

TEACHINGS OF THE BOOK OF MORMON

HUGH NIBLEY

Semester 2, Lecture 34
Mosiah 12–14
Abinadi's Message

We are on chapter 12 of Mosiah where he [Abinadi] comes among them. He gains entrance in disguise, and once in the midst of them, he throws off the disguise. That is a common device of the prophets, and angels do it. We are told that men have often entertained angels unawares. And the Lord himself was not recognized. It's a way to get an audience.

We have a very interesting thing here. This is an important element that we need to mention here right now. Verse 2: "And the Lord said unto me: Stretch forth thy hand and prophesy, saying [this is what's going to happen; this is the picture]: Thus saith the Lord, it shall come to pass that this generation, because of their iniquities, shall be brought into bondage; they shall be smitten on the cheek; yea, and shall be driven by men, and shall be slain; and the vultures of the air, and the dogs, yea, and the wild beasts, shall devour their flesh." This is resumed when somebody reports to the king later on, in verses 11 and 12, the things that will happen.

Then in verse 4 it says, "I will smite this my people with sore afflictions, yea, with famine and with pestilence; and I will cause that they shall howl all the day long. Yea, and I will cause that they shall have burdens lashed upon their backs; and they shall be driven before like a dumb ass." They are really pouring it on. That is a very characteristic element, as you know, in Meso-American art. I have a recent (October 1988) *National Geographic* that depicts that. This is typical of a scene. Pictures like this number in the hundreds. This is the way they are treating their enemies and their prisoners in this particular one. You notice the violence and ferocity, the unmitigated savagery, of these people—it's absolutely deliberate. This is from a very rich tomb down in Peru, and you will find the same thing up in Mexico and in Central America. But why this dedicated viciousness in these things? Things aren't done halfway, and this is rather characteristic of [these people]—this going to extremes. They have illustrated what's going on in this one here. You notice the lavishness and the wealth, etc. This is the wealthiest tomb yet discovered in Peru. But you notice the thatched roof. It isn't the sort of thing that Arnold Friberg imagines, although they were fabulously rich. There's marvelous stuff in this tomb. Notice the deliberate hideousness of things. Why? They make such gorgeous things and make them as hideous as they can. It's an interesting psychological study, isn't it?

We have some more here. Here's the richness of the tomb the way they found it. Again, it's the *viel zu viel*; they just pour it on. (You don't recognize much there; that's the way they found the guy.) But there's this costly apparel, the feathers, the beads, the jewelry, and the clinking and the flapping. These people were just walking Christmas trees. This is a thing that is often reflected in the Book of Mormon, this excess, and especially this treatment of the enemy the way it is described here. There are many pictures of this; it's a favorite theme. Here they are cutting people's throats, etc. They show lots of pictures with vultures and dogs eating people. That's what it says here. The [Lamanites] will smite them and cause burdens to be lashed upon their backs. There are some famous pictures with one

[group of] people bearing the burdens and the others driving them, etc. “Yea, and shall be driven by men, and shall be slain; and the vultures of the air, and the dogs, yea, and the wild beasts, shall devour their flesh.” We have pictures all over, as if they gloated on that sort of thing. It’s a most interesting aspect of the Book of Mormon, this savagery.

Then we come to the east wind and the insects and the pestilence, which follows the war. And verse 8 tells us, “Except they repent I will utterly destroy them from off the face of the earth; yet they shall leave a record behind them, and I will preserve them for other nations which shall possess the land; yea, even this will I do that I may discover the abominations of this people to other nations.” Well, why worry about the abominations? Why go out of your way to show how abominable they were? Why keep the record just to show that these people were destructive and wicked and this is what happened to them? This seems to be a very negative approach to history, doesn’t it? Well, this is for a definite reason and purpose. We should know that today.

Civilizations and cultures do not have to be destroyed. There are cycles; you get those in Spengler and Thomas Henry Buckle. In the cyclical theory of civilizations, they have a youth, a maturity, and an old age. Then they collapse. It has routinely happened to many of them. That goes with civilization. They become acquisitive and expansive, and you can’t do that forever. You’ll always collapse if you have an acquisitive and expansive civilization. We seem to think that unless the GNP goes up every year we are in trouble. If it stands still, then nothing’s going to happen. But we could talk about the stable civilizations that have been there for thousands of years and are still doing very well—on this continent, too, as far as that goes. There are such permanent societies. You can see them on these documentaries; they misname them “savages” in New Guinea and places like that. They say, “Since the Stone Age, they have been living like this for millions of years.” It’s not necessarily that, but they have a stable form of existence. Their food supply is regular.

There is a lot of lamentation now about the destruction of the jungle and all resources, and about the destruction of the ozone. It can’t go on, you see; you can’t expand that way. It always shows us that if we would just leave these things alone, where the balance of nature is established, and wouldn’t try to prey on each other and to get richer and richer, people could go on indefinitely. They can enjoy themselves and have a good time. It’s much better than our miserable rat race that everybody complains about; we’re always under pressure. There are these “noble savages.” The sixteenth- and seventeenth-century explorers and the Jesuits and others were impressed by what they called “noble savages,” the first people that Columbus met, etc. They had no weapons; they didn’t fight at all. It’s a very interesting thing that lots of people like that have been found. The “noble savage” wasn’t all a myth; there’s something to it. We know more about it now. We see these people who seem to be very happy.

This time Abinadi expected to be caught, of course. He threw off the disguise and said who he was. He wanted an audience with the king, and he got it. They took him to the king. Then they accused him of this prophecy. Now this is a very interesting study in textual criticism because this is what he said. Verse 3: “The life of king Noah shall be valued even as a garment in a hot furnace; for he shall know that I am the Lord . . . [verse 11] And again, he saith that thou shalt be as a stalk, even as a dry stalk of the field, which is run over by the beasts and trodden under foot. And again, he saith thou shalt be as the blossoms of a thistle, which, when it is fully ripe, if the wind bloweth, it is driven forth upon the face of the land.”

These passages are very interesting because they are found [in another place]. I was talking last time about a parallel case of the Teacher of Righteousness in the Dead Sea Scrolls, who goes through the same routine—the same persecution, the same hiding, and everything else—as Abinadi. And it happened about the same time, but it was in the Old World. He prophesied, too, and he used the same expressions. We see that these expressions come from a common source. There are references in chapter 50 of Isaiah. This is what it comes down to. First, put down Isaiah 50:9–11. This is the prophet speaking, just as Abinadi is speaking, just as the Teacher of Righteousness is speaking. They both quote Isaiah, and they quote it in a very interesting way from an older text. We find the parallel texts not in Joseph Smith and the Bible, which he could have used, but in Joseph Smith and the Dead Sea Scrolls, which he couldn't have used because they are a recent discovery. They quote it in the same way that Joseph Smith quotes it. If you can keep this straight, it is a neat example of textual criticism. So Isaiah says, "Who is he that shall condemn me? lo, they all shall wax old as a garment [he is not talking about the garment being burned]; the moth shall eat them up [that's what happens to garments]. . . . Behold, all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks: walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks that ye have kindled," you people that play with fire. These irresponsible priests in their wickedness are playing with fire, and they will be burned up by it.

Bearing that in mind, what does the Dead Sea Scrolls man say? "For those who stubbornly oppose God, there shall be violence and overpowering and a flame of fire. They are playing with fire and throwing sparks around." I suppose he got that from Isaiah. This is from the *Damascus Covenant* 5:13. Then the next verse is interesting. "Their weaving is a flimsy thing, the weaving of spiders." Notice how Abinadi combined them. If you play around with flimsy old garments and put them in the fire, they will be burned in a hurry. Here he says they are playing with sparks and throwing fire around, and their weaving (their arguments, etc.) is flimsy, as the weaving of spiders. Then he says another thing, "Thou scatterest the remnant of the men who fight against me, like chaff before the wind." Now Abinadi "saith that thy life shall be as a garment in a furnace of fire. . . . And again, he saith that thou shalt be as the blossoms of a thistle, which, when it is fully ripe, if the wind bloweth, it is driven forth upon the face of the land." Well, I guess they got that from the first psalm about the wicked man. He shall be "like chaff which the wind driveth away." But the thing is that Abinadi put them in the same combination that the Teacher of Righteousness did in the Old World. They both used the same old text is the point. It's an older text. Remember, we have the Isaiah text from the Dead Sea Scrolls, which is a thousand years older than our Old Testament Isaiah. Ours comes from the ninth century, and this is the first century B.C. This is the older text, and Abinadi cites the older text.

Abinadi is the most interesting character from the point of view of literature of any writer in the Book of Mormon because he is very subtle and clever. In his long speech here he uses puns, and a bitter humor comes through. And he knows the scriptures and sticks to them. He chides these people for not knowing the scriptures, for their ignorance. They claim to know them and he says, you're ignorant; you don't know anything about them. "The life of king Noah shall be valued even as a garment in a hot furnace." And [the king's] servants report to him, "And he also prophesieth evil concerning thy life, and saith that thy life shall be as a garment in a furnace of fire. . . . And again, he saith that thou shalt be as blossoms of thistle, which . . . the wind bloweth."

At the same time the Teacher of Righteousness was saying, "For those who oppose God there shall be violence and flame. They are playing with fire and throwing sparks. Their

weaving is a flimsy thing, the weaving of spiders.” The other is the likeness of thistles, and they are “scattered like chaff before the wind.” They play with these ideas and bring them in. This is a neat literary problem in the Book of Mormon.

We proceed then after he tells them about that. What do we have here? Verse 13: “And now, 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. And now, O king, behold, we are guiltless, and thou, O king, hast not sinned; therefore, this man has lied concerning you, and he has prophesied in vain [How do we know we are righteous? Because we have prospered, they said]. And behold, we are strong, we shall not come into bondage, or be taken captive by our enemies; yea, and thou hast prospered in the land, and thou shalt also prosper.” They are talking about the king. They are pretty nice, and this is an important thing. The message here is we are good because we are strong and prosperous.

A special concern of the prophets, and especially in the Book of Mormon, is the self-image. This is a big thing in the Book of Mormon, as you know. The more corrupt and wicked people are, the more they insist on their respectable, proper, decent, upright self-image. After all, who dresses flawlessly in the height of style? The *mafioso*, of course. You’ve seen plenty of TV dramas; you know the oil fellows on *Dynasty*, etc. The most ultra-respectable people are those who are up to the nastiest business on all fronts. They have to have this front of respectability and righteousness, and they work on it awfully hard. This has something to say about our times, too, as you can easily see. But this is a necessary fiction if they are to meet the charges and put the prophets in the wrong.

I’m sorely tempted, and I’m going to yield to temptation this time and read something I wrote thirty-six years ago in a journal on this subject. “And thus Western Civilization was nursed in the schools on a legend of Western goodness [this is the fourth century], the Western world of clean, fresh, simple, unspoiled pioneers [America’s image abroad, you see]. This fiction became the very cornerstone of the official Virgilian doctrine of *Romanitas*. ‘Rome was great because Rome was good. The emperors, who after the second century took the name of Pius and Felix, were giving expression, we are told, to the old Roman belief in the close association between piety and success’ while indulging in the ingrained Roman vice, blatantly paraded throughout the whole of Latin literature, of dwelling with a kind of morbid fascination on one’s own simple goodness [like Horace describing his *puritas*, or the famous ode—tell me how pure I am]. School boys have been told for centuries that the Romans were simple, severe, and virtuous folk with a near monopoly on *pietas* and *fides*, piety and faith, because forsooth, the Romans themselves always said so, though almost every page of their record contradicts the claim. What better demonstration for the effectiveness of the official propaganda? Teachers and orators drilled the essentials of Western goodness into their pupils and auditors until by the fourth century, when hardly a speck of ancient virtue remained, men could talk of nothing but that virtue.”

Salvian was a Christian who made a grand tour through all of Europe in the fourth century and reported on moral conditions in the church there. And what a report! “They go right on sinning,” Salvian reports, “in the sublime conviction that no matter how vilely they may act, or how nobly the barbarians behave, God must necessarily bless them and curse the barbarians for being what they are.” Yet Salvian himself shows how well the lesson has been taught when he stoutly affirms that, “after all, no barbarian can be really virtuous.”

“To the lessons of the schools, carefully supervised by the government, was added the more aggressive policy of deliberately widening the gulf between the two worlds [the Asiatic world was the world of the Persian Empire at that time]. For centuries, barbarian and Roman, East and West, had been mingling on terms of greatest intimacy, producing a borderline culture where it was quite impossible to draw the line between one culture and the other. Priscus mentions [he visited in the fifth century] quite casually the presence of people from the West visiting relatives in the camps of the Asiatics. He notes the busy coming and going of merchants between the two worlds and describes the kind hospitality shown to him, a complete stranger, in the homes of the easterners. But with this he gives us the other side of the picture, the official side—the ubiquitous activity of spies and agents in Roman pay, the infusion into the very court of Attila [he was a contemporary who visited the court of Attila and described it], large sums of money to corrupt and divide [they wanted to destabilize them, you see]. The insane and mounting conviction of the rulers of the two halves of the world [both barbarians; the other one was Theodosius] was that his was the divine calling to liberate the human race from the intolerable ambition of the other.

“The official attitude of the barbarians was set forth a few years after this in Synesius’ instruction to the feeble emperor Arcadius.” Synesius was a flashy character. He was a bishop in Libya in North Africa. He was a fox hunting cleric who loved to hunt and enjoy life. He told an amusing story. After a session in Italy, he was going back to his bishopric in Africa on a Jewish boat. The Jews had a navy and were great sailors; we forget that. As they approached the African shore, a terrible storm came up and started blowing them toward the rocks on the shore. The crew worked like fury until the sun went down, and then it was Sabbath. Not a member of the crew would raise a finger after that. They dashed on the rocks, and there was nothing he could do about it. He described the wreck and what he was able to save. They were really observant Jews. As soon as the sun went down, suicide it must be—here she goes! No one would lift a finger or pull a rope as long as it was the Sabbath. That is what you call Pharisaical.

“He admits that they surpassed the Romans in energy, honesty, reliability, and perseverance. ‘Yet for all that they are still barbarians and as liable to murder citizens in their beds as were ever any savage ancestors [security becomes the name of the game]. Your father has made allies of these Scythians,’ he tells the young and idiotic emperor. ‘He should have known that there is no virtue in a barbarian. From that day to this, they have simply laughed at us. Lacking the heroic qualities of their fathers, they are slaves, for they are a people without a land of their own.’ Hence the proverb ‘the empty waste of the Scythians’ for they are always running away from settled life.”

See they didn’t understand the significance of nomadic life at all; it didn’t mean anything. It sounds like what Nixon said, “There’s no such word in Russian as *liberty* or *freedom*.” That’s the silliest thing in the world. It’s *swoboda*. “Plainly Synesius thinks that the primordial ways of the nomads are some new sign of degeneracy. So far was one of the most learned men of the day, an expert adviser on foreign affairs, from comprehending the Asiatic way of life, which was impinging upon the Roman world at a thousand points.” Then the barbarians just ran over them—that’s all. Well, it goes on and on. It’s quite an article. It has been used in a lot of law schools, etc. It was required reading in the Yale Law School years ago.

Now we go on here [in the Book of Mormon]. Verse 15: “And behold, we are strong, we shall not come into bondage, or be taken captive by our enemies.” This was a very religious, sacral society governed by priests. Like in Thebes, they were priest kings. Then King Noah caused that the priests should gather to consult. The king summoning his wise men together to consult about things is a standard theme in ancient literature, of course. Not only [the priests of Pharaoh trying] to baffle Moses or the priests of Baal trying to baffle Elijah, but especially in the life of Abraham, as a child or a grown man. Every time Abraham threatened the king, the king immediately called his wise men, and then there was a contest between them. Moses’ staff [turned into a serpent and] ate the other seven serpents. And actually from the Old Kingdom there is in the *Pyramid Texts* mention of that—the staff serpent that eats the seven other serpents. It’s a very old story.

So we have this competition between the [prophets] and the king with his official wise men. He calls his counselors or wise men. This is a theme in the scriptures; we get it all through the prophets. We get it in Revelation where they call together the wisest people they have, and all their wisdom comes to nothing. They put their heads together and have no counsel at all; they are absolutely paralyzed. We reach that stage. Just by adding more men to the committee, you’re not going to make it any smarter. You might add up their total IQ and get a good hundred [laughter], but that won’t do it. Verse 17: “And he commanded that the priests should gather themselves together that he might hold a council with them what he should do with him.”

The king is worried. He is a very interesting character. He’s a playboy and has made himself very popular. He’s not entirely bad. He had a good father, but his father showed bad judgment in making him king, etc. But he has his problems, and he is going to have more of them, too. Verse 18: “And it came to pass they said unto the king: Bring him hither that we may question him; and the king commanded that he should be brought before them.” They are going to question him, so here we have a *disputatio*. It’s like Luther in Worms, where they brought all the councils together to face him. Or like Giordano Bruno in Rome before Clement VIII. He tried to convert Clement and failed, so Clement burned him. There are lots of these. We have the trial of St. Joan; you know Shaw’s play, where she has to stand before the council, and they all take turns asking her questions. That’s the routine way for a king to get rid of somebody who has made himself very obnoxious. They show the way the person stands up to it, etc. It’s a theme—the Scopes trial and things like that—in which we try to make heroes.

Notice the one question they ask him. Verse 19: “And they began to question him, that they might cross him, that thereby they might have wherewith to accuse him; but he answered them boldly, and withstood all their questions, yea, to their astonishment; for he did withstand them in all their questions, and did confound them in all their words.” Again, we go back to our Teacher of Righteousness, back in Palestine. The same thing happened, and it’s worded almost the very same way. [We just read verse 19 the Book of Mormon], and this is from the *Hodayot Scroll*, which is the *Thanksgiving Hymn* of this prophet after he has been delivered by the Lord from their clutches. “They spread a net to catch me, but it caught their own foot. Thou deliverest me from the spite of the manipulators, the rhetoricians of lies [see, this is the same situation]. From the counsel of those who seek smooth things, thou hast rescued the soul of the poor one whom they desire to destroy because of his service to thee. I was zealous against the deceitful men, for all who are near to thee resist not thy mouth or change thy words.”

Verse 25: “And now Abinadi said unto them: Are you priests, and pretend to teach this people, and to understand the spirit of prophesying, and yet desire to know of me what these things mean? . . . For if ye understand these things ye have not taught them; therefore, ye have perverted the ways of the Lord.”

In the *Hodayot Scroll* the Teacher of Righteousness says, “I became an accusing spirit against all who taught smooth things, and all the men of false teaching, deception, illusion, stormed against me. They profess to be in the covenant of repentance.”

In verse 27 Abinadi says, “Ye have not applied your hearts to understanding.” They hadn’t really made an effort to understand; we will see that in a minute. Verse 28: “And they said: We teach the law of Moses. And again he said unto them: If ye teach the law of Moses why do ye not keep it? Why do ye set your hearts upon riches? [see, he hits that first] Why do ye commit whoredoms and spend your strength with harlots?”

Then from the Dead Sea Scrolls, “They profess to be in the covenant of repentance, but they have not departed from the ways of the apostates. They have wallowed in the ways of whoredoms and godlessness.” Abinadi said, “Why do ye commit whoredoms and spend your strength with harlots?” And the [text from] the Old World says, “They have wallowed in the ways of whoredoms and godlessness. Everyone has deserted his family for immoral practices, zealous in the acquisition of wealth [he brings that in] and property—every man doing what is right in his own eyes, confirming the people in their own sins.” It’s as if these passages from the Dead Sea Scrolls had been lifted from the Doctrine and Covenants or the Book of Mormon. How valuable they are! And the Dead Sea Scrolls are in discredit. Nobody likes them because they say the wrong things; it’s very interesting.

He goes on in verse 33: “I know if ye keep the commandments of God ye shall be saved; yea, if ye keep the commandments which the Lord delivered unto Moses in the mount of Sinai . . . Have ye done all this? I say unto you, Nay, ye have not.”

Back to the *Hodayoth Thanksgiving Hymn*: “The preachers of lies and the seers of illusions contrived devil’s tricks against me to make me exchange the law, which Thou has engraved in my heart, for the smooth things they teach to the people—they who shut up the drink of knowledge from the thirsting ones [the Lord said this] to give them vinegar, to turn them to false teachings that they fall into your nets.”

Abinadi said [Mosiah 13:27], “I say unto you that it is expedient that you should keep the law of Moses as yet; but I say unto you that the time shall come when it shall no more be expedient to keep the law of Moses.”

The 1QS says: “From no precept of the Torah shall they depart until there shall come a prophet and Messiah of Aaron and Israel.” There’s even that idea that the law was absolute; this was the last word as far as the Jews were concerned. Here we have this Jewish scroll saying, “From no precept of the Torah shall they depart until . . . [the] Messiah of Aaron and Israel [comes].” That’s exactly what Abinadi taught them.

Abinadi goes on [in Mosiah 13:30]: “Therefore there was a law given them, yea, a law of performances and of ordinances.” You have to go through the forms as a drill, keeping yourself on the road. It’s a discipline. However well you might understand it, it prepares you for serious things. They were to observe this “strictly from day to day,” but they

didn't pay attention to that. "But behold, I say unto you, that all these things were types of things to come. [They did not understand the law] and this because of the hardness of their hearts."

Well, back to the *Damascus Covenant*: "And according to this rule they shall walk, even the seed of Israel, and in this way of living for the camp. This is the way they shall walk [again it says] in the time of the wicked until the Anointed One, the Messiah of Aaron, arises."

Verse 33: "For behold, did not Moses prophesy unto them concerning the coming of the Messiah, and that God should redeem his people? Yea, and even all the prophets who have prophesied ever since the world began—have they not spoken more or less concerning these things?" It has all been about the Messiah, he says.

Then the 1QS says, "As commanded by the hand of Moses and by the hands of the servants, his prophets, to atone for the sins, to please God in the land more than the flesh of burned offerings [this was the atonement which goes beyond the old law of Moses] and the fat of sacrifices—the heave offerings of the lips for a *mishpat*, like the sacrificial odor offering acceptable to Him."

It goes on and on here with very interesting parallels. (I didn't realize this was so interesting; I'll have to read it more.)

Question: Is the fate of the Teacher of Righteousness mentioned in the *Damascus* text?

Answer: Yes, he was put to death all right.

Question: [Not audible]

Answer: Now that's interpreted differently. When you say "a man of possessions," you mean a *rich man*. But *ish ḥokmāh* means "a man of wisdom, a wise man." But a "man of righteousness" means a righteous teacher. The Teacher of Righteousness means "the teacher who had the quality of righteousness." It is usually read today as "the righteous teacher." Sometimes they call him *the Star*; he goes by different names. But there were different groups under teachers like that. They were only twenty-eight miles from Jerusalem when they were driven out by Herod's soldiers. Most of the company went north and settled at Damascus. They kept the record there, and then the fragment was found in the genizah of a wall in an old deserted synagogue in Cairo, that had been converted to a mosque. Solomon Schechter found it and took it up to Cambridge, and it rested there for twenty-seven years. Nobody paid any attention to it at all. Then they found the Dead Sea Scrolls and said, "Ah ha, this is a Dead Sea Scroll." But everybody thought it was a fake. Solomon Zeitlin, the old editor of the *Jewish Quarterly Review*, believed it was just a medieval forgery, just a joke. He would never change his mind, although hundreds of documents came forth to attest to it. Stubborn people we are dealing with here.

Now, why do they ask this question? Well, it's obvious why they ask it. Mosiah 12:20: "And it came to pass that one of them said unto him: What meaneth the words which are written, and which have been taught by our fathers, saying: 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 . . . Break forth into joy; sing together ye waste places of Jerusalem; for the Lord hath comforted his people, he hath redeemed Jerusalem.” What he is asking is this: If you are a true prophet, why don’t you bring us this good news. Why don’t you teach us to rejoice; that’s what prophets teach. This is the kind of message you should deliver—good tidings that publisheth good and salvation, that bring joy and comfort to the people. Why aren’t you bringing comfort and joy if you are a real prophet? That was a logical thing to ask because they believed that we should enjoy ourselves and teach people what they want to hear. If you were a prophet like this, you would bring us good news.

“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.” Well, that’s a cheerful promise. Notice that it was the corrupt priests of Noah who were quoting these comforting words. They knew the scriptures, too, but they used them to back themselves up. We reinterpret things today very comfortably for ourselves, also.

“And now Abinadi said unto them: Are you priests, and pretend to teach this people, and to understand the spirit of prophesying, and yet desire to know of me what these things mean? I say unto you, wo be unto you for perverting the ways of the Lord! [they were twisting the words, as Abraham said] For if ye understand these things ye have not taught them; therefore, ye have perverted the ways of the Lord. Ye have not applied your hearts to understanding [it’s a lawyer’s interest you have, how you can manipulate and interpret the words; you haven’t applied your hearts to understanding this at all]; therefore, ye have not been wise [what are you teaching this people?] . . . And they said: We teach the law of Moses [they insist that’s it, and then again:]. If ye teach the law of Moses why do ye not keep it? Why do ye set your hearts upon riches? Why do ye commit whoredoms and spend your strength with harlots, yea, and cause this people to commit sin, that the Lord has cause to send me to prophesy against this people, yea, even a great evil against this people? . . . ye know that I speak the truth [that’s why you feel bad] . . . And what know ye concerning the law of Moses? Doth salvation come by the law of Moses?”

That’s the old law, the law of forms and observances. Salvation is *Atonement*—the center and climax of all the laws in the Day of Atonement, when we become one with everything. *Atonement* is the “universal field” that brings everything in. John 13–17 deals with that—how the Father and the son are one, the Apostles will be one with them, they to whom they preach will be one “even as we are one.” We will all be one. We will all be joined together hereafter in the world to come, when the world is as it should be. There will be the Great At-one-ment, the bringing together. This we don’t have here, but the law of Moses prepares us for that.

Verse 33: “I know if ye keep the commandments of God ye shall be saved.” The law of Moses will lead you on the way. Then he gives the Ten Commandments, but notice the thing he plays up here is that there shall not be any images. He talks about that here. Notice verses 12 and 13 in the next chapter. What about the graven images? Why bow down to them and serve them? Because see what was happening—there was a strong tendency at this time in the religion to go to idols. Idols became the big thing with these people, along with this lush, overdone sort of art, etc. The images, idols, and the visible display became a big thing. So he emphasized idols first of all because that was the way the religion was going, and that’s the way it went all the way. The first thing about the idols is that you should not bow down to them. Then he recited the Ten Commandments, and he said “And have ye taught this people that they should do all these things? I say unto you,

Nay, ye have not. In Mosiah 13:27 he says, “I say unto you that it is expedient that ye should keep the law of Moses as yet; but I say unto you, that the time shall come when it shall no more be expedient to keep the law of Moses.” But it was certainly not now; that’s what he talks about here.

If this were an Old Testament class, we’d go through Deuteronomy especially, but also Leviticus and Exodus. The law of Moses is far more humane, broad-minded, and just than the law we live by today in this country. It’s amazing how humane and generous and kind it is. Yet we talk about the old, savage, tribal law of an “eye for an eye.” etc. What a lot of nonsense! As Abinadi says, we don’t really study; we don’t want to find out what it really says. It’s like these people who criticize the Book of Mormon. They ask good searching questions that should stump anybody. But then they don’t wait for an answer. They stomp out of the room on a triumphant note, “We’ve won.” You can’t answer them if they don’t stay. They never wait for an answer. This is the only way they can maintain their ground. It’s a very common procedure in argument; it’s one of the ways lawyers win, etc.

Verse 28: “And moreover, I say unto you, that salvation doth not come by the law alone [this is the point here]; and were it not for the atonement [That’s the key; salvation isn’t the law, it’s the atonement, the arrangement that the Lord Jesus Christ made by which we are all going to be brought together again and become one with the Father. Without that] they must unavoidably perish, notwithstanding the law of Moses.” The law of Moses doesn’t take care of the law of entropy. The Book of Mormon tells us very clearly that the Atonement does.

Then he talks about their being a stiffnecked people. Even with a very strict law “they were a stiffnecked people, quick to do iniquity,” so the law was adapted to them. Is this the best the Lord could do with the chosen people? Nobody seems to be willing to accept it, and that’s true. No one has accepted it; no one keeps the law of Moses today. Are we ready for the higher law? He gave them the law of Moses, which they did not keep. Why do we have lawyers? Why do we need the Word of Wisdom? It shouldn’t even exist [for us] because we shouldn’t be able to break it. That’s a lower law which is preparatory. But you have to keep it; you’re not going to be saved without keeping the Word of Wisdom. So you say, “See, saved by the Word of Wisdom.” Nobody said anything like that. Remember, the introduction in Doctrine and Covenants 89 says, “Given for a principle with promise, adapted to the capacity of the weak and the weakest of all saints, who are or can be called saints.” This is a step you have to go through before you can expect the other things. So keep these preparatory laws like that. You do certain things and carry out certain instructions, which they were to “observe strictly.” Is there virtue in that? Yes, there is. But in nothing else than that? No, as the prophet said, that just prepares you; then you go on. Verse 30 states it beautifully: “Therefore there was a law given them, yea, a law of performances and of ordinances, a law which they were to observe strictly from day to day, to keep them in remembrance of God and their duty towards him.”

That’s why we have the sacrament; it’s in remembrance. It’s about the only set ritual we have outside of the temple, isn’t it? The same words always have to be repeated, and repeated in exactly the same way. The bread and water have to be passed the same way, etc. We have a rite there, and we say it is in remembrance, to keep our minds on track, to keep ourselves concentrated on that. It’s an act of duty and obedience. “Why do you do this?” the [angel asked Adam]. “I know not save the Lord commanded me.” Then [the angel] told him why, but first he requires that you do it—the law of sacrifice.

Verse 31: “But behold, I say unto you, that all these things were types of things to come [they are similitudes]. And now, did they understand the law?” They didn’t understand the law in the Old Testament, and they didn’t understand it in the New Testament, as the Lord makes very clear. They don’t understand it in the Book of Mormon. We don’t understand it in the Pearl of Great Price; we pay practically no attention to it. And we don’t understand it in the Doctrine and Covenants. We slide over these things. He says here, “Nay, they did not all understand the law; and this because of the hardness of their hearts; for they understood not that there could not any man be saved except it were through the redemption of God.” As Mosiah said, Always keep in remembrance your own nothingness and the greatness and goodness of God; then you can always manage to be happy [paraphrased]. But that’s the thing you have to do.

Abinadi said, “Did not Moses prophesy unto them concerning the coming of the Messiah, and that God should redeem his people? Yea, and even all the prophets who have prophesied ever since the world began—have they not spoken more or less concerning these things?” (This is an important verse in the Book of Mormon.) Well, they could ask, Where does Moses speak of these things? Where do the prophets tell us about the Messiah? The Jews still ask that. They say, “We don’t see any Messiah there.” Well, in the next chapter he proceeds to recite chapter 53 of Isaiah, which is the source of much of Handel’s *Messiah*. That’s the very thing he was talking about; this describes the coming of the Lord. This says that he shall come forth in the form of a man and go forth in mighty power—that “God himself shall come down among the children of men. . . . Yea, and have they not said also that he should bring to pass the resurrection of the dead, and that he, himself, should be oppressed and afflicted.”

Well, all that is in the Old Testament, but, as I said, you don’t have to see it there. The Jews don’t see it there at all. In Mosiah 12:21–24, he talks about the same thing. 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? [verse 23]: Break forth into joy; sing together ye waste places of Jerusalem . . .” This was a passage that they themselves quoted, which prophesies the coming of the Messiah.

Then he quoted these wonderful words from Isaiah 53. Most people find this impossible to believe, so naturally it starts out, “Who hath believed our report, and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?” As I said, most people find it impossible to believe; they say that John and all the rest can’t possibly have meant this literally. It’s out of the question—this is in a spiritual sense. They forget that if Christ had spoken spiritually, he never would have had any trouble with the scribes, Pharisees, or anybody else because *spiritual* was the thing in that day. Everybody had gone hermetic, you see. A spiritual Father? Fine, no objection whatever. Spiritual sacrifice? Fine, no objection whatever. It was because it was real that they were sorely offended; they couldn’t take that. So [Abinadi] talked about it.

We all know these immortal lines: “He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief . . . Surely he has borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows. . . . He was wounded for our transgressions [this is the Atonement—the price that was paid to bring about an atonement, the reconciliation]. . . . All we, like sheep, have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way [Section 1 of the Doctrine and Covenants says, ‘Every man walketh in his own way, and after the image of his own god, . . . whose substance is that of an idol, which waxeth old and shall perish in Babylon, even Babylon the great, which shall fall]. . . . He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter [that’s the

sacrifice]. . . For the transgressions of my people was he stricken. And he made his grave with the wicked [as low as you can get], and with the rich in his death; because he had done no evil, neither was any deceit in his mouth. . . . When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. He shall see the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied; by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities . . . and he bore the sins of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.”

Well, what does all this mean? Now we come to chapter 15. Did I mention chapter 13? (How could I get so lost here?) This is too good to miss, talking about the sharpness of Abinadi. The character of the man stands out very sharply. Let's go back to the text in chapter 13: “And now when the king had heard these words, he said unto his priests: Away with this fellow, . . . for he is mad.” That's the great solution. That's the Stalinist solution—a nice way to handle your enemy. You don't have to be responsible for him. You don't have to give any answer or explain if a person is mad. This is an alien mentality; there's nothing in common between you. There's no fault or sin or anything like that; you can do what you want and just put him out of the way. By calling him mad, the king won't have the pain of putting a prophet to death. Just treat him like he's mad and lock him up. He [the king] won't be under any responsibility to believe him or anything like that, so that takes care of it. The “alien mentality argument” exonerates both opponents and solves your problem.

They used it for Enoch (Abinadi is an Enoch character), John the Baptist, and Elijah. They are wild men [people said]. “There's a strange thing in the land; a wild man has come among us.” He scared them; it was a culture shock. If they went his way, it would be an awful jolt. They had to assume that he was mad because they were frightened. That's a beautiful expression in the Book of Moses, “There's a strange thing in the land; a wild man has come among us.” Let's go up in the mountains and see this strange guy and listen to what he has to say, his ravings, etc. They treated John the Baptist the same way. Remember, he was “the mad mullah of the desert.” He dressed in camel skin and lived on wild locusts and honey. The people flocked out to see him, etc. Josephus said an interesting thing about him. When people asked him who [John the Baptist] was, Josephus didn't know his name. He knew all about him, but he didn't know his name was *John* because he never told anybody his name was *John*. He said he was *Enoch*, a very interesting thing, and they took him for Enoch Redivivus, “the returned Enoch.” And, of course, Enoch is going to return with Elijah, another one who was treated the same way. So this Abinadi character, the wild man prophet, is a masterful invention of Joseph Smith, if you want to put it that way. That Joseph Smith could do almost anything!

Abinadi said, You are angry with me because I tell you the truth [paraphrased]. “Touch me not . . . for I have not delivered the message which the Lord sent me to deliver; neither have I told you that which ye requested that I should tell.” He said, You asked for a message; don't throw me away now. You know darn well I'm not mad [paraphrased]. Then his face shone. He was something special, and they were overawed. They “durst not lay their hands on him, for the Spirit of the Lord was upon him; and his face shone with exceeding luster, even as Moses' did while in the mount of Sinai, while speaking with the Lord.” And Joseph's in Liberty Jail. We have an Enoch figure, something very special here. “Yea, and I perceive that it cuts you to your hearts [see, they were overwhelmed] because I tell you the truth concerning your iniquities. Yea, and my words fill you with wonder and amazement, and with anger.” The establishment had drifted so far.

Here is another very interesting statement in verse 10: “But this much I tell you, what you do with me, after this, shall be as a type and a shadow of things which are to come.” The choice is up to you, he says; you will do according to your nature. The Arabs say “a man will do according his nature.” Or, as the immortal Heraclitus said, “A man’s character is his fate.” What you will do is determined by what you are. Of course, that’s the tragedy—not what happens to you, not what becomes of you, but what you become. It’s finished, as far as that goes; the Book of Mormon makes that wonderfully clear. Long before the Nephites were exterminated, they had ceased to be a civilized people. They were finished because of their character; they couldn’t do anything but lose. So he said, I tell you what you do with me shall be a type and shadow of what will happen to you. You will do according to your nature and suffer accordingly [paraphrased]. Your character prescribes the role you play and all its consequences.

You have the stock characters in the new comedy of Plautus, Terence, etc., in Rome. You have an old miser, a clever servant, and the son who wants to marry [the miser’s] daughter, etc. You know what’s going to happen. The miser is going to withhold his money; the clever servant is going to steal the money by a ruse, and the daughter will get married. They were stock plays, and each character had a wig. The saucy servant had a red wig. The girl had to be blond, of course, and the man had to have a long beard. And he had a miserly old friend to make more comedy. But your character will determine the role you will play. You’ll do those things because it is your nature. “You will do only according to your nature.”

Here is some of his bitter humor in verse 11. They are the great scholars who have been asking him questions about the scriptures. “And now I read unto you the remainder of the commandments of God, for I perceive that they are not written in your hearts.” I have to read them to you now because they are not written in your hearts. Oh, you have studied all your lives, and you are great students of what? Iniquity—you have studied and taught iniquity all your lives. He commends their study and their knowledge, but he is going to read a simple thing to them because they don’t understand it. It is not written in their hearts. Then he says, “I perceive that ye have studied and taught iniquity the most part of your lives.” They are great students, but students of iniquity. He gets some dirty digs in here.

Then he refers to the graven image again because, as I said, graven images were getting to be the thing—to bow down and worship them. Then he goes through the Ten Commandments. Well, the time is up now; we’ll have to resume later with all these things.