As the man of God returned to the city, most people did not notice him. He had returned to preach the message of repentance that had previously caused this wicked people to seek his life. But this time he "came among them in disguise, that they knew him not" (Mosiah 12:1). In boldness and faith he stretched forth his hand and announced that he was Abinadi, sent by God to call the people to return to the Lord. The ensuing story unfolds the drama of the most prominent martyr story in the Book of Mormon.

Abinadi's mission was to bear witness to the people of King Noah that lest they repent they would be afflicted and punished for their sins. Like others in prophetic responsibility, he became a martyr for the cause of God. ((Taylor Halverson, "Martyrdom of Isaiah" *Encyclopedia of Ancient History*, 2013.)) *Martyr* derives from the Greek language and means "a witness who bears a divine message." ((Walter Bauer *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, translated by William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979; second edition), p. 494.)) Over time the word took on additional meaning as those who bore divine witness were killed (such as Stephen in Acts 7:55-56). Thus the word *martyr* began to refer to one who was killed for the sake of the witness he bore. Abinadi's story contains significant details that give light to our understanding of the martyr-prophet Abinadi, the people whom he addressed, and prophetic tradition. We will briefly explore these topics.

Besides his faithfulness and the words recorded by Alma about Abinadi, almost nothing else is known about Abinadi. Yet his name may reveal information that adds understanding to his persona. Many of the Book of Mormon names are of Hebrew or Egyptian origin. Significantly, when the meaning of a name is brought to light it often seems to fit the plot, character, or detail of the story in which it is found. ((This is likely a sign of the ancient literary feature of word-play, also known as paronomasia or midrashic punning.)) The name Abinadi may be one of those examples. Abinadi is possibly formed from two Hebrew words, abi "my father" and nadi "to wander, show grief." ((*The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc; 1996), p. 626. The root of *nadi* is *nud*. Because we do not have the original Hebrew text (or Reformed Egyptian text for that matter), it is impossible to determine the exact root word. Other root words as *nadad* (to wander, to flee, to retreat) or *nadah* (to put away, exclude) are other possible options in the name of Abinadi and fit the context of the story as well. The evidence suggests that the Book of Mormon is engaged in paronomasia (punning and word play), an ancient literary feature that demonstrated authorial artistic sophistication and beauty.)) Combining these two words may yield the name-phrase "my father wanders" or "my father shows grief." In essence, Abinadi's name may suggest that he came from a priestly or prophetic class that were "wanderers" perhaps because the wicked did not want to hear their message, but rather cast them out of society. Or it may suggest the idea that God the Father shows grief over the wickedness of the people. If these meanings are correct, Abinadi's name contributes to the context of the story while providing additional witness of the divine purpose of his message.

When Abinadi came to Noah's city he announced himself and began to deliver his prophetic message. When the people cast their attention towards Abinadi, their rage and anger grew as they heard his words of condemnation. Not being able to endure this rude interruption into their lives, the people seized Abinadi and brought him before King Noah with evil report. King Noah was stirred up to anger by the words of the people. He called in his priests to cross examine Abinadi in order to find a reason to slay him.

During the questioning period King Noah's priests demanded that Abinadi explain a passage of scripture to which he retorted, "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?" (Mosiah 12:25). Abinadi penetrated further and asked, "What teach ye this people?" (Mosiah 12:27) to which the priests replied, "We teach the law of Moses" (Mosiah 12:28). At this response Abinadi wasted no time in systematically displaying the negligence of both priest and king to live or teach the Law of Moses.

King Noah reacted in rage and commanded that Abinadi be put to death. As "they stood forth" to "lay their hands on him" he rebuked them saying that he had "not delivered the message which the Lord sent" him to deliver (Mosiah 13:2-3). "Now it came to pass after Abinadi had spoken these words…his face shone with exceeding luster, *even as Moses'* did while in the mount of Sinai…and he spake with power and authority from God" (Mosiah 13:5-6). For the priests of Noah who held Moses in the highest esteem, it is incredible that they were impervious to a prophet who came in the name of Lord with a face that did shine like unto Moses. ((Compare this story to that of

Brigham Young's succession to the presidency of the Church after the death of the Prophet Joseph Smith. Benjamin Ashby recorded, "I was in the congregation when the question of succession to the leadership of the Church was before the people and I solemnly assert and testify that the last time I saw the features, the gestures, and heard the sound of the voice of Joseph Smith was when the form, voice and countenance of Brigham Young was transfigured before the congregation so that he appeared like Joseph Smith in every particular. Thus the Lord showed his people that the mantle of Joseph had been bestowed upon Brigham." This quote and additional information of interest is found in *The Autobiography of Parley P Pratt, Revised and Enhanced Edition*, edited by Scot Facer Proctor & Maurine Jensen Proctor (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2000), p. 419, footnote 12.)) If they truly followed Moses, why weren't they willing to follow a prophet who *looked like* and taught like Moses? Unfortunately even this miraculous witness fell upon hard hearts, all except for Alma of course. They were condemned by their own criteria.

The ensuing horror and sadness of this story is well known. Abinadi was ruthlessly burned to death because he would not deny his witness of the Lord Jesus Christ. One might ask, why did Abinadi return to the city when he knew that King Noah would seek his life? And even more curiously, why did Abinadi come in disguise and then formally announce himself? Did that formal announcement defeat the purpose of the disguise? No. The disguise was not meant as a protection from harm or danger. Rather the disguise served both a pragmatic and a symbolic purpose.

The pragmatic purpose is that without the disguise, Abinadi would not have been able to enter the city to deliver the message. For the symbolic purpose, the Old Testament affords a comparative story to help explain this "mystery." In 1 Kings 20:35-42, a prophet disguised himself "with ashes on his face" in preparation to deliver a message of divine judgement against King Ahab. In this story the word "ashes" is better translated as "a covering." ((*The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, page 68. The Hebrew word underlying the English text is *ba'afer* from the root word *'afer*. This same word can also be translated as "bandage" (see for example the NRSV translation of 1 Kings 20:38).)) Furthermore, it is important to recognize that during the Old Testament time period this type of covering "covered a distinctive mark on the forehead of prophetic guild members." ((*The HarperCollins Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version*, edited by Wayne E. Meeks (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1993), p. 554, footnote 20:38.)) Therefore, it may be that Abinadi's disguise was such that the people did not recognize him to be a prophet.

But what was this distinctive mark? Was it simply "ashes" that symbolized the humiliation and woe of God's judgement upon a wicked people? Or was it the mark of one who had been sealed up to eternal life (Revelation 22:4)? If the latter, it offers a powerful suggestion as to why Abinadi approached his certain fate with determined courage and faith, "But I finish my message; and then it matters not whither I go, if it so be that I am saved" (Mosiah 13:9).

Abinadi sealed his testimony with his own blood, the most powerful form of testimony, one that cannot be impeached by the passage of time and one that requires the serious reflection and honor of all mankind. Abinadi was a martyr marked in the forehead with the symbol of salvation for his soul and the symbol of destruction for those who rejected his simple message of purity and truth.