



Insights: The Newsletter of the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship

Volume 24 | Number 1

Article 2

January 2004

Was Aminadab a Zoramite?

Matthew Roper

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/insights>



Part of the [Mormon Studies Commons](#), and the [Religious Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Roper, Matthew (2004) "Was Aminadab a Zoramite?," *Insights: The Newsletter of the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship*: Vol. 24: No. 1, Article 2.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/insights/vol24/iss1/2>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in Insights: The Newsletter of the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship by an authorized editor of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.

Was Aminadab a Zoramite?

In one of the more moving narratives found in the Book of Mormon, a group of Lamanites are miraculously prevented from killing the prophets Nephi and Lehi in a prison. The Lamanites and Nephite dissenters are then redeemed from their own spiritual bondage when they are converted to Christ.

In what is a key element of their conversion, the Nephite dissenter Aminadab reminds his fellow Lamanites that Alma, Amulek, and Zeezrom had taught them faith in Christ nearly 45 years earlier (Helaman 5:41), presumably during the mission to the Zoramites.¹ Shortly after this mission, the Zoramites who remained unconverted “became Lamanites” (Alma 43:4). Assuming that some of the dissenters in the prison had heard these prophets preach to the Zoramites, several elements of the prison narrative in Helaman 5 would have both recalled and graphically reinforced for them those earlier prophetic teachings. Indeed, this possible connection between the two events is strengthened by the parallel language in both narratives.

In his words to the dissenting Zoramites years before, Amulek warned that if they procrastinated the day of their repentance, there would come a

“night of *darkness* wherein there can be no labor performed” (Alma 34:33). Regarding the prison account, the record states that the would-be attackers were “overshadowed with a cloud of *darkness*, and an awful solemn fear came upon them” (Helaman 5:28). So profound was the fear generated by this darkness that they were unable to harm Nephi and Lehi and unable to even move (Helaman 5:34). Might these descriptions of the Lamanites recall the language previously used by Amulek?

Alma taught Zeezrom, who accompanied Alma on his mission to the Zoramites, that it is the devil who seeks to “*encircle you about* with his chains, that he might chain you down to everlasting destruction, according to the power of his captivity” (Alma 12:6). And Amulek taught the Zoramites that when the wicked repent, the Lord “*encircles them* in the arms of safety, while he that exercises no faith unto repentance is exposed to the whole law of the demands of justice” (Alma 34:16). Employing similar imagery, the account in Helaman states that while in the prison, Nephi and Lehi were “*encircled about*” by a protective fire that literally separated them from their persecutors, who in contrast were surrounded by darkness (Helaman 5:23–25,

28). It is only after the Lamanites began to pray and to repent that they were “*encircled*” by the same protective fire (Helaman 5:42–44). Much as Amulek had taught, the now-repentant Lamanites were included in the circle of safety.

Alma taught the Zoramites about the bronze serpent that Moses raised up as a “type” in the wilderness, “that whosoever would *look* upon it might live. And many did *look* and live” (Alma 33:19). He also urged the Zoramites to “cast about [their] *eyes*” in order that they might begin to have faith in Christ (Alma 33:21–22). The prison narrative in Helaman echoes this concept of “look and live.” The dissenter Aminadab “turned him about” and saw the faces of Nephi and Lehi within the pillar of fire (Helaman 5:36). “And it came to pass that this man did cry unto the multitude, that they might turn and *look*. And behold, there was power given unto them that they did turn and *look*; and they did behold the faces of Nephi and Lehi” (Helaman 5:37).

Furthermore, in urging the Zoramites to cry unto God for all of their needs, Amulek said, “Therefore may God grant unto you, my brethren, that ye may begin to exercise your *faith* unto *repentance*. . . . Yea, *cry* unto him for mercy; for he is mighty to save” (Alma 34:17–18). Similarly, when the Lamanites asked

what they must do in order to remove the awful cloud of darkness, Aminadab reminded them, “You must *repent*, and *cry* unto the voice, even until ye shall have *faith* in Christ, who was taught unto you by *Alma*, and *Amulek*, and *Zeezrom*; and when ye shall do this, the cloud of darkness shall be removed from overshadowing you” (Helaman 5:41). Aminadab’s counsel repeats what the Nephite dissenters likely heard years before but apparently had only now learned.

These considerations may suggest that Aminadab and some of his fellows were Zoramites

who as young men had heard those Nephites preach. More significantly, the account of their conversion shows how God can confirm the words of his servants the prophets in mercy as well as in judgment. [\[1\]](#)

By Matthew Roper

Note

1. The only time when these three prophets are specifically said to have served together was during the mission to the Zoramites (Alma 31:6), though it is possible that they served together at other times as well.

LECTURE REPORT

Early Christian Monastic Prayer

On 10 October 2003, Father Columba Stewart presented an Institute-sponsored lecture at BYU titled “The Practices of Egyptian Monastic Prayer: Desert, Cell, and Community.” Fr. Stewart is a Benedictine monk of St. John’s Abbey, Collegeville, Minnesota, where he is professor of theology at St. John’s School of Theology and teaches monastic studies. He is also the interim director of the Hill Monastic Manuscript Library, which is working closely with the Institute on its manuscript preservation projects in the Middle East and Ethiopia.

Fr. Stewart has published extensively on early Christian spirituality. His lecture provided an opportunity for students and faculty to hear the fruits of some of his latest research on prayer in early Christianity, particularly monastic prayer. He described the role of the scriptures, particularly the Psalms, in the spiritual life of Egyptian monks of the fourth through sixth centuries. Through a process of prayerful and thoughtful reading, as well as memorization (the book of Psalms and the entire New Testament would be memorized in the first years in the desert), the monks of this period used the scriptures throughout the day to praise God, challenge and transform themselves, and battle the demons.

Ancient Mesoamerican Initiative

At an Institute-sponsored brown bag lecture on 29 October, BYU anthropology professor

John E. Clark, a member of the FARMS board and director of the New World Archaeology Foundation (NWAf), reported on the progress of the Institute’s Ancient Mesoamerican Initiative, which he directs. Clark highlighted the cities included in the Mesoamerican Early Cities Project that are the most pressing and promising of the Institute’s research priorities. Of the 20 cities included in this project, funding is needed to proceed with 14 of them. Donations from Leon and Randie Reinhart and Alan and Karen Ashton have allowed work to begin in several cities.

Clark says the task of conducting this kind of research is so enormous that it exceeds the reach of any researcher or team of researchers and must be managed. For example, in Mesoamerican research, the Institute could accomplish more if it functioned less as a research organization and more as a grant-making organization. This would enable the Institute to select and fund external researchers who would report their findings to the Institute.

Maya Creation Mythology in the First Century AD

At a campus-wide lecture at BYU on 17 November, Professor William A. Saturno, an archaeologist from the University of New Hampshire specializing in Mesoamerican civilization, spoke on Maya creation mythology in the first century AD. His slide presentation and discussion focused on his discovery (in March 2001) of San

[continued on page 4](#)