulfillment of the prophecy.

*Verse 23: Break forth into joy; sing together ye waste places of Jerusalem; for the Lord hath comforted his people, he hath redeemed Jerusalem.*

Building upon the concept of return and restoration established in the preceding verses, the city, now referenced as Jerusalem, itself rejoices over its impending restoration. Highlighting that the city in question was Jerusalem emphasizes the promised return of the faithful found elsewhere throughout Isaiah. As we have noted previously, both a physical renewal of the city and a return to the land itself were essential characteristics of the Nephite community in the land of Nephi, suggesting yet again that

they understood their rebuilding of the city as fulfillment to the prophecy. More importantly, this verse suggests that they understood the restoration as a redemption they themselves enacted. This interpretation of redemption would become the center of the conflict between Abinadi and the priests, as the prophet would present another interpretation in harmony with earlier Nephite prophecy, but this will be discussed in greater detail below.<sup>25</sup>

Verse 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.*

The final verse in the prophetic quartet emphasizes the restoration and return of the community with divine approval. In fact, the verse suggests that the restorative return meets with more than God's approval and is in fact the evidence of his power to all other nations. The return stood as the tangible symbol of God's might and, therefore, Israel's election. Similarly, the reestablishment of a community in Nephi surrounded by Lamanite communities may have been understood as fulfillment of this particular promise. Certainly, the Nephite military victories would have reinforced the colonists' belief that God approved of their work, even actively participating on their behalf, and these successes, along with the other perceived fulfillments, would have stood as a testament to the election of these Nephites versus those who had veered from their Israelite identity back in the land of Zarahemla.

Whether the above reflects a complete understanding of the colonists' interpretation of Isaiah 52:7–10 cannot be fully determined, but it does seem clear that they had a particular interpretation that would have reflected their specific situation. And it was this certainty of prophetic justification that lay behind this passage's use by Noah's priests against Abinadi. For surely the presentation of the prophetic quartet by the priests was not an admittance of ignorance but instead was meant as proof that Abinadi was a false prophet. For if the building efforts of Noah and the prosperity of the community fulfilled the very prophecy taught and interpreted by the "fathers," then how could Abinadi be a true prophet?<sup>26</sup>

## THE MINISTRY OF ABINADI AND THE COMPETING THEOLOGIES OF REDEMPTION

The prophetic ministry of Abinadi actually began two years prior to the confrontation with what may be considered a “typical” Israelite warning: “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. . . . Behold, I will deliver them into the hands of their enemies; yea, and they shall be brought into bondage . . . and none shall deliver them, except it be the Lord the Almighty God” (Mosiah 11:20–21, 23). Not surprisingly, Noah and his people did not accept the message, Noah himself expressing the belief that Abinadi sought to foment dissension among the community.

Two years later, Abinadi returned and promised a series of curses familiar to those found in the Old Testament and which were meant to be experienced by those who had broken the covenant: abuse and forced removal by enemies; corpses left unburied to be eaten by wild animals; plagues and “afflictions”; pestilence, including insect scourges; destructive hailstorms and the “east wind”; and, finally, utter destruction.<sup>27</sup> Only this time the curses were not conditioned on the people’s repentance but now proclaimed inevitable and impending. Utter destruction was now the conditional element. In other words, the colonists were going to experience defeat, suffering, and bondage regardless of their repentant state, but repentance could keep the colony from being utterly destroyed. Unfortunately, just as with Abinadi’s first ministry, the response of the people was one of anger and outrage. Perceiving their level of prosperity as a sign of righteousness, they did not accept the accusations made by the prophet.

This same sense of righteousness fuels the intent of Noah’s priests when they ask Abinadi for his interpretation of Isaiah 52, and Abinadi indeed appears to recognize this, since he takes a roundabout way of providing that interpretation. Challenged in chapter 13, Abinadi does not revisit the Isaianic text until chapter 16. Yet when he does, the heart of his interpretation is the concept of spiritual redemption rather than the theme of physical restoration of land. Abinadi’s emphasis on redemption is not

unique in Nephite history, as it played a particularly important role in the ministries of both Nephi and Jacob.

As noted earlier, the Nephite experience was one of multiple migrations, which, because of the ways in which the Nephite model of lands of inheritance differed from the biblical one, led to crises of faith since the loss of presumed lands of inheritance was understood to reflect separation from God. Thus, after every migration there was a sense of abandonment, isolation, and loss of identity, which both Nephi and Jacob attempted to alleviate by establishing a relationship between their people and God as Redeemer.

Nephi, in response to the crisis after the first migration, states that part of his ministry was to instill a hope among his people, one similar to the hope those in the Old World still had, which would be accomplished by recognizing that the Lord was their Redeemer (1 Nephi 19). To this end Nephi states that he read often from Isaiah: “And I did read many things unto them which were written in the books of Moses; but that I might more fully persuade them to believe in the Lord their Redeemer I did read unto them that which was written by the prophet Isaiah” (1 Nephi 19:23). Similarly, Jacob’s first speech in the land of Nephi was an attempt by the prophet to encourage his people to “rejoice, and lift up [their] heads” (2 Nephi 9:3), an image that he returns to in his exhortatory conclusion, “Let us remember [God] . . . and not hang down our heads. . . . Cheer up your hearts . . . [and] reconcile yourselves to the will of God” (2 Nephi 10:20, 23–24). Like his brother earlier, Jacob also uses specific Isaianic texts to establish this theme, which not coincidentally referenced God as Redeemer throughout.<sup>28</sup>

The concept of a redeemer can be found in the Old Testament, as the term referred to a family member who had the responsibility to buy back, or return, land or even family members who had been lost or sold into bondage. In this sense, then, a redeemer demonstrated awareness of the given family members, restoring them to their proper place or, in the case of land lost or sold, returning the land to the family.<sup>29</sup> Yet as we have already seen, the Nephite experience was not one of return or restoration to a prior land of inheritance, an experience that would reflect the particular role of the redeemer described above. Instead, for Nephi and Jacob the

Nephites would experience restoration as a return to a fulness of knowledge concerning God and their eternal state. Thus, their relationship to the Redeemer was not to one who would restore the lost family members to a land of inheritance but rather was to a Redeemer who restored lost family to a knowledge of their place within history. In other words, Jacob and Nephi addressed the Nephites' fear of being forgotten and abandoned by emphasizing God as Redeemer, who remembered them and who promised to always remember them, thus indicating that they were never really cut off, even if their relationship to the concept of land of inheritance had become untethered from the biblical and ancestral understanding.

The theme of redemption is explicit in Abinadi's discourse as the words *redeemer*, *redeem*, *redeemed*, or *redemption* show up no less than fourteen times. As with his prophetic forebears, Abinadi does not refer to redemption as a physical restoration.<sup>30</sup> But whereas Nephi and Jacob's redemption contains historical elements in their discourses, emphasizing a restoration at a future time, Abinadi's redemption is cosmic, concerned with the eternal dimension.<sup>31</sup> Abinadi begins the theme by untethering salvation from the law of Moses. Though the law of Moses may seem to have no bearing on the Isaianic prophecy, the two become connected via Abinadi's claim that the law of Moses is not a means of salvation. Indeed, no institution or power can bring about salvation except God, who "should redeem his people," a prophecy that Moses and all the prophets delivered from the beginning (Mosiah 13:32–33). While this statement by Abinadi is ostensibly a response to the priestly claim that the priests had performed their responsibilities by teaching the law of Moses, it also sets up a greater prophetic claim that all prophets—including the quintessential Israelite prophet, Moses—understood that redemption was a divine prerogative. The claim that all prophets taught this principle implies that Isaiah also understood this. Thus, the true interpretation of the prophecy, regardless of specific Nephite interpretation, fits within the greater prophetic message of divine redemption.

This claim is then followed by Abinadi's quoting of Isaiah 53, which he interprets as a prophecy concerning the manner in which God would redeem by taking on physical form, suffering, and then overcoming death, thereby allowing for Christ to stand "betwixt" the children of men and the

eternal consequences of justice (Mosiah 14:1–9). Abinadi then focuses on the promise given to Christ that Christ would “see his seed,” who are “all those who have hearkened unto [the prophets’] words, and believed that the Lord would redeem his people” (Mosiah 14:10; 15:11). In this manner, Abinadi is able to begin his interpretation of Isaiah 52 by declaring that it is the prophets who prophesied of God as Redeemer and who are “they who have published peace, who have brought good tidings of good, who have published salvation; and said unto Zion: Thy God reigneth!” (Mosiah 15:14). Abinadi then gives variations on this theme by noting how beautiful were such prophetic feet, how beautiful are the feet of current prophets, how beautiful would be the feet of future prophets, and ultimately how beautiful would be the feet of the one who brings good tidings, who is the “founder of peace, yea, even the Lord, who has redeemed his people” (Mosiah 15:18).

Having placed the context of Isaiah 52 in line with all other prophets, including Moses, Abinadi now establishes what redemption really is—the granting of eternal life. Noting that the Son, whom he identifies later as Christ,<sup>32</sup> has power over the dead, the prophet declares that he “bringeth to pass the resurrection of the dead” (Mosiah 15:20). More specifically he discusses the first resurrection, in which all the prophets, all those that believed the prophets, and all those who kept the commandments of God would be “raised to dwell with God who redeemed has them” (Mosiah 15:23) prior to Christ’s resurrection. Abinadi would later allude to the first resurrection as a restoration (Mosiah 13:24), while those in this resurrection are “his seed” or “his people,” reflecting the familial characteristic that defines redeemers. Moreover, the redemption comes about because Christ’s “family” listened to the words of the prophets and believed on him—that is, knew him. Thus, Abinadi emphasizes the importance as to why the redeemed must know Christ, while Jacob and Nephi promise that their descendants would have the opportunity to know Christ and thus be redeemed.

Having provided an interpretation for the first verse of the prophetic quartet, Abinadi now provides context for the last three verses by placing his cosmological redemption into a historical setting:

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.

*Yea, Lord, thy watchmen shall lift up their 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.* (Mosiah 15:28–31; italics added to emphasize Isaianic verses)

According to the prophet, a historical fulfillment of the prophecy would in fact happen. But the declaration would be one of cosmic redemption, not physical return, and, significantly, it would happen at a later date. Thus, Abinadi makes quite clear that the priestly interpretation, and thus the *raison d'être* for the entire colony's existence, is based on a complete misreading or misunderstanding of the prophecy.<sup>33</sup> Abinadi's full interpretation of the quartet also marks a new theme in his discourse—the outcome of those who are not redeemed.

## REDEMPTION VERSUS REBELLION

While ostensibly cosmological in scope, this secondary theme is where one finds Abinadi's specific criticisms against the priests and their community in the land of Nephi. Following his material on the cosmic redemption, Abinadi then warns his audience: "But behold, and fear, and tremble before God, for ye ought to tremble; for the Lord redeemeth none such that rebel against him and die in their sins; yea, even all those that have perished in their sins ever since the world began, that have willfully rebelled against God, that have known the commandments of God, and would not keep them; these are they that have no part in the first resurrection" (Mosiah 15:26). As if recognizing that his warning may not have been explicit enough, he goes on to say, "Therefore ought ye not to tremble? For salvation cometh to none such; for the Lord hath redeemed none such; yea, neither can the Lord redeem such; for he cannot deny himself; for he cannot deny justice when it has its claim" (Mosiah 15:27).

Abinadi's mention that those who are not redeemed are those that know the commandments of God but do not keep them alludes back to his earlier argument concerning the law of Moses and the incorrect manner in which the priests had been teaching it. Yet the theme also highlights the role of agency in redemption. As he notes, redemption, or salvation, may be experienced only by those who willfully choose to follow the commandments. The introduction of agency with the principle of redemption explains Abinadi's use of Isaiah 53.<sup>34</sup>

Also known as the Suffering Servant Song, Isaiah 53 emphasizes the submissive nature of Christ to the will of God, a fact not lost on Abinadi, who, in his own commentary immediately following, mentions no less than three times the manner in which Christ was "subject" to his Father's will (Mosiah 15:2, 5, 7). In contrast to Christ's willing obedience, Abinadi notes that if one is not redeemed it is because one is in willful rebellion against God, a state also mentioned three times, including Mosiah 15:26, mentioned previously.<sup>35</sup> Thus it is agency that allows for redemption, as the redeemed are those who "hearkened" (Mosiah 15:11) to the words of the prophets and "have kept the commandments of God" (Mosiah 15:22). On the other hand, the unredeemed, or rebellious, are those who "[persist] in [their] own carnal nature . . . according to their own carnal wills and desires" (Mosiah 16:5,12) or who knew "the commandments of God, and would not keep them" and are therefore "they that have no part in the first resurrection" (Mosiah 15:26), are "cast out" (Mosiah 16:2), and are "delivered up to the devil" (16:11).

Having established the true understanding of redemption, with the attendant theme of agency as fundamental either to being redeemed or rebelling, Abinadi brings together all of his teachings with his final admonishment to the priests that they teach the law of Moses through the lens of the prophetic message of redemption: "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 16:14–15).

Just as his message on the cosmic nature of redemption is a corrective to the colony's interpretation of Isaiah 52, his explication of what constituted rebellion addresses the colony's claims of election before God. We

have already noted that Abinadi, in his first ministry, had prophesied that the colonists would experience the “typical” punishment of defeat and bondage if they did not turn to the Lord. Now in his second, which includes his discourse before the priests, he equates their sinful state with rebellion, a state that may also work to describe their dissension from the larger Nephite polity as one that demonstrates they are in open rebellion against God himself.

Though it may seem a leap to equate the Nephite dissension and subsequent colonization with rebellion against God, earlier Book of Mormon material suggests that this is in fact the case. The third Nephite migration into Zarahemla was not a haphazard affair but expressly commanded by God, as recorded in the book of Omni: “For behold, he was warned of the Lord that he should flee out of the land of Nephi, and as many as would hearken unto the voice of the Lord should also depart out of the land with him, into the wilderness—and it came to pass that he did according as the Lord had commanded him” (1:12–13). In the period following the migration, there is no indication that the commandment was rescinded, a situation that, as we have noted earlier in this study, is completely in keeping with the Nephite prophetic tradition concerning lands of inheritance and the concept of restoration versus return.

The second indication that dissent was equated with rebellion against God appears in Benjamin’s discourse. One of the stated purposes of the speech was the installation of Mosiah<sub>2</sub> as king. Among the instruction given to the people concerning this event, Benjamin exhorts his people to continue doing “as ye have hitherto done. As ye have kept my commandments and also the commandments of my father, and have prospered . . . , even so if ye shall keep the commandments of my son, or the commandments of God which shall be delivered unto you by him, ye shall prosper in the land, and your enemies shall have no power over you” (Mosiah 2:31). This instruction is immediately followed by a plea to avoid communal confrontation, as those who did so “obey[ed] the evil spirit, which was spoken of by [his] father Mosiah” and in so doing “transgressed the law of God.” Summing up a few verses later, Benjamin declares bluntly that those who “should transgress and go contrary to that which has been spoken . . . , the same cometh out in open rebellion against God” (Mosiah 2:32–33, 36).

Here the association of God's commands with the voice of his appointed leaders is clear, and though Benjamin himself does not explicitly equate dissent with contention, this is certainly implied. Mormon appears to see the two as the same, for, in the Words of Mormon, he states that during the reign of Benjamin there was "much contention and many dissensions" (1:16). Thus, both in terms of their dissent with Benjamin and their attempt to return, Zeniff's group went against the commands of God and may accurately be viewed as being in rebellion against him, exactly the indictment that Abinadi proclaims. Unfortunately, this also meant that the colony was now to experience the consequences of this presumed rebellion, being cast out, driven away, and put in bondage, exactly as Abinadi had prophesied.

## **CAPTIVITY, DELIVERANCE, AND THE CONSEQUENCES OF REBELLION**

Abinadi is imprisoned and eventually martyred because of his teachings, his last words echoing his teachings concerning God as Redeemer: "Thus God executeth vengeance upon those that destroy his people. O God, receive my soul" (Mosiah 17:19). With this the historical narrative concerning the colony traces the colonists' experience with the devastating consequences outlined by Abinadi. But as devastating as the consequences were, they became the means by which the people came to understand fully Abinadi's message of redemption. And, in an ironic twist, this redemption would ultimately occur during the only return described in the Book of Mormon for a Nephite population—a return to the land of Zarahemla.

Following Abinadi's martyrdom, the narrative splits between the original colony, which remained in the land of Nephi, and a splinter group headed by Alma, one of the priests of Noah who was convinced by Abinadi's message.<sup>36</sup> This group, apparently fearing for their safety, fled and established themselves in a territory known as Mormon. As for the original colony, the ministry of Abinadi appears to have had an effect, as the king and his cadre become increasingly isolated, resulting in conflict between them and a portion of the population. This conflict coincided with a military attack by the surrounding Lamanites, who may have noted the increasing internal instability and believed the Nephites to be vulnerable.

In the ensuing chaos Noah was eventually killed, while his son Limhi was recognized by both the conquering Lamanites and the remnants of his own people as king, though in terms of the former, the Lamanites made it clear that he was to be a vassal king. As such the Nephite kingdom was expected to pay a tribute amounting to half of all they owned, which was partly used to compensate Lamanite military garrisons now stationed along the borders of the kingdom. Over the ensuing years, Lamanite-Nephite relations worsened, with the Lamanites “exercise[ing] authority over them” and the Nephites effectively becoming slaves, thus learning the hard lesson that “there was no way that they could deliver themselves” (Mosiah 21:3, 5).

As for Alma’s community they too experienced subjugation and bondage. Following their settling in the land of Helam, they were found by a lost Lamanite army that promptly did the same thing to this community, namely encircling the settlement with a military cordon. Mormon tells us that, over time, the Lamanites “exercise[d] authority over Alma and his brethren,” treating the subjugated population as a source of slave labor, complete with Lamanite taskmasters. Thus, the foretold consequences of the Nephite “rebellion”—captivity and bondage—were experienced by all members of the population, including the now-repentant, separated group of Alma.<sup>37</sup> More importantly, these experiences led each group to the realization that deliverance and therefore redemption could be achieved only by God.

Unfortunately for the original colony, this realization emerged only after three attempts to redeem itself via military conflict. The colonists’ defeats led them to “humble themselves . . . , subjecting themselves . . . [and] submitting themselves” to the will of God (Mosiah 21:13), terminology that Abinadi had explicitly used earlier to describe Christ’s obedience to God. Similarly, as Alma’s group experienced their prophesied bondage, they were told that their burdens would be eased, not taken away, so that they would “know of a surety that I, the Lord God, do visit my people in their afflictions.” Following a miraculous escape, Alma and his people “poured out their thanks to God . . . , for they were in bondage, and none could deliver them except it were the Lord their God” (Mosiah 24:14, 21).

In both cases the negative consequences became catalysts to recognizing the role of willing obedience in redemption.<sup>38</sup>

With both communities now in a state whereby they recognized their dependence on God, the narrative begins to describe their deliverance. It is worth noting that while neither Abinadi nor his teachings are alluded to explicitly in the narrative, his definition of redemption lies behind the historical events. As noted in the preceding paragraph, the redemption of the people was enacted only by their agency, thus highlighting Abinadi's doctrine concerning the role of agency, obedience, and disobedience in redemption and rebellion. As for the cosmic redemption, both groups either entered into covenant relationships with God to "serve him and keep his commandments" (Mosiah 18:10) or expressly stated their willingness to do so (Mosiah 21:31) prior to their deliverance, reflecting Abinadi's final instruction to the priests. The placement of these decisions in the text demonstrates that they were prerequisites to the actual physical deliverance.

The redemptive process experienced by the two communities concluded with a return to the land of Zarahemla and subsequent reconciliation with the greater Zarahemlan community. Of course, peaceful reconciliation was not guaranteed, since neither the community in Zarahemla nor the groups in Nephi apparently had any contact with each other for three generations. Moreover, as noted previously, the secession itself was not amicable. It is at this point though that the last discourse of King Benjamin becomes important to the overall narrative.

The relationship between this discourse and the narrative of the colony of Zeniff, comprising Mosiah 7–24, is not immediately obvious. In fact, the Zarahemlan attempt to find the colony did not take place until three years after the death of Benjamin, suggesting that ill feelings towards the dissenters still existed among some of the larger Nephite polity. Yet the proximity of the discourse to the narrative of the colonists suggests that Mormon saw a relationship between their rebellion and their dissension, thus requiring the teachings of Benjamin. On a more explicit level, the terminology used by Mormon to describe the state of obedience obtained by Limhi's people prior to their meeting with Mosiah's emissaries—"humble themselves even in the depth of humility; and they did cry mightily

to God; yea, even all the day long did they cry unto their God” (Mosiah 21:14)—is an almost word-for-word repetition of part of Benjamin’s speech: “Humble yourselves even in the depths of humility, calling on the name of the Lord daily” (Mosiah 4:11).<sup>39</sup>

In light of the subtle yet distinct relationship between Benjamin’s discourse and the colony’s historical narrative, Benjamin’s rationale for his speech becomes important to the message of redemption depicted in the Abinadi arc. In Mosiah 1, Benjamin tells Mosiah to “make a proclamation throughout all the land among all this people, or the people of Zarahemla, and the people of Mosiah who dwell in the land, that thereby they may be gathered together” (Mosiah 1:10). This request reveals that the populace of the city was not homogenized but was broken into two primary groups: Mulekites and Nephites. At the proposed gathering, Benjamin informs his people that it is his intent to proclaim Mosiah<sub>2</sub> as king as well as “give this people a name, that thereby they may be distinguished above all the people which the Lord God hath brought out of the land of Jerusalem . . . , a name that never shall be blotted out, except it be through transgression” (Mosiah 1:11–12). Thus, the speech has an explicit purpose, to unite the two population groups in Zarahemla with an identity that would apply to both groups.

The goal was met when, following the speech, the gathered entered into a covenant and received the designation of “children of Christ,” a transformation that Benjamin informs them makes them “free” (Mosiah 5:7–8) under the leadership of God and achieved only by being “obedient unto the end of your lives.” This is a process that is strikingly familiar to Abinadi’s description (and therefore of traditional Nephite prophetic tradition) of redemption. The reader is presented with a political scenario that can be resolved only through spiritual transformation made possible by Christ.

The unique nature of Benjamin’s discourse, as both a political maneuver and spiritual exhortation designed to facilitate unification of disparate elements within the community, may explain an apparent role in Ammon’s official presentation to Limhi and his people. Having found the colony, Mosiah<sub>2</sub>’s emissaries established formal relations, which included, according to Mormon, Ammon rehearsing “unto them the last words

which king Benjamin had taught them, [explaining] them to the people of king Limhi, so that they might understand all the words which he spake” (Mosiah 8:3).<sup>40</sup> Though somewhat vague, this description suggests that Benjamin’s discourse was delivered so that the people would be able to more fully understand the invitation that Ammon and the other sixteen represented from Mosiah. Certainly, the speech would have held political significance for Limhi’s people. It highlighted the legitimate claim of both Benjamin and his son, Mosiah, as the divinely and popularly recognized kings of the Nephites; emphasized the manner in which all individuals were potentially in rebellion against the true sovereign, God himself, but could become free through obedience to God’s covenant; and led to the unification of two separated communities by easing their cultural and historical differences through a process of coming unto Christ. These messages would have resonated with Limhi and his people by virtue of their recent experiences, Abinadi’s discourse, and the obvious failure of their own interpretation.

In any case, the narrative arc itself, consisting of both events, the speech of Benjamin as well as the colony’s history, acts as a repudiation of the colony’s interpretation of redemption while vindicating the traditional, prophetic Nephite interpretations, as represented in Abinadi’s teachings.

## MORMON AND THE ABINADI NARRATIVE

The Abinadi narrative and the Benjamin discourse—with their expositions on rebellion and redemption, as well as their historical content describing the efforts of competing ideologies for Nephite self-definition—certainly qualify as one of the more fascinating periods of Nephite history, or at least such was the view of Mormon. As noted previously, evidence within the narratives suggests that Mormon deliberately crafted each one to dovetail with the themes and arcs of the other. As for the primary theme, the nature of redemption, it appears that Mormon sought to demonstrate a continuity and therefore legitimization of the Nephite prophetic interpretation, in which redemption was a cosmic event rather than a historical return, and thus frame the unique Nephite identity within a greater Israelite ideology.

But it also appears that there was a personal connection to these narratives. One of the few places where Mormon’s voice explicitly emerges

is in his description of the events surrounding Alma and his group at the Waters of Mormon: “And now it came to pass that this was done in Mormon, yea, by the waters of Mormon, in the forest that was near the waters of Mormon; yea, the place of Mormon, the waters of Mormon, the forest of Mormon, how beautiful are they to the eyes of them who there came to the knowledge of their Redeemer; yea, and how blessed are they, for they shall sing to his praise forever” (Mosiah 18:30). In his own version of Isaiah 52:1, Mormon imitates Abinadi’s fourfold variation on the beautiful feet of those who had proclaimed, continued to proclaim, and would proclaim God as Redeemer, Christ himself being the ultimate messenger. It also suggests that the social institution described within the prophetic quartet, at least from Mormon’s perspective, could be the church itself, a perspective that might reflect his own position in the church. But it is in his introduction of himself in 3 Nephi 5 that the link between himself and the narrative is laid out plainly: “I am called Mormon, being called after . . . the land in which Alma did establish the church among the people” (5:12).<sup>41</sup> Thus, Mormon’s own identity is tied intimately with the formation of the church and its message of redemption, his name reflecting in a microcosm the entire history concerning Nephite identity.<sup>42</sup>

In a similar manner, while rebellion is an important theme to both the Benjamin and Abinadi narratives, particularly in its contrast to redemption, the phrases “wilfully rebelled,” as used by Abinadi, and “open rebellion,” as used by Benjamin, are used elsewhere in Mormon’s own record to describe the state of his people at his time.<sup>43</sup> This, in turn, suggests a deeper relationship between Mormon and these narrative sequences, for, like his own people, the two describe the conditions by which a people pass beyond the state of grace. Though perhaps not to the extent of Mormon’s own time, the absolute guarantee and then experience of bondage—regardless of later, repentant states—because of “willful” rebellion by the colonists must have been a prophetic warning to Mormon concerning his own people. Certainly, the seeming futility of Abinadi’s engagement with Noah and his people and the people’s attendant suffering following the rejection of the prophet reflected Mormon’s own inability to initiate spiritual transformation among the final Nephite community.

If that is the case, then it is possible that Mormon's interest in the narratives may have also been because they encapsulated a hope he had for his own people—that perhaps, even though their day of grace had passed, resulting in their being hewn down by the thousands because of their open rebellion of God, they would be placed, like Abinadi's Nephites of old, in a situation in which eventually they too would submit and realize that deliverance would come only through God. If so, then Mormon's inclusion of the Abinadi narrative reinforced his powerful, central theme of the Book of Mormon: that Christ submitted to all things so that he could redeem all in the fullest sense of the word through an Atonement that really is infinite and eternal, even when the immediate consequences are no longer conditional, thereby truly defining us. This may, in turn, explain why he believed an audience two thousand years later would need the same narrative.

## NOTES

1. See Brant A. Gardner's commentary, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 6 vols. (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2007), which provides cultural, political, and social analysis for the Book of Mormon generally. See Joseph M. Spencer's study *An Other Testament: On Typology* (Salem, OR: Salt Press, 2012) for a specific study addressing the Abinadi narrative.
2. The difficulty of determining whether there was originally more material written by Mormon concerning King Benjamin is based on Mormon's statement that he "had made an abridgement from the plates of Nephi [the large set of plates] down to the reign of this king Benjamin." Words of Mormon 3. While we may assume that "down to the reign" actually means "including the reign" (see Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, vol. 3, *Enos through Mosiah* [Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2007], 97–8), it is possible that it means the history of the Nephites "until" the reign of Benjamin, meaning that a detailed history, or at least a greater history, of king Benjamin may in fact never have been written by Mormon.
3. The differentiation between the two suggests that false Christs were more than simply ecclesiastical figures but may have had political implications as well, an association substantiated by Korihor, the anti-Christ who espoused a fully secular political entity as the government of the Nephites. The term *Christ* is

a Greek transliteration of the Hebrew term *messiah*, or anointed one, which in the Old Testament referred to a number of different social types: kings, foreign rulers, prophets, priests, etc. The association of the term with kings, or political figures, is intriguing because of the political challenges Benjamin would have faced trying to integrate the Nephite and Mulekite populations. Gardner suggests that term is used to refer to native inhabitants who impersonated deities by dressing in costume (see Gardner, *Second Witness*, 3:83) but then notes the challenge this provides with Mormon's expansion in verse 16, thus concluding, "Perhaps the false prophets, preachers, and teachers simply expand the category of 'false Christs' or perhaps they represent others who were championing competing religions." Gardner, *Second Witness*, 3:84.

4. Gardner does not address the explicit reasoning provided in either reference. It is his contention that the group's decision was an economic one: "A reasonable hypothesis is the comparative wealth of the city of Nephi compared to Zarahemla's poverty. Zeniff's expedition may have indulged in nostalgia for the lost 'good life,' something like Laman's and Lemuel's longing for their comfortable life." Gardner, *Second Witness*, 3:68. This approach stems from Gardner's assertion, following John Sorenson, that the city of Nephi should be situated in Kaminaljuyu, a pre-Columbian Mayan city, while Zarahemla was situated at present-day Santa Rosa. According to Gardner, at the time of Mosiah Zarahemla was poorer than Nephi, thus the move from Nephi to Zarahemla was a move from "an opulent city to one of relative poverty." While it is possible that the location of the two cities is correct, the reasoning ignores the text itself.
5. See Spencer, *An Other Testament*, 117, who also sees this as an attempt to reclaim an "original" Nephite kingdom. See also Grant Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader's Guide* (Oxford: Oxford Press, 2010), 126–27.
6. For an overview of the Israelite conception of "land of inheritance," see David Frankel, *The Land of Canaan and the Destiny of Israel: Theologies of Territory in the Hebrew Bible*, Siphrut 4 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 2–16. See also Elmer A. Martens, *God's Design: A Focus on Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1981), 108–15.
7. Daniel L. Belnap, "We Are Not Cut Off": Separation and Reconciliation through Sacred Covenants," in *Living the Book of Mormon: Abiding by Its Precepts*, ed. Gaye Strathearn and Charles Swift (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2007), 113–24. "This passage describes a people who feel that they do not belong anywhere, that they do not have a place to provide identity or meaning. Being Israelites, the

lack of a land to call their own would have been especially painful since their identity as God's chosen people specifically includes a promised land of inheritance. It would seem then that the loss of land led the Nephites to a sense of having a broken covenant relationship with God." Belnap, "We Are Not Cut Off;" 114–15.

8. As to how long the Mulekite population inhabited Zarahemla prior to the Nephite migration is a matter of discussion. Gardner suggests that the Mulekites were only recent to the area, as noted by the name of the city being the name of the Mulekite ruler. Following a pattern of naming found elsewhere in the Book of Mormon, in which the settlement is named after the leader of the group at the time of the settlement, the city of Zarahemla would have been inhabited only by Mulekites within one generation prior to Mosiah's arrival. As to whether there were other inhabitants is unknown. If this was the case, then Mulekites and Nephites were the dominant cultural entities.
9. "Benjamin is making a bold political move designed to preserve the internal peace he has created, perpetuating it by restructuring the political world within the city of Zarahemla. While kin divisions will certainly remain, Benjamin intends to erase political divisions and unify the people." Gardner, *Second Witness*, 3:108.
10. See 1 Nephi 10:3; 2 Nephi 6:11; 2 Nephi 9:2; 2 Nephi 10:7; 2 Nephi 25:11; and 2 Nephi 30:7 for the prophetic return of biblical Israel to the land of inheritance.
11. See 1 Nephi 22:8–12; 2 Nephi 10:2; and 2 Nephi 30:4–6 for Nephite-specific prophecies concerning restoration. In fact the Nephites were explicitly told that returning to their first land of inheritance would result in death (see 1 Nephi 7:15).
12. Gardner suggests that the "austere" nature reflects this individual's refusal to be swayed by "the possibility of acquiring riches by less dangerous means than military conquest. It also suggests that he had no sympathy or fellow feeling for the 'goodness' that Zeniff saw among the inhabitants." Gardner, *Second Witness*, 3:230. The term itself means "strict, severe, stern" (*Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "austere") and is used to describe one who was "severe in self-denial or self-restraint" or "severely simple in style or character; free from luxury" as well as "grave, serious." If the purpose of the expedition was to reclaim territory thought to be truly Nephite lands of inheritance and if the expedition emerged from fears of too much integration with Mulekite culture, then the individual's austere nature would be the refusal to brook possible cultural or religious

contamination by allowing the Lamanites to live. Incidentally, while this view is described in negative terms, it is the same policy as that of the ancient Israelites when they returned to the promised land. If the return to the land of Nephi was an attempt to return to their Israelite roots, then repeating the biblical policy would not be out of place.

13. “The title *gibbôr hayil* [strong man or mighty man] often carries a military connotation (Josh. 1:14; 8:3; 10:7, etc.), but this does not exhaust its meaning, as is sometimes assumed. Basically the expression describes social standing and implies economic power. It may be used in reference to a nobleman or wealthy citizen, such as Jeroboam (I Kings 11:28) or Boaz (Ruth 2:1). The *gibbôrê hayil* are the taxable gentry (II Kings 15:20), who in the feudal hierarchy of the monarchy are associated closely with the court (II Kings 24:14; I Chron 28:1), where the feudatory obligation of military service is especially important. Thus while the expression may have referred originally to military prowess (though to be sure *hayil* may mean ‘wealth’ as well as ‘[physical] strength’), it became applicable to any high-ranking citizen.” P. Kyle McCarter Jr., *1 Samuel*, Anchor Bible Yale Commentaries (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1980), 173.
14. See Spencer, *An Other Testament*, who notes a number of similarities between Nephi1 and Zeniff, suggesting that Zeniff deliberately used Nephi1’s writings to emphasize his own interpretation as to what Nephite identity meant (126). Incidentally, the emphasis on the full immersion in the Nephite language hints again at the Nephite-Mulekite divide. As noted previously, prior to the arrival of the Nephites in Zarahemla, the Mulekites had their own language, but with the Nephites’ arrival and the desire for integration expressed by both Mosiah1 and Zarahemla, the eponymous Mulekite leader, “Nephite” was taught to at least a portion of the indigenous population. This does not mean though that Mulekite as a spoken language necessarily died out. Mosiah 28:2 reveals that at least by the third generation following the integration, the Mulekites outnumbered the Nephites within the larger population. Moreover, a few verses later, we are told that the Mulekites and the Nephites still gathered in separate bodies according to cultural affiliation. These two factors suggest that Mulekite culture remained vibrant enough three generations following integration that the larger segment of the population still identified as such. This, in turn, suggests that Mulekite as a language still existed as well. The emphasis by Nephite leaders on their full competency in Nephite suggests that the language had a rival, or else this factor would not have been such a distinction. Indeed, the fact that it is a

distinction suggests that Nephite may not have been the actual lingua franca of the general population, a factor that may have upset nationalistic elements within the Nephite population segment. Regardless, Zeniff's mention of his full knowledge of Nephite places him in the category of other Nephite elites, who may also be identified by their having such knowledge. See Dan Belnap, "And It Came to Pass . . .': The Sociopolitical Events in the Book of Mormon Leading to the Eighteenth Year of the Reign of the Judges," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 23 (2014): 101–39, esp. 119–22. Also Gardner, *Second Witness*, 3:61

15. See Gardner, *Second Witness*, 3:244. It is also possible that we are seeing a very Nephite perspective. According to Mosiah 10:6, Zeniff states that the new Lamanite king stirred up his people "in rebellion against my people." The term *rebellion* suggests that either the Nephites had an ideology that presumed authoritative superiority not only over land they were granted by the deceased Lamanite king but also over the land still currently inhabited and governed by the Lamanites themselves. The term could also suggest that Nephites have actually settled territory outside of the agreed-to territory, a possibility that could be dependent upon the physical well-being of the former king and the possible instability of the new king as he consolidates his rule.
16. Gardner's commentary simply assumes a Mesoamerican setting: "The typical Mesoamerican ruler's 'seats' were low to the ground and would not even be described as chairs. The common native would squat or sit on the ground. A ruler would have a small raised seat or bench. Elevated seats are obviously a mark of social stratification, which would be very common in the kind of society Noah was apparently building. Furthermore, Noah apparently raised not only the seating but the flooring, so that the priests occupied a space that was higher both physically and conceptually." *Second Witness*, 3:255. Yet raised seats for priestly and political leadership are found in the Old Testament as well (1 Samuel 1:9; 4:13, 18; Ezekiel 44:3). Interestingly, such seats were often associated with entranceways into the city or sacred precincts. Thus, Eli sat at the gate of the tabernacle and the gate of the city, while the elders of cities were told to adjudicate at the gates while sitting (Ruth 4:1–2; 2 Samuel 19:9; Jeremiah 38:7); see Tina Haettner Blomquist, *Gates and Gods: Cults in the City Gates of Iron Age Palestine—An Investigation of the Archaeological and Biblical Sources* (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell International, 1999); also Natalie N. May, "Gates and Their Functions in Mesopotamia and Ancient Israel," in *The Fabric of Cities: Aspects of Urbanism, Urban Topography and Society in Mesopotamia, Greece and*

*Rome*, ed. by Natalie N. May and Ulrike Steinert (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 77–121. The text does not say where the seating is set up, but it is mentioned following the description of the temple reconstruction and the building of the towers. If the priests and leaders followed a biblical pattern, then one would expect these seats to be at or near the entrance of the temple precincts.

17. “Knapp recently wrote that ‘monumental buildings are culturally constructed places, enduring features of the landscape that actively express ideology, elicit memory and help to constitute identity’. Commemorative monuments in particular are structures that embody a deep kind of historicity, while featuring a collective sense of belonging and cultural memory laden with stories. This richness is usually attributed to the visual, textual and architectural corpus or design of monuments, mainly their narrative or iconographic content. I suggest that their effectiveness in captivating public imagination also derives from their specific site of construction, and the cultural significance associated with their locality. In addition to their inscriptions, visual narratives, or architectural symbolism, monuments are made meaningful by virtue of their place, the way they speak to the cultural landscape to which they are introduced.” Ömür Harmanşah, *Cities and the Shaping of Memory in the Ancient Near East* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 101.
18. It is Mormon’s summary that suggests civil dissatisfaction existed, and yet Mormon never states that the people themselves were upset over the 20 percent tax or the manual labor. “Looked at more objectively, a 20 percent tax, on mostly luxury or trade items, would actually provide tax relief to many Americans.... Mormon downplays the people’s willing participation. They are not oppressed and enslaved by their selfish king; rather they have accepted the same cultural definitions as their king. Those definitions defined their society; the public architecture would proclaim their support of that social model.” Gardner, *Second Witness*, 3:254–55. See also Kent P. Jackson and Morgan W. Tanner, “Zeniff and Noah,” in *Studies in Scripture*, vol. 7, *1 Nephi to Alma 29*, ed. Kent P. Jackson (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1987), 232, who state, “There is no hint in the record that they saw themselves as oppressed.”
19. While the relationship between prosperity in the land and the reign of the king and queen is noted in a number of disparate cultures so as to be almost ubiquitous, it is also possible that the declaration alludes to the specific Nephite promise that innocence from wrongdoing would be awarded with prosperity (see 2 Nephi 1).

20. Others have attempted to explain the priestly usage of Isaiah 52. On the one hand, some have suggested that the priests had no idea what it meant and therefore hoped to stump the prophet. See Monte S. Nyman, “Abinadi’s Commentary on Isaiah,” in *The Book of Mormon: Mosiah, Salvation Only through Christ*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr., (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, 1991), 161, who says, “The priest obviously did not understand the Isaiah text; he seemed to assume Abinadi wouldn’t understand it either.” On the other hand, others suggest that the unnamed priest (recognized as Alma) was inspired to ask for an interpretation from the prophet. For example, Rodney Turner says, “Undoubtedly inspired, one of the priests—was it Alma himself?—asked for an explanation of Isaiah 52:7–10, which speaks of Christ and his latter-day Zion.” Rodney Turner, “Two Prophets: Abinadi and Alma,” in Jackson, *Studies in Scripture*, 242. The most exhaustive study on the usage of Isaiah 52 in the Book of Mormon and its particular usage here in the Abinadi narrative is that of Dana M. Pike, who suggested that the intent of the priestly query was not one arising out of ignorance but one seeking to potentially frame Abinadi as a false prophet: “It seems clear from the tenor of the preserved account that the priests were trying to frame, and thus eliminate, this prophet who was troubling them. A likely possibility is that they had asked Abinadi to interpret Isaiah 52:7–10 because this passage indicates that a messenger of the Lord would come with good tidings, and Abinadi’s tidings to Noah and his priests were anything but good. Assuming this, the priests could then charge Abinadi with false prophecy.” Dana M. Pike, “‘How Beautiful upon the Mountains’: The Imagery of Isaiah 52:7–10 and Its Occurrences in the Book of Mormon,” in *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry and John W. Welch (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 249–92. Similarly, John W. Welch, in his study *The Legal Cases in the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press; Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2008) stated the following: “It appears that the priests intended, by their direct examination, to catch Abinadi in conflict with scripture. In essence, they quoted to him from Isaiah 52 and selectively asked him why he bore tidings of doom and destruction when Isaiah declared that the beautiful and true prophet brings good tidings and publishes peace.” Yet Welch goes on to suggest that “this passage of scripture quoted to Abinadi by the priests could very well have been one of the themes that had been used by Zeniff’s colony as they rejoiced over their redemption of the land of their inheritance. . . . In the face of Isaiah’s prophecy and its apparent glorious fulfillment by Zeniff’s people, how did

Abinadi dare to accuse both the king and his people of falling under God's worst judgments?" (176). If Welch's supposition is correct, then the examination is not to catch Abinadi as a bad, instead of the happy, type of prophet but rather as a false prophet who not only goes against the prophetic fulfillment of Isaiah but the uniquely Nephite identification. See also Spencer, *An Other Testament*, 142–44, who concurs with the role of Isaiah 52 in Nephite self-identity.

21. For more on the significance of Isaiah 52, see Pike, "How Beautiful Upon the Mountains"; see also Daniel L. Belnap, "The Bible, the Book of Mormon, and the Concept of Scripture," in *No Weapon Shall Prosper: New Light on Sensitive Issues*, ed. Robert L. Millet (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2011), 141–70.
22. The priestly use of Isaiah 52 and Abinadi's interpretive use is the primary focus of Spencer's study *An Other Testament*, in which he recognizes that the priestly usage would have reflected the colony's initial interpretation: "Noah's priests apparently assumed that Isaiah 52:7–10 had a single, obvious, incontrovertible meaning—a meaning that everyone in the Land of Nephi would immediately see. Such an interpretation would have to have been well-known and rooted in a culture-wide ideology" (142).
23. See John L. Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; FARMS, 1985), 23–27 on the use of *up* and *down* to describe elevation.
24. "Latter-day Saints often consider Jerusalem and Zion to be names applied to distinctly different locations, Jerusalem in Isarel and 'Zion (the New Jerusalem) . . . upon the American continent' (Article of Faith 10). This is true, but in addition to referring to the 'pure in heart' (D&C 97:21) wherever they may be, the term Zion has been applied in the scriptures to specific places where the pure in heart have gathered. . . . Many, if not most, of Isaiah's contemporaries would have viewed his use of the names Zion and Jerusalem in Isaiah 52:1–2 as a function of the interchangeability of a poetic pair of terms." Pike, "How Beautiful upon the Mountains," 250.
25. Interestingly, a generation or so later, there appears in fact to have been a settlement established in the land of Nephi named Jerusalem (Alma 21:1–3), encountered by Aaron, one of the sons of Mosiah.<sup>2</sup> Incidentally, Mormon's mention of this city may reflect his redaction of multiple records as two traditions seem to be involved in Jerusalem, the Lamanite city. Verse 1 suggests that Jerusalem is named by the Lamanites themselves, "calling it after the land of *their* fathers'

nativity,” but in verse 2 we are told that the Lamanites, Amalekites, and Amulonites built the city, which it turn suggests that the city was, at least in part, a Nephite dissenter settlement. Moreover, the presence of the people of Amulon may suggest that the city and its name reflects the Nephite prophetic interpretation associated with the recolonization of the land of Nephi and not Lamanite history. The presence of these two etiologies for the city suggests that Mormon is interacting with two traditions and is attempting to reconcile them.

26. “The priests of Noah may have tried to prove that Abinadi’s prophecies contradicted the word of God as spoken by Isaiah for two related reasons: they wanted to prove him wrong or show that he did not understand Isaiah correctly, and they probably wanted to prove that he was not speaking the word of the Lord and was therefore a false prophet. The definition of false prophecy in Deuteronomy 18 made it a capital offense to prophesy things in the name of the Lord ‘which I have not commanded him to speak’ (Deuteronomy 18:20). Abinadi had clearly invoked the name of Jehovah as the source of his prophecy: ‘Thus has the Lord commanded me,’ and ‘the Lord said unto me’ (Mosiah 12:1, 2). In order to know ‘the word which the Lord hath not spoken,’ the judges were to apply the following test: ‘If the thing follow not [literally “is not”], nor come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord hath not spoken’ (Deuteronomy 18:22). One option, of course, was to wait and see if the prophecy came to pass. Another approach apparently was to test the prophecy against other texts known to be valid to see if the new prophecies ‘follow not’ or ‘are not’ in the sense that they are inconsistent with the established word of the Lord.” Welch, *The Legal Cases*, 176:
27. Hardy suggests that these curses represent an allusion to the Exodus: “Hail, east wind, insects, pestilence: these threats never materialize in the history of Noah’s people (though the fulfilments of other items in Abinadi’s prophecies are meticulously recorded), and, given the cluster of Exodus phrases, they make more sense as allusions to the plagues of Egypt rather than critical elements of the Nephite narrative.” Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 159. For an explanation as to how these could also have New World phenomena in mind, see Kerry Hull, “An ‘East Wind’: Old and New World Perspectives,” in this volume.
28. 2 Nephi 6:11, 18; 7:2; 8:11 (the final reference highlights the redemption of the “redeemed”). As for Jacob’s commentary, the term is used only once, in 10:2, but, as we shall see, the entire speech reflects Nephi’s earlier interpretation as to what a Redeemer would do. After the textual inclusion of Jacob’s speech, a speech

that according to Jacob was commissioned by Nephi in the first place, Nephi then states that he included both Jacob's and Isaiah's material because both have seen the Redeemer (2 Nephi 11:2–3). The usage of Isaiah in all three communities in order to emphasize redemption is not coincidence. Nephi states that he deliberately used Isaiah to do so, and in fact the term *gōel*, or “redeemer,” found nineteen times in the Old Testament, appears thirteen times in the writings of Isaiah, the majority of these in the last twenty chapters of Isaiah. Thus, it is no surprise to find that the leadership of Nephi appears to have utilized the prophecies of Isaiah 52 or that its theme of redemption and restoration was used in the rationale for resettlement.

29. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1975), 2:350–55. “In Leviticus 25:48f., it refers to a man's brother, uncle, cousin, or some other kinsman who is responsible for standing up for him and maintaining his rights. . . . If someone sells a house or a piece of property to pay a debt, there is a right of redemption, and the nearest relative at the time is bound to buy back that which was sold and thus restore the possession of the family. . . . If an Israelite sold himself to a foreigner as a slave, the right of redemption by the *gōel* was also applicable (Lev. 25:47–54)” (351–52).
30. The Abinadi narrative includes a significant percentage of all references to *redemption* and *redeem* in the Book of Mormon (15 percent and 21 percent respectively), but more importantly, no other narrative sequence uses the terminology more than the Abinadi narrative.
31. This may be what Spencer senses when he sets out what he sees as two different theologies between Nephi and Abinadi in *An Other Testament* (specifically pages 148–50). The theologies themselves are not all that different, as both prophetic traditions recognize Christ as Redeemer, but they differ as to when redemption will be experienced. Even in this, the two theologies do not differ so much as emphasize different time frames. Thus, Abinadi's emphasis on the cosmological, eschatological redemption does not contrast or conflict with Nephi's historical redemption, in which God demonstrates his awareness of his people.
32. In this, Abinadi reflects Nephi, in 2 Nephi 25:19, who also interrupts his ongoing narrative to provide the exact same information concerning the historicity of Christ.
33. Again, this is not so much a new theological perspective but rather a reemphasis of an earlier Nephite prophetic approach. Though Nephi more often dealt

- with an historical perspective of redemption, one can find the cosmic redemption in his writings, particularly in his final discourse concerning the doctrine of Christ. In fact, in his discussion concerning eternal life and the doctrine of Christ (2 Nephi 31–33), Israel and history are not mentioned at all.
34. The use of Isaiah 53 by Abinadi is commonly understood as an indication that the priests lack an understanding or belief in Christ as Messiah (see Gardner, *Second Witness*, 3:284; Turner, “Two Prophets,” 245); similarly, his excursion on the law of Moses is understood within the frame of the priests’ rejection of Christ. While it is clear that lack of a full understanding of Christ’s mission may have been an issue, no text appears in which the priests explicitly reject Christ. Instead, it appears that Abinadi’s declaration concerning the law of Moses (that it does not bring salvation but is necessary to follow) emphasizes his overall message that submission to God’s will and law is what creates the environment for redemption. Thus, while the law of Moses does not redeem, Israel’s obedience to it allows for God to redeem because of their willingness to submit (see Mosiah 13:28).
  35. “For the Lord redeemeth none such that rebel against him and die in their sins, yea . . . that have willfully rebelled against God, that have known the commandments of God, and would not keep them. . . . Therefore ought ye not to tremble? For salvation cometh to none such; for the Lord hath redeemed none such” (Mosiah 15:26–27); “Remember that he who persists in his own carnal ways, and goes on in the ways of sin and rebellion against God. . . . Therefore he is as though there was no redemption made, being an enemy of God” (Mosiah 16:5).
  36. Alma’s familiarity and acceptance of Abinadi’s teachings concerning redemption may be seen in his words when baptizing the followers at the Waters of Mormon; see Mosiah 18:13: “Helam, I baptize thee, having authority from the Almighty God, as a testimony that ye have entered into a covenant to serve him until you are dead as to the mortal body; and may the Spirit of the Lord be poured out upon you; and may he grant unto you eternal life, through the redemption of Christ.”
  37. The inclusion of Alma’s group may be surprising to the reader because of their repentance and repudiation of Noah. But their conversion is clearly placed after Abinadi’s pronouncement of inevitability; they made these decisions following Abinadi’s declaration that the time for repentance and for escaping the consequences had passed. Thus, all were to experience the consequences of bondage and suffering.

38. See Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 167–70, who explores these two narratives and the relationship between them.
39. “Submitting themselves” is also terminology used by King Benjamin in his own discourse and by the angel in his message to Benjamin as recorded in Mosiah 3. The natural man, we are told, is an enemy of God, as opposed to the saint, who is “submissive, humble, willing to submit to all things” the Lord inflicts. Not surprisingly, this description follows Benjamin’s excursus on rebellion against God (and, therefore, against Zeniff and his son). For more on the relationship between Abinadi’s teachings and Benjamin’s discourse, see Spencer, *An Other Testament*, 121–23.
40. The speech was the culmination of a series of formalized events recognizing the authority of Ammon as Mosiah’s spokesman and normalizing the relationships between the two groups of Nephites. Covering a two-day period, these events included a public procession into the city complete with martial guard; the offering of hospitality, which included a feast and rest; and an official pronouncement that the citizens were to gather at the temple the next day to listen to public speeches by both parties. A similar pattern is reflected in Mosiah 25, following the reuniting of all estranged groups. At this event, Mosiah<sub>2</sub> gathered all the people and read the records of Zeniff’s people up through their return as well as the record of Alma and his people. Following this public reading, rituals of allegiance were performed, specifically by the children of the priests, who revoked their family allegiance and became “Nephite” (officially Zarahemlan Nephites). Like Ammon in the city of Nephi, Alma is also asked to speak following the words of the king. Thus, it would appear that there was a certain ritualized process associated with the official entering or reintegrating into a community. Intriguingly, there is another hint that this may be the case. In Mosiah 19:19–24, at the meeting between those men who followed Noah and those who had remained behind, both groups formally recount all that had happened since their separation, whereupon the text reads, “And it came to pass that after they had ended the ceremony, that they returned to the land of Nephi” (19:24). It is possible that the rituals of entering are what are being alluded to here as well. For other possibilities to this verse, see Gardner, *Second Witness*, 3:353–54.
41. Incidentally, this same verse highlights Mormon’s understanding that the colony has sinned through rebellion: “Yea, the first church which was established among them after their transgression.”

42. It is worth noting that Mormon would use Isaiah 52:7 again when describing the work of the sons of Mosiah and Alma<sub>2</sub> following their conversion (Mosiah 27:36–7), suggesting that they represented a fulfillment of the promise, thus vindicating Abinadi's interpretation again.
43. Mormon actually uses these phrases throughout later Book of Mormon narratives. The first such reference is in Alma 3 during the description of the Amlicites and the marks that they placed on their bodies to differentiate themselves from the Nephites. Mormon, as the author, pointed out that in doing so they fulfilled prophecy from Nephi of old, noting that while the Amlicites may not have known they were fulfilling the word of God, they were in fact in open rebellion against God, thus the necessity of their experiencing the curse. Elsewhere, while observing Nephite society immediately prior to the cataclysmic events denoting the death of Christ, Mormon noted that the people experienced “great inequality in all the land” because the people “did not sin ignorantly, for they knew the will of God concerning them. . . . Therefore, they did willfully rebel against God” (3 Nephi 6:18). Concerning this reference, Brant Gardner writes, “Whether Mormon's use of Abinadi's exact phrase ‘willfully rebelled’ is intentional or coincidental, the conceptual parallel is clear.” Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, vol. 5, *Helaman through Third Nephi* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2007), 287. In 4 Nephi, a 285-year summary of Lehiite history following the theophany of Christ, Mormon describes the emergence of the Lamanites at the end of this period as a designation not based so much on lineage but on opposition to righteous leadership: “[They] did not dwindle in unbelief, but they did willfully rebel against the gospel of Christ” (4 Nephi 1:38). Finally, *open rebellion* is used by Mormon in his own record: “And it came to pass that my sorrow did return unto me again, and I saw that the day of grace was passed with them, both temporally and spiritually; for I saw thousands of them hewn down in open rebellion against their God.”