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Lesson VII. Abinadi—The Martyr

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LESSON DEPARTMENT

An Appreciation of the Book of Mormon

Senior Course of Study.

LESSON VII.

Abinadi—The Martyr.

(For Tuesday, Decemebr 7, or Sunday, December 12.)

"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." John 15:13.

Of all the scenes pictured in the Book of Mormon few equal in dramatic strength and splendor the martyrdom of Abinadi. A halo of glory always attaches to a martyr, but when love, duty, and courage combine as they did in his case they add a nobility that is sacred—a nobility that entitles him to the eternal companionship of the martyrs of all ages.

Abinadi sought not to win honor or distinction. Had he done so, he might easily have flattered his people into doing him honor. Had he encouraged them in their vanities or joined with them in their departure from the ways of the Lord he might easily with his capabilities have become popular. But he strove to do God's bidding. He was called to cry repentance to his people that they might escape the punishment that must inevitably follow their lives of wickedness. In his attempt thus to do good—to help those who hated him—he brought upon himself the fate of Carthage and Calvary.

You will recall that about 200 years B.C., under Zeniff, a band of

Nephites had gone back from Zarahemla to inquire into the welfare of their own people whom they had left some years before in the land of Lehi-Nephi. Having returned, they entered into treaty with the Lamanites and began to establish themselves in the land of their fathers. They chose Zeniff king and under his righteous rule prospered and served the Lord. At the close of his reign, however, he conferred the kingdom upon his son, Noah, who proved to be a successor to his father in name only. For "it came to pass that he placed his heart upon his riches, and spent his time in riotous living—" Mosiah 11:14. To satisfy his vain ambition and lust for the things of the world, he levied a tax upon his people of one-fifth of all that was theirs. With the revenue thus secured, he built elaborate and costly buildings, erected a palace for himself, planted large vineyards, established wine presses—in fact, he gave himself over to luxury, extravagance, and indulgence. His priests followed his example and his people in turn joined in a life of worldly enjoyment. Add to all of these things the pride that attended the successful repulse of the Lamanite army and you have a people ripe in iniquity.

To call such a people to repentance became the mission of Abinadi—a mission beset with difficulties. When people turn from God they naturally will not accept His servants. Particularly so when those servants must chide them for their wrong doings.

And so, when Abinadi called the people of Lehi-Nephi to repentance they clamored for his life. His call was a warning in no mistakable terms:

"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.

"And except they repent, and turn to the Lord their God, behold, I will deliver them into the hands of their enemies: yea, and they shall be brought into bondage; and they shall be afflicted by the hand of their enemies.

"And it shall come to pass that they shall know that I am the Lord their God, and am a jealous God, visiting the iniquities of my people.

"And it shall come to pass that except this people repent, and turn unto the Lord their God, they shall be brought into bondage: and none shall deliver them, except it be the Lord the Almighty God.

"Yea, and it shall come to pass that when they shall cry unto me, I will be slow to hear their cries; yea, and I will suffer them that they be smitten by their enemies.

"And except they repent in sackcloth and ashes, and cry mightily to the Lord their God, I will not hear their prayers, neither will I deliver them out of their afflictions; and thus saith the Lord, and thus hath he commanded me." Mosiah 11:20-26.

When the people heard Abinadi's message so violent were they in spirit that he fled for safety. After an absence of two years he returned in disguise and began once more to preach and prophesy.

"Yea, wo be unto this generation. And the Lord said unto me, Stretch

forth thy hand and prophesy, saying, Thus saith the Lord: it shall come to pass that this generation, because of their iniquities, shall be brought into bondage, and 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.

"And it shall come to pass that 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.

"And it shall come to pass that 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.

"And it shall come to pass that I will send forth hail among them, and it shall smite them; and they shall also be smitten with the east wind; and insects shall pester their land also, and devour their grain.

"And they shall be smitten with a great pestilence: and all this will I do because of their iniquities and abominations.

"And it shall come to pass that 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. And many things did Abinadi prophesy against this people." Mosiah 12:2-8.

Of course such declarations angered the people—so much that they took Abinadi before King Noah with a report of his preaching. Noah, deaf to the word of the Lord, declared "Away with this fellow, and slay him, for what have we to do with him for he is mad." But when the priests would have taken him, he said:

"Touch me not, for God shall smite you if ye lay your hands upon me, for I have not delivered the message which the Lord sent me to deliver;

neither have I told you that which He requested that I should tell; therefore, God will not suffer that I shall be destroyed at this time.

"But I must fulfill the commandments wherewith God has commanded me, and because I have told you the truth, ye are angry with me. And again, because I have spoken the word of God, ye have judged me that I am mad.

"Now, it came to pass after Abinadi had spoken these words, that the people of King Noah durst not lay their hands on him, for the Spirit of the Lord was upon him; and his face shone with exceeding lustre, even as Moses' did while in the mount of Sinai, while speaking with the Lord." Mosiah 13:3, 4, 5.

And so he continued to deliver his message as it is contained in the thirteenth, fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth chapters of Mosiah.

At the conclusion of these declarations, Noah again commanded his priests to take Abinadi and put him to death. He was bound and cast into prison. After being confined there for three days he was brought before the king who told him that he should be put to death unless he would recall the words he had spoken. Like Paul before Agrippa, Abinadi could do only one thing—stand for the truth. So beautifully did he do so, that only his words adequately can do justice to the situation:

"Now Abinadi said unto him: I say unto you, I will not recall the words which I have spoken unto you concerning this people, for they are true; and that ye may know of their surety, I have suffered myself that I have fallen into your hands.

"Yea, and I will suffer even until death, and I will not recall my words, and they shall stand as a testimony against you. And if ye slay me, ye will shed innocent blood, and this shall also stand as a testimony against you at the last day." Mosiah 17:9-10.

The rest of the story also is best

told in the language of the Book of Mormon:

"And now King Noah was about to release him, for he feared his word; for he feared that the judgments of God would come upon him.

"But the priests lifted up their voices against him, and began to accuse him, saying: He has reviled the king. Therefore the king was stirred up in anger against him, and he delivered him up, that he might be slain.

"And it came to pass that they took him, and scourged his skin with fagots, yea, even unto death.

"And now when the flames began to scorch him, he cried unto them, saying:

"Behold even as ye have done unto me, so shall it come to pass that thy seed shall cause that many shall suffer, even the pains of death by fire; and this because they believe in the salvation of the Lord their God.

"And it will come to pass that ye shall be afflicted with all manner of diseases because of your iniquities.

"Yea, and ye shall be smitten on every hand, and shall be driven and scattered to and fro, even as a wild flock is driven by wild and ferocious beasts.

"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.

"Thus God executeth vengeance upon those that destroy his people. O God, receive my soul.

"And now when Abinadi had said these words, he fell, having suffered death by fire; yea, having been put to death because he would not deny the commandments of God: having sealed the truth of his words by his death."

Other lessons will show how the prophecies of Abinadi were fulfilled; still others will relate the fruits of his mission through the labors of Alma whom his words so forcefully touched, but it seems fitting to close this chapter with a poetic tribute paid to Abinadi and his glorious sacrifice.

Abinadi the Martyr.

See the fearless Abinadi, stand before
a Nephite throng,
Speaking words of inspiration, faith-
ful, calling loud and long,
To the king, his priests, and people,
every one both high and low,
That the Lord, in sore displeasure,
would their greatness over-
throw.

"Ye shall all be brought to bondage,
fathers, mothers, daughters fair,
All shall feel the wrath of Heaven,
all shall see God's arm made
bare.

Lashed shall be the heavy burdens on
your backs from morn till night.
Soon the hail and wind and tempest
shall o'ertake you in your flight.

"And thou, oh great and proud King
Noah, all thy greatness now is
gone.

Soon thy life shall be in value, as a
garment scorched and torn,
As the blossoms of the thistle which
the wind blows o'er the land,
Or the dry stalk in the field, when
trodden under foot of man.

"I have seen thy sins and whoredoms,
saith the Lord, in light of day,
And thy great abominations, while
they have long borne sway.
Now the Lamanites no longer in their
thousands can be driven
By thy fifties, as when victory
crown'd thee from thy God of
Heaven.

"I have seen the great taxation which
thy people cannot bear,
In thy folly, made to fatten those
who've fallen in thy snare.
I have seen the gold and silver, and
the ziff, the brass, and iron
Made to adorn the spacious palace,
when thou sit'st upon thy
throne.

"And the Temple which thy fathers
built to my most Holy name,
Thou has wickedly polluted, and has
gloried in thy shame.
From the seats of my High Priest-
hood, which my wisdom hath
designed,
Now is heard the lying precepts of
thy priests of darkened mind.

"All I've said shall come upon you:
King and people, every one
Who have heard this proclamation,
take my warning and return
Unto God in true repentance, that you
may His mercy see.
Hear the words of Abinadi, for, thus
hath God commanded me."

"Who is the Lord?" said great King
Noah, "Would afflict my peo-
ple so,
And who, I ask, Abinadi, who thus
declare to overthrow?
Bring him here, that I may slay him,
for thus daring to appear
In the kingdom of King Noah, who
is honored far and near!"

Abinadi now is sought for, but is no-
where to be found.
King, nor priest, nor wicked people,
care aught for the Gospel
sound,

But continue in their folly, waxing
worse from day to day,
Heeding not the Prophet's warning;
till two years have passed away.

Then in power and voice of thun-
Abinadi's words were pour'd.
Upon King and priest and people,
who in their pride defied the
Lord.

Such is the power of human blind-
ness, when no light from Heav-
en is nigh
All the priests save one condemn'd
him—Abinadi now must die.

This one was Alma, who had spoken
in defense of truth—tho' vain,
For the King was wroth, and ordered
that young Alma should be
slain,
But he fled, and while in exile, wote
the words we hold so dear
Of the Prophet Abinadi, whose loved
memory we revere.

Now the wrath of King and people
rose like tempest on the main,
"Seize this fellow, bind him, slay him,
let him perish in the flame!"

"Touch me not!" said Abinadi, "till
my message I declare,
Touch me not for God shall smite
you! hold, ye wicked ones for-
bear!"

Then he stretched his arm and told
them, that in nations far away

Men would tell these deeds of darkness to their children, and would say:

"See how vain the strength of kingdoms, or the power of man to save;

When the Lord comes out in vengeance, let the wicked cease to rave."

Still in language sharp and powerful, Abinadi's words were hurled On the Nephite King and people till his message had been told, Then the face of Abinadi shone in glorious lustre bright, Like as Moses on Sinai, hallowed by the heavenly light.

Now they scourged his skin with fagots; soon the scorching flames ascend,

While he told them of their future, that their own fate in the end Would be also pains and burnings; still the flames around him roll, And the last words of Abinadi were "O God, receive my soul!"

May the youth of modern Israel ever cherish scenes like these,

That such tales of pure devotion may not vanish with the breeze, That the names of noble Martyrs may in honor still be sung

By the good and wise in Zion, in the ages yet to come

Glasgow, June 22, 1882.

—A. N. MacFarlane.

OUTLINE.

The glory that attaches to the term Martyr.

Abinadi called to cry repentance to his people

His message.

He is brought before King Noah.

The terms upon which he may be released.

His dramatic stand for the truth.

His martyrdom.

QUESTIONS AND SUGGESTIONS.

1. Review of the history of the Nephites from the time they left Jerusalem until they arrived at Lehi-Nephi. Follow them to Zarahemla.

2. Explain why some of them returned to Lehi-Nephi.

3 Summarize their history under King Zeniff.

4. Discuss the conditions of the Nephites under King Noah (For this review it may be well to assign special topics to individual members of the class)

5. Why was Abinadi's mission a particularly difficult one?

6. Compare it with the mission of other prophets you are familiar with.

7. Compare Abinadi before Noah with Paul before Agrippa. See Acts 26.

8. Why does the Lord permit His prophets to be put to death?

LESSON VIII.

Alma—A Study in True Nobility.

(For Tuesday, December 14, or Sunday, December 19.)

It is always an inspiration to encounter a man of integrity, of character, zealous in his devotion to the work of the Lord. It is doubly so just now when political slander, religious indifference, and financial manipulation fairly seem to shake the confidence of man in his fellows. To find men who in the face of temptation, hardship, and calamity can hold on steadfastly to what they know to be true is a real joy. For this reason it is a de-

light to ponder the life stories of some of the men who stand out as the great characters in Book of Mormon history.

Such a character was Nephi, the great founder of the Nephite Church here in America—He was a sort of combination of Joseph Smith and Brigham Young to his people. His life, too well known to need repetition here, was dedicated to the service of the Lord with a faith seldom surpassed.