



Type: Book Chapter

Chapter XI

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Source: *The Story of the Book of Mormon*

Published: Salt Lake City; Joseph Hyrum Parry, 1888

Pages: 86-94

Abstract: Zeniff Returns to the Land of Nephi—His Treaty with the Lamanites—The Prosperity of the People of Zeniff—The Treaty Broken—War—Peace and Wars Again—The Death of Zeniff—Noah's Wicked Reign—His Wars with the Lamanites—The Prophet Abinadi—His Terrible Message of God's Wrath—He is Martyred—Alma—He Pleads for Abinadi—Is Cast Out—Flees to the Place of Mormon

So before he dismissed the multitude he consecrated his son Mosiah to be their king, appointed priests to instruct the people in the ways of the Lord, and, with his patriarchal blessing, dismissed his subjects. Then according to their respective families they all departed for their own homes.

Mosiah now reigned in his father's stead, whilst Benjamin, beloved and honored, remained yet another three years on the earth before he returned to the presence of his Father in heaven.

CHAPTER XI.

ZENIFF RETURNS TO THE LAND OF NEPHI—HIS TREATY WITH THE LAMANITES—THE PROSPERITY OF THE PEOPLE OF ZENIFF—THE TREATY BROKEN—WAR—PEACE AND WARS AGAIN—THE DEATH OF ZENIFF—NOAH'S WICKED REIGN—HIS WARS WITH THE LAMANITES—THE PROPHET ABINADI—HIS TERRIBLE MESSAGE OF GOD'S WRATH—HE IS MARTYRED—ALMA—HE PLEADS FOR ABINADI—IS CAST OUT—FLEES TO THE PLACE OF MORMON.

BEFORE proceeding with the story of king Mosiah's reign, we will return to the land of Nephi, and learn how matters are progressing there. It will be recollected that during the reign of king Benjamin a company started from Zarahemla to return to the old home of the Nephites. Their leader's name was Zeniff. What became of him and them was a question that was never answered during that king's lifetime.

Zeniff and his people, having left Zarahemla, traveled southward towards the land of Nephi. The blessings of the Lord were not greatly with them, for they did not seek him nor strive to do his will. In the wilderness they lost their way, and suffered from famine and many afflictions; but after many days they reached the neighborhood of the city of Lehi-Nephi, the former home of their race. Here Zeniff chose four of his company, and accompanied by them went to the king of the Lamanites. This monarch received them with the appearance of kindness. He made a treaty with them, and gave them the lands of Lehi-Nephi and Shilom to dwell in. He also caused his own people to remove out of these cities and the surrounding country that Zeniff's people might have full possession. The king of the Lamanites was in reality not as friendly as he pretended to be. His object was to get the industrious Nephites to settle in the midst of his people, and then by his superior numbers to make them his slaves; for his own subjects were a lazy, unprogressive race.

As soon as Zeniff and his followers occupied their new possessions they went to work to build houses and to repair the walls of the city; for the idle Lamanites had suffered them to fall into decay. They also commenced to till the ground, and to plant all manner of seeds of grain, vegetables and fruit therein. Soon, through their thrift and industry, they began to prosper and multiply. This caused King Laman to grow uneasy. He desired to bring them into bondage that his people might reap the benefits of the labors of the Nephites. But they were growing so rapidly that he feared that if he did not soon put a stop to their increase they would be the stronger of the two people.

To prevent this he began to stir up the hearts of his people in anger against the Nephites. He succeeded so well that in the thirteenth year of Zeniff's reign in the land of Lehi-Nephi a numerous host of Lamanites suddenly fell upon his people, while they were feeding and watering their flocks, and began to slay them. They also carried off some of their flocks, and the corn from their fields.

Those of the Nephites who were not slain or overtaken fled to Zeniff. As quickly as he could he armed his people with bows and arrows, swords and cimeters, clubs and slings, and with such other weapons as they could invent. Thus armed they went forth in the strength of the Lord to meet the enemy, for in their hour of peril they had cried mightily unto him, and he heard their cries and answered their prayers.

Thus strengthened they met their foes. The battle was an obstinate and a bloody one. It lasted all day and all night. At last the Lamanites were driven back with a loss of 3043 warriors, while the people of Zeniff had to mourn the death of 279 of their brethren. After this there was peace in the land for many years.

During this time of peace Zeniff taught his people to be very industrious. He caused his men to till the ground and raise all kinds of fruit and grain. The women he had spin and make cloth for clothing, fine linen, etc. In this way for twenty-two years they prospered and had uninterrupted peace; but at the end of that period the Lamanites again came up to war against them.

At this time the old king Laman died, and his son succeeded him upon the throne. Like many young

men, he desired to distinguish himself in war. So he gathered a numerous host of the Lamanites and having armed them in the same manner as the Nephites, he led them to the north of the land of Shemlon, which lay side by side the land of Nephi-Lehi.

An army of the Lamanites was at this era a strange sight to look upon. Their heads were shaved, the only covering of their bodies was a leathern girdle around their loins, otherwise they were naked. Their arms were bows, arrows, slings, swords, etc.

When Zeniff learned of the approach of young king Laman's armies, he caused the women and children of his people to hide in the wilderness; but every man, young or old, who was able to bear arms was placed in the ranks to go out against the foe. Zeniff himself was then an aged man, but he still continued to command his forces and led them in person to battle. But before doing so he recounted to his soldiery the history of the two peoples, stimulated them to valor by shewing them that in this contest they were in the right; then calling upon them to put their trust in God, he led them to the onset. Strengthened by the faith Zeniff had renewed in their hearts, the Nephites gained a great victory; and so numerous were the slain of the Lamanites that they were not counted. After this there was peace again in the land, which continued all the remaining days of Zeniff. Shortly after this he died, and, unfortunately for his kingdom, chose for his successor an unworthy son, named Noah, who led the people into many sins and ruled with such folly and weakness that they fell an easy prey to the ever-watchful foe that everywhere surrounded them.

King Noah did not walk in the ways of his father, for he was a very wicked man. He was filled with lust and cruelty, and ruled his people with a tyrant's hand. He removed the good priests who had been consecrated by his father, and placed corrupt men, of his own stamp, in their stead. Then he lay heavy taxes upon the people, even one fifth of all they possessed, whether it was gold or silver, grain or fruit, flocks or herds. These taxes he wasted upon himself and his priests, upon his wives and concubines, and the harlots with whom the priests consorted. Noah also built a very grand palace in Lehi-Nephi for his own comfort, and spent much in lavishly ornamenting the temple in that city. Near the temple he erected a very high tower, so high that any one standing upon its top could see all over the surrounding country. He also did much building in the land of Shilom, and there erected another high tower. Furthermore he planted many vineyards and made his people a drunken race. All this he did with the riches which he ground out of his tax-burdened subjects.

How different was his course to that of the righteous Benjamin, who was at that time reigning in Zarahemla. We can scarcely conceive of two men more different in habits and character. The great care of the one was to serve God and benefit his people, the other had no other thought than to gratify his own desires and live for his own pleasure, no matter how much pain or suffering it caused his fellow men.

Again the Lamanites attacked the Nephites while engaged in their labors, killed them and drove off their flocks. King Noah then set guards around the land, but in such small numbers that they were destroyed.

He finally sent his armies and drove the Lamanites away. This victory made him and his people conceited and boastful, and developed a delight in them to shed the blood of the Lamanites.

At this time a prophet, named Abinadi, appeared among them, and predicted that they would be brought into bondage to their enemies unless they repented of their wickedness. The king and the people were very angry with Abinadi, and sought to take his life. Two years after he came among them in disguise. This time he uttered, in the name of the Lord, very terrible prophecies against Noah and his people. He told them that they should go into bondage to their enemies, that they should be smitten like dumb beasts and be slain. That vultures and dogs should devour their carcasses. That famine and pestilence should come upon them, and hail and insects should destroy their crops. And in the end, if they did not repent, they should be utterly destroyed. All of which was fulfilled in a very few years.

Abinadi was one of the greatest of prophets; he was filled with the Holy Ghost, but the people would not heed him, and the more he exposed their iniquities the more furious raged their anger against him. Neither did they believe his words; in their own opinion they were everything that was good. They were mighty in their own strength, and unapproachably wise in their own conceit. Never, if you could believe them, had a better, more valiant, more-innocent people lived. Filled with this spirit of self-conceit they took Abinadi, bound him, and hurried him, with railing accusations, before the king. There the priests began to cross-question him, that they might confuse him and cause him to

say something that would give them a pretext for slaying him. This conduct was providentially turned to the glory of God and to the good of many souls. It gave Abinadi the chance in turn to question his accusers, by which he shewed their deceit and iniquity; and it also enabled him to explain many of the principles of the gospel of life and salvation. His teachings pricked the hearts of a few, while they more greatly enraged the greater number. Particularly did he impress upon their minds the great truth that Christ should come, and quoted the words of Isaiah and other Hebrew prophets to sustain his words. His teachings are among the strongest and plainest that any of the scriptures record, and should be read by all who desire to become fully acquainted with the truths of divine love and mercy for fallen humanity.

These doctrines were, however, exactly what Noah's infidel priests did not want. They charged Abinadi with having reviled the king, and on this charge obtained Noah's consent for his execution. And Abinadi was cruelly tortured and burned to death by his fellow citizens in the sin-stained city of Lehi-Nephi. How strange that people can so quickly grow wicked. In Zeniff's reign they kept God's laws, if only after a fashion, but in Noah's days, led by his bad example, they sank to the depth of shedding innocent blood, and taking the life of one who had done them no wrong, but whose only fault was to reprove them of their wrong doings, and to strive to teach them repentance and the road to heaven.

Abinadi's last words were very terrible in their prophetic denunciations. When the flames began to scorch him he cried out:

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. ● God, receive my soul.

But all the people did not in their hearts consent to this great crime. One among them especially, whose name was Alma, confessed the truth of Abinadi's words. He knew that the grave charges the prophet made were true. He was a young man, one of Noah's priests, and when the clamor was highest for Abinadi's death, he went to the king and plead in Abinadi's behalf. This so angered Noah that he had Alma cast out of his presence, and then sent his servants after the young priest to slay him. Alma, however, hid from his pursuers, and, during his concealment, wrote the words he had heard Abinadi speak, which teachings now form one of the most important of the doctrinal portions of the Book of Mormon.

The power and importance of Abinadi's teachings had sunk deep in the heart of Alma; he not only realized their truth, but he comprehended their saving value. The first lesson they impressed upon his mind was the necessity of his own repentance. This he did

sincerely; and then began to teach the same lesson to others. For fear of the king he did not do this openly, but secretly as opportunity permitted.

Alma's preaching of God's holy word was not without fruit. Many received the truth with joy. These gathered to a convenient spot on the borders of the wilderness, but not far off their city. This place was called Mormon. It was admirably suited for a hiding-place, having been formerly infested by ravenous wild beasts, and as such was dreaded and avoided by the people. Near by was a thicket or forest of small trees, in which the gospel believers could hide should they be pursued by the king's servants; here also was a fountain of pure water, most excellently adapted for the purposes of baptism. Here was this holy rite first administered, and here was the church of Christ organized. How different the circumstances of its organization to those which attended the same event in the land of Zarahemla, under king Benjamin, of which we have already spoken.

