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Editor's Note: Updates report and encourage ongoing research. The recent Update "Scouring with Faggots" (vol. 21, no. 7, 2001) called attention to an Aztec method of punishment that may help explain the curious wording in Mosiah 17:3 regarding Abinadi's execution. The following report takes an alternative approach to this text, from the perspective of textual studies.

'Scourged' vs. 'Scorched' in Mosiah 17:13

Very often in my work on the critical text of the Book of Mormon, I have discovered cases where the text reads inappropriately. Book of Mormon researchers have typically attempted to find some circumstance or interpretation to explain a difficult reading, but in many cases I have found that difficult readings are actually the result of simple scribal errors.

One example of this is in Mosiah 17:13–14:

and it came to pass that they took him and bound him and **scourged** his skin with faggots yea even unto death and now when the flames began to scorch him he cried unto them saying . . .

The word *scourged* is found in the printer's manuscript (in Oliver Cowdery's hand). This reading is followed by the 1830 and all subsequent editions. Unfortunately, the original manuscript is not extant for this passage.

There are considerable problems with the use of the word *scourged* in Mosiah 17:13. First of all, the verb *scourge* means 'to whip,' which does not make sense here, especially since faggots

(bundles of sticks for burning) are seemingly being used to whip (or perhaps beat) Abinadi to death. One can, I suppose, construct various scenarios in which one can be beaten to death with faggots.

More serious, however, is the fact that elsewhere the Book of Mormon text always refers to Abinadi as having been burned to death, not beaten or whipped:

Mosiah 17:18

and in that day ye shall be hunted and ye shall be taken by the hand of your enemies and then ye shall suffer as **I suffer the pains of death by fire**

Mosiah 17:20

and now when Abinadi had said these words he fell having **suffered death by fire**

Alma 25:9

thus the words of Abinadi were brought to pass which he said concerning the seed of the priests who caused that he should **suffer death by fire**

Alma 25:11

and now Abinadi was the first that **suffered death by fire** because of his belief in God now this is what he meant that **many should suffer death by fire** according as he had suffered

Thus the current reading in Mosiah 17:13 ("scourged his skin with faggots") contradicts all other places in the text which refer to Abinadi's death by fire.

The solution to these problems is to emend the word *scourged* in Mosiah 17:13 to *scorched*. In the very next verse (Mosiah 17:14), the text specifically refers to the flames scorching Abinadi ("the flames began to scorch him"). In fact, the word *scorch* is precisely in accord with Book of Mormon usage. This verb is always used to refer to burning the surface of something. Consider, for instance, the two other uses of *scorch* in the Book of Mormon text:

Alma 15:3

and this great sin and his many other sins did harrow up his mind until it did become exceedingly sore having no deliverance therefore he began to be **scorched** with a burning heat

Alma 32:38

and when the heat of the sun cometh and **scorcheth** it because it hath no root it withers away and ye pluck it up and cast it out

Interestingly, the same use of *scorch* for burning people is found in a comment by the Elizabethan John Hooker about the Spanish in the Americas:

they subdued a naked and yielding people . . . and against the course of all human nature did **scorch** and roast them to death (cited in Paul Johnson,

