

Abinadi and the Dead Sea Scrolls

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ABINADI THE PROPHET:

In Mosiah we learn about the mysterious Prophet Abinadi, who sort of came out of nowhere about 150 BC. (Largey p. 22) He is an elderly but well seasoned and informed Prophet with evident experience and great courage; called on a mission he knows will be his last. In his defence before King Noah, he makes one convert that would influence the last half of the Book of Mormon. (Largey p. 22) Abinadi could not be taken until he finished his mission. "He spake with power and authority from God." (Mosiah 13:5-6) As he stood in solemn majesty before the kangaroo court of King Noah, he laid out conditions unacceptable to the King and his court, some of who may have had authentic priesthood, such as one among them called Alma. They had sought to take him, and finally did and he anguished over the lot into which he had been cast. (Mosiah 12:17, Largey pp. 22-24) Abinadi had been first mentioned in Mosiah 7: 26-28). He first came among the Nephites under King Noah to call them to repentance in disguise, so he could get into the city, and now prophesied their destruction. (Price pp. 56-57) The elements found in the name Abinadi include the prefix elements 'abi'-father, the root, 'nad'--'generosity', and the theophoric hypocoristica suffix ending for God of 'i'. Probable meaning: 'God, the father of generosity'. (Mandel p.10)

Noah had commanded his priests and advisors to gather themselves together that he might hold a council with them about what he should do with Abinadi. His priest and advisors in the council, (the report comes from Alma), said unto the King, command that Abinadi be brought before them. In their arrogance they want to question Abinadi, mainly that they might cross him, trip him up, get him to provide some basis to accuse him so they might kill him. Abinadi was brought up out of their prison and when questioned, "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," (Mosiah 12: 19) deftly turning the tables on all of them. Alma who recorded all of the events and words of Abinadi states (Mosiah 17:4) "they were 'astonished' and 'confounded'." Part of what Abinadi had to say was in response to the quote from Isaiah 52:7-10, of particular interest is Isaiah 52:7 which needs to be examined in more detail and especially what Abinadi had to say about it.

Then one assuming more wisdom than he really had, "said unto him: 'What meaneth the words which are written (by Isaiah 52: 7-10) and which have been taught by our fathers, [from the Brass Plates] saying:

7. "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;

(The Interlinear
translation of this verse in the Hebrew Bible reads: "How beautiful on the
mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, [the
gospel] who proclaim peace, [eternal
life] who bring good tidings, who proclaim
salvation, [exhaltation] who say to Zion "Your God reigns!") (Kohlenberger III, p. 107) Note the words in bold type, the
differences
are important and cannot entirely be accounted
for on the basis of the King James English language Version of the verse.
Compare this version with that found in 3 Nephi 20:40.

8. Thy watchman shall lift up the voice; with
the voice together shall they sing; for they shall see eye to eye when the Lord
shall bring again Zion;

9. Break forth into
joy; sing together ye waste places of Jerusalem;
for the Lord hath comforted his people, he hath redeemed Jerusalem;

10. Thy 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 your God?" (Mosiah 12: 20-24)

To this Abinadi
made the response: "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, woe be unto
you for perverting the ways of the Lord! 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; therefore, ye have not
been wise. Therefore, what teach ye this
people?" (Mosiah 12: 25-27)

It is evident that the 'wise' priests were trying to trip Abinadi up in these verses perhaps quoting from the Brass Plates, quoting from Isaiah 52:7-10. The quote is not exactly as found in the King James Version. While our interest is in verse 7, four verses have been provided to show that the quote, contrary to 'hostile criticism', is not exactly as found in the King James Version. In verse 8, is the highlighted word 'watchman'. In the King James Version the word there, as found in Isaiah, is 'watchmen'. In Hebrew it is 'men watching you' and would be translated 'Watchmen'. Could it be that the Priest's challenging Abinadi were quoting from a copy of Isaiah contained in the Brass Plates, and had copied it in error? Or does the Brass Plate actually have this passage quoted from Isaiah in the form of an earlier tradition that may have actually had the word 'watchman' in it?

By the end of 1830 Joseph working on the translation of the biblical records and preparing what was to become the INSPIRED VERSION, made changes in the verse being quoted by the Priest's to Abinadi:

7. And then shall they say, 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. (Joseph Smith, Inspired Version, Isaiah 52:7)

8. Thy watchmen....(Joseph Smith, Inspired Version Isaiah 52:8, and Mosiah

12:21-22)

The highlighted words in the Inspired Version are different than the King's

James and the Book of Mormon versions of Isaiah 52:7. Also note that the Inspired Version changes Watchman to Watchmen. The highlighted words are also not in the Dead Sea Scroll, 1 QIsa, MT. (Parry 2001, p. 209) It would seem that the Inspired Version by Joseph Smith and the Brass Plates indicate that there may have been two additional older versions of Isaiah. Perhaps future discoveries will confirm this, or eventually we may get the content of the Brass Plates to determine the antiquity of different versions. While in itself not an important issue, it does point out that there were anciently different versions of Isaiah, and the most preferred version today would be the Inspired Version by Joseph Smith.

THE SEPTUAGINT VERSION:

Another Version,
the Septuagint, the scriptures rendered in Greek about 250 BC in Alexandria
Egypt, for use of Greek Speaking Jews in Egypt,
some of whom had come from the Military Garrison at Elephantine, Egypt,
the Isaiah verse in question, Verse 7, is rendered with some differences. Jehovah is "clearly depicted as the one
speaking, and second he identifies himself as the one who is 'like beauty on the mountains', and 'like the feet of one who
proclaims
peace'...The Language of Isaiah 52:7, metaphorically represents Jehovah as if he
were a messenger [which he is] proclaiming the deliverance of his people." (Parry p. 276) The Lord has also described
the preaching of
the Gospel by missionaries as the "Glad tidings of great joy." (D&C 19:29,
31:3, 79:1) Does the glad tidings
pouring forth from the Mountains fulfill the prophecy of Daniel about the stone
cut from the Mountain rolling forth until it filled the whole earth.? (Daniel 2:44-45)

Another version
provided by Christ himself: is found in 3 Ne 20:40:

And then shall they say: 'how beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings unto them, that
publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings unto them of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion: They
God reigneth!' The thought and intent of the verse as translated in the
Septuagint is closer than other versions to that found in 3 Ne 20:40. But a Dead Sea Scroll comes closer
to the intent and thought than this.

The bold words are not found in the Mosiah
quote of Abinadi's responses, they are found in the Inspired Version. So, did Joseph
make changes in the Inspired Version conforming to what is in the quote found
in 3 Ne. 20:40 that he had translated nearly more than two years earlier?

"An alternative,
more literal rendition of this verse is provided by Parry "What beauty on (or over) the mountains; the
feet of a herald [Christ] announcing
peace, declaring (heralding) good,
announcing salvation, saying to Zion 'your God reigns.'" (Parry pp.
257-258) Parry also discusses some of
the other translations of the Bible and their versions, as well as a more
detailed commentary on the context in which the verse under discussion is
found. The use of 'feet' seems to
symbolize mobility and movement, throughout the world. Here the 'herald' is
mentioned. The herald is Christ.

The message remains essentially the same through all these versions: "The Lord will send forth messengers [missionaries] throughout the earth to preach (publish) the good tidings of the gospel. His people will be redeemed through His power, and He will establish the standard of Zion in preparing the people for the Millennium." (Brewster p. 235) This can also be taken as a reference to the temple ordinances to be performed to save mankind. Man is not truly totally saved unless he is exalted in glory.

One other version, a musical one, is found in the use of this verse made famous by the Composer George Frederick Handel in his magnificent oratorio, THE MESSIAH. (Skousen ;646) Several religious music pieces includes Isaiah 52:7 in their versions as well. .

DEAD SEA SCROLL SOURCES:

"Discovered among the Dead Sea Scrolls are the remains of twenty-one copies of the book of Isaiah. Only a few of these, however, preserve any portion of Isaiah 52:7-10; the so-called Great Isaiah Scroll, 11QIsaiah, preserves the whole passage." (Parry p. 276) That text and fragments of the same verse from other Dead Sea Scrolls do not differ in any significant way from the traditional text of Isaiah 52:7 except as noted above.

There is, however, another version of Isaiah 52:7 in another Dead Sea Scroll. "A.S. van der Woude published a group of thirteen small fragments discovered in 1956 in Qumran Cave 11. The title of his article attracts attention immediately, 'Melchizedek as a Heavenly Redemption-Figure in the Newly Discovered Eschatological Midrashim from Qumran Cave 11'." (Fitzmyer p. 245) Fitzmyer provides a translation and detailed commentary in light of other information that came available after van de Woude's work. (Fitzmyer pp. 247-269) For our purposes we are mainly interested in the version of Isaiah 52:7 found in that scroll, now called 11QMelch. Does the thought and content of that scroll come close to what Abinadi had to say? More so than other versions? More information is contained in the work by Fitzmyer that will not be included in this study, for instance in Par 10:... 'Elohim has [ta]ken his stand in the as[s]embly of 'El, in the midst of Gods ['lwhym] he gives judgment'....11. take your throne in the heights; let God ('l) judge the peoples" (Fitzmyer p. 249, Parry-Welch p. 277) which requires considerable and very interesting commentary, but essentially

is understood and only has meaning to well informed Mormons. Many scholars translate and comment on ancient documents without having the insights of the Restoration. By neglecting the insights that modern revelation gives and the Restored Doctrines provides, the scholars do not come to appropriate conclusions.

But in Par. "15:...this is the dayabout which he said [for the end of days through Isai]ah the prophet who sai[d, How] beautiful 16. upon the mountains are the feet [of] the heral[d] proclaiming peace; the herald of good, proclaiming salvat]ion, (and) saying to Zion, 'Your God [is King]." (Fitzmyer p. 250) Clearly the herald here is the Lord, Christ, Jehovah, or the Messiah, depending on whether you are Christian, Jew or Mormon.

But the thought is changed in this text. The verse is quoted as a forward, prophetic event 'in the end of days' in the sense the LDS interpret the verse, based on another variation of Isaiah 52:7 found in 1 Ne 13:37 nearly 500 years before the exalted response by the prisoner Abinadi: "And blessed are they [missionaries the Mormon Church] who shall seek to bring forth my Zion at that day, for they shall have the gift and the power of the Holy Ghost; and if they endure unto the end they shall be lifted up at the last day, and shall be saved in the everlasting kingdom of the Lamb and whoso shall publish peace, yea, tidings of great joy, how beautiful upon the mountains shall they be." They join the herald, in proclaiming peace and salvation. The Herald is Christ. The doctrinal content is much more complete, but suggested by the Dead Sea Scroll quote.

"The 'herald', of the Isian text is said to be 'anointed with the Spirit' [the Holy Ghost], in line 18, van der Woude restored the article [in 11QMelch] before [m]shy, thus identifying the 'herald' explicitly with the "the Messiah" (Fitzmyer p. 252) Y. Yadin, in another translation, would not agree with this, "But Yadin's reading is, nevertheless interesting in that it [still] makes of the herald of Is 52:7 a messianic figure, i.e., one who is anointed." (Fitzmyer pp. 252-253) This is still a tacit agreement with Woude. It was Yadin who had proposed the translation of the sentence Woude thought contained the reference to the Messiah, to read 'annointed by the Spirit'. All of this is in agreement to the variation enunciated by 1 Nephi 13:37, and contained in the version found in 11 QMelch quoted above, and in agreement with the final interpretation Abinadi puts on this verse. It would be quite a stretch to say that the Messianic figure identified by van der Woude and the 'one who is anointed' is not the same being; The Messiah, or Jeohovah, or Christ. Three inspired Men, (Prophets?) Nephi in 592 BC, Abinadi about 148 BC, and an unknown inspired writer who prepared before 250 BC a text now known as 11 QMelch, had similar thoughts and understanding of eternal things hinted at in Isaiah 52:7, but defined by those three men along similar lines, and like no other before them and only Joseph Smith after them. .

"It is known that the 'herald' of Is 52:7 became a figure expected in the beliefs of Palestinian Judaism. He was in fact identified with the Anointed King or King Messiah by R. Jose the Galilean (c. AD 110), according to Drekh 'Eres' Zuta." (Fitzmyer p. 253)

ABINADI, AS A
PROPHET, INTERPRETS ISAIAH 52:7

Now, we return to Abinadi. He is going to change everything. He speaks of all the prophets who have ever spoken and opened their mouths to prophecy: "I mean all of the holy prophets, ever since the world began: I say unto you that they are his [Christ's] seed. And these are they who have published peace, who have brought good tidings of good, who have published salvation; and said unto Zion: Thy God reigneth." (Mosiah 15:13-14) Note the change in tense Abinadi gives to verse 7 of Isaiah 52. It is all in the past tense. And yet the doctrine is one that is eternal. But it also emphatically refers to the 'last day'. To emphasize this and to exercise his prerogative as a prophet, Abinadi rises to full prophetic powers in the interpretation he then puts on Verse 7:

In what follows, from Abinadi, note the significance of the words were, are, still and shall!

"And O how beautiful upon the mountains were their feet! And again, how beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of those that are still publishing peace! And again, how beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of those who shall hereinafter publish peace, yea, from this time henceforth and forever! And behold, I say unto you this is not all. For O how beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him [all teachers of the gospel] that bringeth good tidings, that is the founder of peace, [the eternal peace of eternal life] yea, even the Lord, who has redeemed his people, yea, him who has granted salvation unto his people; for were it not for the redemption which he hath made for his people, which was prepared from the foundation of the world, I say unto you, were it not for this, all mankind must have perished." (Mosiah 15:18-19). Thus, Abinadi reveals the real content of Verse 7! How Glorious!

Abinadi must have made the skin crawl and hair stand on end of every one of the priests who were hearing him rise to this majestic height of prophetic power and interpretation and declaration of the salvation and redemption wrought by Christ. Certainly Alma would have been deeply affected by this powerful summary and interpretation of this verse of ancient Isaiah. Study the statement by Abinadi, he made his message eternal, past, present, and future! And he introduced great summary doctrines concerning Christ into the Book of Mormon. (Largey pp. 22-24) One can only be awed by this great summary and interpretation. Where is there greater sublimity in scripture? And the Dead Sea Scroll 11 QMelch and those who have interpreted and translated it are in essential agreement with Abinadi and Abinadi's declaration that the Lord [and the missionaries he sends] are the herald, and all those called by the Lord, and the Lord proclaim peace and salvation. "True peace only comes from the Gospel." (Nyman p. 369) Christ is the Founder of peace, (Isaiah 9:6, McConkie pp. 237-240), and all his servants are the publishers. And the peace of the Lord is eternal life.

Abinadi continues in the following verses to teach important doctrine concerning the atonement wrought by Christ and "resurrection of those who have been, and who are, and who shall be." (Mosiah 15:21-31) Another study details more of the life and teachings of Abinadi, but does not enlarge upon the special interpretation Abinadi gave to the verses above. (Parker p. 14) A briefer and succinct study of Abinadi is by Largey. (Largey 22-24) Abinadi was one of the great prophets, one with great simplicity and great depth. He builds a foundation that underlies much of the rest of the Book of Mormon and particular the works of Alma and Alma's descendants.

Abinadi is an example of what Jesus told his disciples would happen when confronted by the Pharisees and detractors: "And when they bring you unto the synagogues, and unto magistrates, and powers, take ye no thought how or what things ye shall answer, or what ye shall say: For the Holy Ghost shall teach you in the same hour what ye ought to say" (Luke 12:11-12) Abinadi and his prophetic interpretations were certainly inspired. The Holy Ghost was certainly with Abinadi. (Nyman p. 329) He sealed his valiant and complete testimony of Christ with his own life, prophesying the terrible deaths of those who killed him. (Mosiah 17:5-20)

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