

## STUDY NOTES

### Lesson 7: Mosiah Chapters 11-14

*When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice: but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn.*  
*Proverbs 29:2*

*Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.*  
*Proverbs 4: 23*

#### THE INFLUENCE OF A WICKED MAN

King Noah is presented in all his grotesque wickedness in chapter 11. Most of us are familiar with the Arnold Freiberg painting that shows him glowering down at Abinadi from his throne, a man swollen by his affluence, swathed in rich robes, surrounded by snarling pet jaguars and evil looking priests dressed in sinister black and red. The painting radiates a glow of evil and the Book of Mormon account has the same darkness. Every motive, every impulse, every action taken by this man is uniformly selfish, cruel, self-indulgent and cowardly. We are curious to discover from this tale how a human being gets to this degenerate state. The text also shows what a disastrous affect his despicable character has on the whole nation.

King Noah "did not walk in the ways of his father." (v.1) And as we see, the bad choices of a leader create a cascade of particularly awful consequences because a leader is entrusted with the care of others, like the shepherd of a flock; the poor choices a king makes are visited upon the innocent. The evil that begins in King Noah's selfishness sows seeds that end up sprouting and growing in the nation he leads.

Noah began to "change the affairs of the kingdom," in accord with his selfish heart. He taxed the people heavily and built impressive public works: a new temple, tower and palace. He provided wine in abundance and an example to his people of wives and concubines in abundance. His father's priests are "retired" and in their place he puts new ones who support his sinful lifestyle and idolatry.

#### CULTURAL RAIN

The theme here is one of *influence*. What influences inform and mold our choices and the choices of our children? As LDS women who are concerned about the lives of the next generation, we need to be aware of the evil influences that descend like acid rain upon the world. We need to provide better influences of our own. We need to ensure that the influence of the Spirit is in our home like a soft spring rain, soaking the soil and encouraging the growth of tender buds. Sometimes we teach our youth to stay in out of the storm; sometimes, when they have no choice but to go out into the town square and the marketplace of life, we provide them an umbrella and instructions to carry it with them at all times.

King Noah's story provides a good backdrop for thinking about what kinds of influences leading politicians, journalists, sports and entertainment figures are pouring into the stream of our culture. We have to make countering choices and provide countering influences. We can control the media in our homes, we can work in our children's classrooms, we can home school, and we can talk about the news with our families, using the lives of public people to point out the positive and negative consequences of their actions. But most importantly, we can make the reading and study of the scriptures a central, vital feature of our family life. There can be no more important immunization against the influences of evil than the word of God.

#### LIVING IN A PRE-GUTTENBERG WORLD

The story of King Noah and his people is a tragic one partly because it took place in a culture where few could read. We have a great advantage over the faithful women who lived in King Noah's nation. What they knew of God and His word would have been what the priests told them in public meetings. In any pre-printing press culture, "books" were not for common people. Records were hand copied, one copy at a time. Only royalty, priests and those who worked for them had access to them. Knowing how to read was a remarkable blessing in that time that would not have been available to you or me.

What if all you knew about God was what you heard over the pulpit once a week? It would be critical that the priest be telling the truth, the whole truth, in his sermons. A great responsibility rested on the shoulders of these priests. It is easy to see why the fullness of the gospel that we enjoy today could not spread over the earth until such time as people could have and read their own copies of the word of God.

It is for this reason that God held the kings and priests so accountable in the Book of Mormon and the Old Testament. Common men and women were greatly at the mercy of their religious and civic leaders. Things have changed for the better in the modern world. The Bible is now the most published book in the world and we probably all have multiple copies of the Book of Mormon in our homes. Our fate now rests on our own shoulders, as we are accountable before God for how we regard and use His word in our homes and individual lives.<sup>1</sup> We would be foolish indeed if we ignored this great blessing and left these books to gather dust.

### **COTTON CANDY RELIGION**

Note that King Noah, a man who was not fond of commandments, did not just get rid of the old religious leaders. He replaced them with priests of his own. Dictators are always anxious to enhance their credibility with religious authority. And the phony priests like it because they get automatic status and fancy clothes. Ancient Rome had a chief priest appointed by the state: the Pontifex Maximus. Later The Holy Roman Empire claimed legitimacy from the Catholic Church. King Henry the 8<sup>th</sup> had the Anglican Church and the German princes used the Lutheran Church<sup>2</sup>. Every ancient kingdom had its priests to lend an air of divine approval to what their kings did. Satan always has a counterfeit to every true thing.

What did Noah's priests teach the people? Mosiah 11:7 says they taught things that were "vain and flattering." *Vain* means of no substance, like theological hot air. *Flattering* means that these doctrines appealed to the natural man. Perhaps they liked listening to it because they were told that they were God's favorites. The doctrine of being a "chosen" people is appealing. Any doctrine can be twisted and stripped of its sterner obligations. God had indeed said "For thou art an holy people unto the LORD: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth." (Deut. 7:6)

But he had also commanded his people to serve Him and demonstrate holiness to other nations by keeping His commandments. And they *were* commandments, not suggestions. But Noah's priests only want to talk about positive things, like peace, beauty and good tidings. In fact, they seem a lot like the "prosperity preachers" of our day, who tell their people that God wants them to be rich and healthy and happy; and if they just give generously to the offering plate, their gifts will be the seeds of great blessings that God wants to pour down upon them. These preachers ignore Jesus' teaching to, "take up [your] cross and follow me."<sup>3</sup>

There are plenty of leaders willing to tell people what they want to hear. "Be kind to yourself. You come first. Enjoy life. You need to trust your inner child." This kind of teaching also tends to make the promoters of such philosophies wealthy and powerful. Noah's people were paying one-fifth of all they earned to the king so he could spend lavishly on massive building projects and on his own lifestyle, and the people were actually happy doing it because he provided them with wine (v.15) and with priests who flattered them.

### **A PROPHET'S INCONVENIENT VOICE**

No wonder everyone was ticked off by Abinadi. Noah and his priests were fleecing the flock to support their corrupt, worldly ways, and the sheep weren't even complaining. Then just like a big sister who comes in on her little brothers doing something forbidden and says, "I'm gonna tell Mom!" Abinadi appears on the scene. The party is over. King Noah and the priests who willingly supported him in his sins did not want to hear anything about commandments or the necessity of keeping them. They especially didn't want to hear about the punishments of God that inevitably come upon those who break them.

Their response is typical in this situation. "Who do you think you are to judge us?" Those who are breaking the commandments immediately heap scorn upon those who point out their sins by insinuating that those who are pointing their fingers are no better than those being pointed at. But Abinadi, and all the other prophets for that matter, never claimed to get their authority from being better than other people. They get their authority from God. "Behold, thus saith the Lord, and thus hath he commanded me, saying, Go forth, and say unto this people, thus saith the Lord—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."(v20)

### **IT STARTS IN THE HEART**

We wonder what makes one person veer off the strait and narrow path so that they end up a moral monster like King Noah. Noah was the son of a king—a prince. We've read enough scripture stories and fairy tales to know that princes usually go one of two ways—either brave and noble, or spoiled rotten. Noah was probably the latter. There seems to be some peril in being rich and important when you're still a little kid. In other words, when you get whatever you want starting too early in life, you are at risk of the kind of heart trouble Noah developed. As Mosiah 11:2 puts it, "he did walk after the desires of his own heart." In our last lesson, we read the plaintive words of Noah's son Limhi, who had to live with the wreckage brought about by his father's selfishness: "Oh, how blind and impenetrable are the understandings of the children of men; for they will not seek wisdom, neither do they desire that she should rule over them! Yea, they are as a wild flock which fleeth from the shepherd, and are driven, and are devoured by the beasts of the forest." (Mosiah 8:20-21)

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<sup>1</sup> Because of the constraint of not being able to read the scriptures, God made the religious system of the past a "simpler" one. People could remember 10 commandments, along with a few other basics. The gospel was taught by feasts, holy days, circumcision, animal sacrifice, systems of ritual cleanliness, and diet. People's lives were one continual daily and yearly round of visual aids. The example of the king and the priests was also a powerful influence.

<sup>2</sup> Even though Luther himself never wanted to start a church, but only reform the already existing one.

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 16:24

Step one in leaving God's path then, is to simply to want what you want more than you want to obey any authority over you. The path to spiritual maturity is to be willing to submit your will to the will of someone higher than yourself. This can be your parents, your conscience, wisdom, a coach—there are lots of options to get you started. But you are in trouble if your only guide is the little baby that lives inside your head and wants what it wants when it wants it. If you are a Harry Potter fan, you know that Voldemort, the ultimate bad guy, is revealed at the last to have a soul that is just a pitiful bawling baby.

King Noah seems like that. He has lived so long without a thought for anyone but himself and gratifying his whims, that his shriveled heart is incapable of loving anyone but himself and his "stuff"—his gold and jewels and thrones and palaces. He has "placed his heart upon his riches and he spent his time in riotous living." It is clear that *he* made that choice; he "placed" his heart. Thus we are warned that we must think about what we are "placing" our hearts upon. We must start by becoming aware of our choices.

Surely Noah didn't wake up every morning saying to himself, "I'm going to love my palace today, or my new wine cellar." He just went with the flow of the natural man. He went with his "wants." God's word, however, says, "Guard your heart," or "Keep<sup>4</sup> your heart, for out of it are the issues of life." (Proverbs 4:23) Be careful what you find yourself thinking about. Be deliberate about what you love. You need to make that choice, and not let the lusts of your flesh make it for you. Pray for righteous desires and for the love of God to be the most powerful motivating force in your life. Then maintain those desires by personal worship.

### **CARDIO THERAPY**

The heart is mentioned 12 times in the three chapters of Mosiah 11, 12 and 13. This is obviously meant to be a powerful and instructive warning. There is a progression from "walking after the desires of one's own heart," to "hardening your heart against the word of the Lord," and "setting it upon riches," to finally "being lifted up in the pride of your heart." These men lost opportunities to "apply their hearts to understanding" or "have the commandments written upon their hearts." Finally it took a prophet's sharp message to "cut them to the heart." Here was one last chance. God sent a message so powerful that it pierced the hard shell around their hearts. Abinadi died without knowing if any of his listeners took his convicting message "to heart" and repented. But we should realize that sometimes when a message, scripture or truth convicts us and cuts us to the heart, it is God's love trying to get through to us. We should take advantage of the opportunity that these feelings bring for repentance and growth.

### **PAYING THE PIPER**

Abinadi's prophetic message is that King Noah and his people cannot enjoy a life of sin indefinitely. The piper must be paid. In Mosiah 12 he declares that the harvest of the sins they have sown will be bondage and heavy burdens, famine, pestilence, and unless there is repentance, ultimately destruction. King Noah is warned that he has as much future as a "garment in a hot furnace." James sums up this process in his New Testament epistle: "Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death." (James 1:15) God puts a time gap between sin and the harvest of consequences for sin—death.

Sin has a beginning, a long second act, and then, "when it is finished" it brings death. Sometimes the absolute moral principles operating in the universe are not apparent to us because of this space, this gap, this time for repentance and learning allotted unto man before sin is "finished." So it may seem to us that some people sin and "get away with it." But such people are only "living in the gap." Their sin has not caught up with them.

This gap is a precious gift. It ensures our free agency and time to learn from our experiences. How could we ever learn to be truly righteous if the universe administered an electric shock to us every time we had a wicked thought or broke a commandment? It was Satan's plan to force us to be righteous. God has given us a more valuable gift; He has given us freedom to learn from our experiences, and then to repent and to learn some more. We are here to find out what is good and what is evil. He loves us and wants us to learn valuable experiences from our time on earth. Life is like a tough boarding school before we go home to eternity and it is, as the American poet E. A. Robinson once put it, "as bad as it has to be."

### **FINDING THE RIGHT ROAD MAP**

Things are evil or wrong, not because they feel bad, since sometimes wrong things feel good, at least at first. In truth things are wrong because God says they are wrong. We must trust His word. And things are right, not because they feel good, but because God says they are right. We must trust Him again. People like Noah, who live their lives based solely on what feels good or bad at the moment, are in for a surprise. If they continue to defy His laws God will finally "visit them in [His] fierce anger." (11:20) People who live their lives trusting God's word, like Abinadi, can have bad things happen to them, but they are not undone by even the worst circumstance. Their trust in God is a rock that allows them to stand firm despite the storms of life.

### **FAITHFUL AND TRUE VS CORRUPT AND FALSE**

The thing we like about the Arnold Freiberg painting is the image of the prophet Abinadi, standing there in chains that are supposed to humiliate him before the wicked court, "astonishing" them with his boldness, his purity casting a heavenly glow into the hellish surroundings. Abinadi is a weakened old man, a prisoner in rags. His vulnerability contrasts sharply with King Noah's mighty power and

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<sup>4</sup> The Hebrew word here is *natsar*, a word that means, "guard, maintain, or protect."

worldly position. Yet the story, as the picture, makes us ask ourselves who is actually the strong one? Isn't it Noah who quakes with fear and "dares not lay his hand upon" his prisoner? These themes echo others: What is real wealth and what is true poverty? What is true majesty and what is degradation? What in fact, are the true meanings of words, and of life. This story shows how false and "blind" people become when they get off God's paths and follow the world, the flesh and the devil.

All the definitions of Noah's life are actually 180° from the truth. There is a powerful scripture in the Book of Revelation that is delivered by an angel to a wealthy church of Saints in the city of Laodicea, but could just as easily apply to King Noah and his court: "... thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art *wretched*, and *miserable*, and *poor*, and *blind*, and *naked*: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eye salve, that thou mayest see." (Revelation 3:17-18)

### **A MESSAGE WORTH DYING FOR**

Noah and his priests have been trading in lies. They have lied to the people and to themselves. Abinadi has been sent by God to leave a testimony of the truth that will stand against them. They will not be able to say they didn't know. First, he testifies of the rottenness that is at their core. Their hearts are corrupt; they have set them upon their riches and their whoredoms. Secondly, they have not taught nor practiced the Law of Moses as they claim. By reciting the Ten Commandments to them, he shames them into the realization that they have not kept nor taught the most basic principles entrusted to them as shepherds of the flock. And finally, he teaches them what they had never realized because they had not "applied their hearts to understanding"; he teaches them the purpose of the Law of Moses. He testifies that it is a pointer, a teaching device, to bring them to the greater knowledge of God's promised redemption by a Messiah yet to come.

### **ISAIAH'S MIGHTY WITNESS**

Abinadi knows that he will give his life for his message. Every word that he leaves is carefully chosen. Thus his recitation of the 53<sup>rd</sup> chapter of Isaiah is very significant. There is no greater witness of Jesus Christ in all the Old Testament than these 12 simple verses. A friend, who was working on her doctorate in Ancient Scripture taking a class at Marquette University, was listening to a lecture on Isaiah 53. Two Jewish students were sitting together close by. One of them turned to the other and whispered in horror, "But it sounds so... so... Christian!"

Their surprise makes Isaiah's opening line meaningful: "Who hath believed our report?" The humiliation and rejection of Israel's Messiah was foreseen and foretold. Instead of coming in the pomp and circumstance the Jews expected, he grew up as a tender plant flourishing in dry ground, having life in himself, rather than getting his life from the religious culture around him. What a prophetic witness! Every detail is here. We, who know Him in hindsight, read these poetic words and see his whole story, from growing up in the dry dead religion of his time, to his spotless, sinless life. We have read the gospels and know that He was truly acquainted with grief, and scorned by his countrymen who "hid their faces from Him," even as he bore their sins and received the lashes that healed their sorrows and infirmities. He opened not his mouth before the Sanhedrin and Roman court, was numbered with transgressors—crucified between two "wicked" men—then buried in a rich man's tomb. And though cut off out of the land of the living as a young man, leading his contemporaries to taunt that he had no "generation," or descendants, yet "he shall see his seed" because the miracle of the atonement brings those of us who have faith in Him into that very relationship with Him.