



---

Maxwell Institute Publications

---

2018

## Christ and Antichrist: Reading Jacob 7

Adam S. Miller

Joseph M. Spencer

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/mi>



Part of the [Religious Education Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Miller, Adam S. and Spencer, Joseph M., "Christ and Antichrist: Reading Jacob 7" (2018). *Maxwell Institute Publications*. 23.

<https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/mi/23>

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in Maxwell Institute Publications by an authorized administrator of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact [scholarsarchive@byu.edu](mailto:scholarsarchive@byu.edu), [ellen\\_amatangelo@byu.edu](mailto:ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu).

# Acknowledgements

Our thanks to the Laura F. Willes Center for Book of Mormon Studies and the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship for their generous support of the Mormon Theology Seminar. Without their support, the live, two-week format for the seminar would not be possible. More, a special thanks to Union Theological Seminary in New York, New York and Dean Mary C. Boys for their willingness to host this Mormon Theology Seminar on Jacob 7.

# Introduction

Joseph M. Spencer

The Book of Mormon presents itself as the work, principally, of three men.

The book is of course named after its chief architect, Mormon, a military captain and prophet-historian who witnessed the collapse of a thousand-year-old civilization. Mormon saw the need to tell his people's story in a sweeping one-volume narrative, brilliant but tortured in its execution. But as he came to the end of his literary efforts, he apparently felt that his book remained incomplete, and so he left the record to his son Moroni to finish off. Moroni at first seems to have felt content just to supplement his father's book with a brief epilogue, but he eventually found himself driven to add substantially to the volume. The Book of Mormon is thus, in its final form, as much the work of Moroni as of Mormon. Although the book takes its name from Mormon, it was Moroni who brought the book to the attention of Joseph Smith and who is said to hold the keys over the record.

Due to a complicated series of events, however, readers of the Book of Mormon encounter another major voice long before they become acquainted with either Mormon or Moroni. The volume opens with the lengthy record of Nephi, writings originally assembled some nine or ten centuries before Mormon and Moroni began their work on the book. And thanks to his larger-than-life presence, Nephi has become, in Mormon culture, the book's most recognizable hero. His story is interesting and inspiring, and his prophecies are the most compelling in the whole book. Although the inclusion of his writings in the Book of Mormon was ultimately the result of an afterthought, Nephi clearly joins Mormon and Moroni as a major contributor to the project. Mormon's discovery of Nephi's writings seems to have altered the direction of his own project, and there is substantial evidence that Moroni became especially familiar with Nephi's writings. Undeniably rich though the distinct but intertwined projects of Nephi, Mormon, and Moroni are, it is too easy to allow them to crowd out another important contributor to the Book of Mormon. Far too little attention has been given to the prophet Jacob, Nephi's younger brother, and his importance to the Book of Mormon as a project has consequently often been overlooked.

Jacob was arguably the first great Nephite theologian. It was to him that his father, Lehi, directed what readers encounter as the first substantive treatment of grand theological themes (see 2 Nephi 2), and it was Jacob who first developed those themes in what remains one of the richest chapters in the whole of the Book of Mormon (see 2 Nephi 9). Jacob's teachings on atonement and grace clearly influenced his older brother's thinking (compare 2 Nephi 10:23–25 and 2 Nephi 25:23), just as they influenced much later Book of Mormon prophets like Benjamin and Abinadi, Alma and Amulek (see Mosiah 3; 15–16; Alma 12; 34; 42). His careful work on the interpretation of Isaiah also deeply informed his older brother's understanding of that prophet (compare 1 Nephi 22 with 2 Nephi 25, mediated by 2 Nephi 6 and 2 Nephi 10), and he quite uniquely gave detailed attention to a prophet the Book of Mormon presents as having been an influence on Isaiah himself (see Jacob 4–6). Jacob was the first Nephite prophet to defend cultural minorities (see Jacob 1–3), and his willingness to speak truth to power provided a model for some of the most important prophetic interventions in later Lehiite history (see especially Mosiah 11–12 and Helaman 13–16). Further, Jacob's confrontation with an enemy of Nephite Christian religion (see Jacob 7) set the tone for similar confrontations later in Nephite history (see Alma 1; 30). Although the book that bears his name is rather short, comparatively, Jacob's imprint on the Book of Mormon is impressive.

With these considerations in mind, the second annual Summer Seminar in Mormon Theology, co-sponsored by the Mormon Theology Seminar and the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship and generously funded by the Laura F. Willes Center for Book of Mormon Studies, convened in 2015 in New York City to study the seventh

and final chapter of the Book of Jacob. Graciously hosted for two weeks by Union Theological Seminary, eight scholars from a variety of disciplines and with a variety of interests sat down to read, with great care and a great many questions, the story of Jacob's confrontation with Sherem, the notorious critic of Christianity. We hoped to learn from the story itself, as well as from theological statements embedded in the narrative. We hoped to see how the story relates itself literarily to other stories in Mormon scripture, as well as to understand the philosophical implications of the rival conceptions of law and the messianic on display in the text. And of course, we hoped to experience the sense of camaraderie that attends collaborative reading of a sacred text.

It is impossible to reproduce in writing the depth and richness of the seminar as an experience. Mornings were dedicated to individual preparation for our collaborative work, with each participant producing notes and a short essay on just a few verses of Jacob 7. Early each afternoon, we met as a group to discuss the text and to share our essays with one another. We spent between four and six hours each afternoon working together on the details of the scriptural text—trying to understand the determinations and the ambiguities of the narrative, teasing out the theological and philosophical presuppositions of the text, and raising many more questions than we could possibly hope to answer. After just a few days, however, a set of identifiable questions emerged as central to our collaborative reading, and our several interests in the text began to take clearer shape. As our first week of work came to an end, we began to turn our attention from working directly on the text to formulating both our shared and our private conclusions. The papers that make up this volume were written, in their first form, over the course of our second week together. We worked on each other's ideas, listened to each other's papers, and tried to organize our thoughts about the questions that had come to interest us all. And at the end of the second week, we hosted a public symposium to present our preliminary conclusions.

This volume collects our conclusions in a somewhat more finalized form than that in which they were presented in New York. It opens with a summary of our findings, written collaboratively and meant to outline a few of the things we came to focus on over the course of our work together. The Summary Report presents these findings in the form of complex answers to apparently straightforward questions. Nonetheless, the conclusions drawn in these summary findings are anything but conclusive. They summarize our discussions and our shared interests, but they don't come even close to exhausting the virtuosity of the text. If there's anything to be learned from sitting down for two weeks to read a chapter of the Book of Mormon together, it's that at least a year of such work would be needed to feel like the basic implications of the text have been decently addressed. The conclusions shared in the Summary Report, then, are merely provisional, meant more to serve as an invitation than to decide on the meaning of the text. We hope others will see these points of possible interpretation as a spur to provide better and closer readings, richer and more poignant readings. Indeed, we hope that each of these seminars—this is one of many—helps just to begin a longer conversation about the richness of Mormon scripture.

Of course, once the seminar had come to a conclusion, each of its participants had time to develop her or his own private interests in Jacob 7 somewhat further. This is what makes up the bulk of this volume, more mature versions of the papers presented at the conclusion of the seminar in 2015. In the several chapters that follow, then, several themes within the story of Jacob's encounter with Sherem find fuller articulation. They deserve some introduction here, if only to prepare the reader to appreciate them better.

The book opens with Jana Riess's "'There Came a Man': Sherem, Scapegoating, and the Inversion of Prophetic Tradition." Riess discusses the importance of the formulaic opening words of Jacob's story—"and there came a man among the people"—which ironically borrows a trope from stories of prophetic intervention in the Hebrew Bible. In scripture, the formula almost universally introduces a story about a nameless "man of God" who appears from nowhere to deliver an uncomfortable message to those in power, usually with rather drastic consequences. In

Jacob 7, oddly, the formula introduces Sherem, the man who demands a sign rather than delivers one. To develop this reversal of expectations, Riess draws on the literary and anthropological theory of René Girard, exploring the uncomfortable outcome of Sherem's intervention. Sherem is struck dead, but in such a way that Nephite society turns its collective attention in a new and perhaps unprecedented way to their responsibility for (as well as their antipathy toward) the estranged Lamanites, their brothers and sisters. Riess's study asks readers to confront deep ambiguities in Jacob 7, including the possibility that a deeply inspired and inspiring narrative bears within it ethically troubling details. Adam Miller, in "Reading Signs or Repeating Symptoms," further explores suggestions in the text of the Sherem story that its moral lessons are fraught and ambiguous. On Miller's reading, Jacob tells a story that's at once triumphalistic and tragic. The prophet triumphs over true doctrine's foe, yet the prophet clearly miscalculates the behavior of that foe. Jacob tells Sherem he would deny any sign granted because of the devil's influence, but Sherem, after seeing a sign, genuinely seeks repentance and helps launch a large-scale Nephite return to true religion. Jacob has apparently fallen into the trap of viewing Sherem through a lens colored by his difficult experiences with his older brothers, brothers who were, like Sherem, committed to the Mosaic regime and unsure about Nephi and Jacob and their "doctrine of Christ." Beautifully, however, Miller notes that the story ends with Jacob's surprise at the turn of events—and with his leading his people in a new attempt to reach out to the children of his older brothers. Kim Berkey also finds in Jacob 7 a story of development and maturation. In "The Lord's Prayer(s) in Jacob 7," she looks carefully at the way the most dramatic parts of the Sherem story—his being struck down, his subsequent confession, and his eventual spectacular death—are organized around two prayers offered by Jacob. Further, Berkey shows, each of the two prayers contains within it an allusion to an important prayer spoken by Jesus Christ in the New Testament's synoptic gospels: the Lord's Prayer from the Sermon on the Mount and Christ's desperate prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. Strikingly, the earlier of Jacob's two prayers, uttered in close connection with his miscalculation of Sherem's response to the divinely granted sign, finds him struggling to reconcile his will to God's, while the later of the two prayers, offered after Jacob has been surprised by the turn of events, shows him simply requesting something of his Father in heaven and seeing it granted. In the place of a kind of tortured asceticism, in imitation of Christ's suffering in the Garden, Jacob's more mature prayer exhibits a deep intimacy with God that simply follows the prayer the Lord recommends to his followers in his most famous sermon. The larger story of Jacob 7 can thus be read, Berkey argues, as outlining a theology of right and proper prayer. Jacob Rennaker's "Divine Dream Time: The Hope and Hazard of Revelation" argues that a theology of time accompanies any theology of prayer on offer in Jacob 7. Rennaker takes his cue, interestingly, from Jacob's famously melancholy farewell, included only once the Sherem story has come to its conclusion. For Rennaker, Jacob's talk of the dreamlike passage of time provides a useful metaphor for Jacob's messianic experience of time. Sherem's defense of the law of Moses is rooted in a linear conception of time, unintermittent by any messianic surprise. Jacob, on the other hand, lives a life of hope that draws the future into the present, interrupting the smooth flow of time, causing him to experience time in a fundamentally distinct way. The hazard of revelation thus lies in the tortured sense of time that accompanies it, and Rennaker goes so far as to suggest that Sherem's stroke might well have been a direct consequence of his being granted, for a moment at least, a glimpse into messianic time. Unable to reorient the present to a messianic future, Sherem collapses in fear. By contrast, Jacob continues his ministry in hope. Joseph Spencer's contribution to the volume also takes its orientation from Jacob's concluding farewell. But where Rennaker draws from the farewell a key metaphor for making sense of the Sherem story, Spencer's "Weeping for Zion" gives detailed attention just to the farewell itself, largely setting the Sherem story aside in order to ask what might be learned from Jacob's melancholy words. Spencer shows that the structure of Jacob's farewell focuses the Nephite experience in a peculiar way on the inaccessibility of their lost homeland, the land of Jerusalem. Drawing on psychology and philosophy to distinguish between distressingly pathological and spiritually productive forms of sadness, he argues that Jacob's farewell can be interpreted as modeling the latter. Because what Jacob's people mourned was Jerusalem's loss, moreover, his poignant farewell brings into a focus his clear interest throughout his

sermons and writings in Israel's covenantal destiny. Jacob's tragic tenor, on Spencer's account, exhibits itself in its most concentrated form in the prophet's consecrated weeping for Zion. Sharon Harris's "Reauthoring Our Covenant Obligation to Scripture and Family" focuses, like Spencer does, on the way Jacob's story helps to frame the Abrahamic covenant that's so central to Mormonism. Tracing priestly and temple themes that organize the narrative of the Sherem encounter, Harris asks about the importance of the fact that the story culminates in a renewed emphasis on scripture. She notes that the closure of Jacob's book is followed in the Book of Mormon by Enos's report of the sacred event during which Jacob gave him charge of the scriptural record. The transmission of the record is passed within the family, from generation to generation, and using language deeply suggestive of covenant. These are significant details in such close connection with a story that's primarily about how to read scripture—about whether it is or isn't appropriate to read the canonical law of Moses as messianic in nature. On Harris's reading, Jacob inherits a tradition but must for that very reason reauthor the meaning of the covenant that obligates him. The difficulties attending Jacob's encounter with Sherem thus help to outline the complex nature of covenantal inheritance. Like Harris, Jenny Webb gives her attention to the role played in Jacob 7 by family and covenant. In "Formed by Family: Jacob 7 as a Site for Sealing," however, Webb roots her reading in the easily-overlooked theme of flesh and family that often draws Jacob's attention in his preaching and writing. Reviewing in great detail Jacob's most intimate relations, Webb helps to reveal how all of Jacob's family are implicitly woven into the story of the prophet's encounter with Sherem. Distressingly, Jacob's experience with Sherem takes place long after Jacob's loved ones have disappeared or been estranged, adding poignancy to his self-understanding as a wanderer, at odds with his errant brothers and cousins. Yet in a way, they all live again in his present experience. And importantly, Webb argues that Jacob's experience with Sherem finds echoes in the record of the child of his own flesh, Enos. Jacob 7 thus becomes the heart of a larger network of family relations, binding together the people Jacob could not keep close to him in life. Jacob 7 is an excessively rich text. These papers only scratch the surface. We hope that readers of this volume can glimpse some of that same depth as they work through our reflections and begin to formulate some of their own.

# Summary Report

## 1. *Who is Sherem?*

Jacob introduces Sherem as someone who does not belong. “There came a man among the people of Nephi,” Jacob tell us, “whose name was Sherem.” Describing Sherem as someone who “came among” the Nephites, Jacob implies that Sherem was not, in some sense, already among them (7:1). It seems unlikely, though, that the Sherem is an outsider in any culturally or ethnically substantial way. Sherem arrives fully informed about Jacob, the law of Moses, and the doctrine of Christ, and he arrives with a clearly defined mission in relation to all three. More, Sherem arrives on the scene with “a perfect knowledge of the language of the people,” something unlikely for a foreigner (7:4). Either way, the rhetorical force of Jacob’s implication is to position Sherem antagonistically as “not one of us.” Given the difficulties faced by Jacob himself as a preacher (see Jacob 1–3), his wariness regarding his rival is expected and understandable.

Jacob also reports that Sherem is a preacher, that he did not accept the “doctrine of Christ,” that he had a perfect knowledge of the language of the people, that he spoke persuasively, that he quickly gathered a following, and that he labored diligently. In short, Sherem is a popular, hard-working, talented, and eloquent preacher who is committed to defending the law of Moses. Jacob immediately frames Sherem’s missionary efforts in terms of “flattery,” “leading away the hearts of the people,” and “the power of the devil” (1:4). However, unlike others in the Book of Mormon who oppose the doctrine of Christ, Sherem explicitly does so in defense of the law of Moses, what he calls “the right way of God.” Backed by key Mosaic prohibitions, Sherem defends God and charges Jacob with the crimes of blasphemy (misappropriating God’s name and law) and divination (claiming to tell the future). In light of these elements, together with the story’s rhetorical dynamics, it is plausible to read Sherem as a preacher who is well-meaning but wrong, rather than someone who is evil.

Sherem, arguing against the doctrine of Christ and in defense of the law of Moses, would surely have reminded Jacob of similar arguments made by those in Jerusalem against Lehi’s messianic prophecies and by Laman and Lemuel against Nephi’s own prophecies (cf. 1 Nephi 17:22). Throughout their encounter, Jacob automatically assumes, like Nephi does with Laman or Lemuel, that Sherem acts in bad faith and with the worst possible motives. Rather than offering instruction or correction (at least as he tells the story), Jacob moves immediately to condemnation. And, most tellingly, Jacob is convinced that, even if Sherem were given a sign from God, Sherem would doubtless deny that sign and refuse to repent (7:14). But, it turns out, Jacob is wrong on this last point. When the sign is given and Sherem is smitten, Sherem not only repents, he immediately “confessed the Christ and the power of the Holy Ghost” (7:17). And it is then Sherem’s preaching—not Jacob’s—that is ultimately witnessed by the multitude, that astonishes them, and that calls down the power of God such that they, too, are overcome, fall to the earth, and are converted (7:21). It is Sherem’s preaching rather than Jacob’s that inaugurates a fundamental transformation among the Nephites, with the result that “the love of God was restored again among the people” (7:23).

For his own part, Sherem fears that he has “lied unto God” because he “denied the Christ and said that [he] believed the scriptures,” but, in context, this confession reads more like a retroactive acknowledgment of his failure to understand the scriptures than an admission of a malicious intent to deceive the people from the beginning (7:19). Of course, Jacob’s strident and unyielding evaluation of Sherem as a “wicked man” (cf. 7:23) should not simply be discounted. Certainly he failed to understand the practical and theological importance of Nephite messianic prophecy. But the significant differences between Jacob’s evaluation of Sherem and Sherem’s

own stated goals and morally significant actions, together with the obvious dynamics that may have unfairly colored Jacob's own judgments, indicate that readers should seriously consider reassessing Sherem's words and actions in a more charitable light. The important limitations to his religious outlook can be instructive without vilifying him, and details in the narrative suggest that charity is called for.

## 2. *Where is Jacob?*

Sherem dominates the narrative in Jacob 7. Where Sherem is an active, driving presence, Jacob is, curiously and suggestively, passive and peripheral. Note that it is Sherem who comes among the people, Sherem who preaches and labors diligently, and Sherem who has to seek out Jacob for an opportunity to confront him. "He sought much opportunity that he might come unto me," Jacob reports (7:3). Why is this necessary? Where is Jacob? Why is he so hard to find? Why does Sherem have to seek much in order to come unto him—especially in such a young society that would likely have been relatively small and intimate at this point? More, why is Sherem allowed time and freedom to "lead away many hearts" without any resistance from Jacob (7:3)? Why doesn't Jacob take action, seek out Sherem, confront him, and himself put a stop to Sherem's efforts to "overthrow the doctrine of Christ" (7:2) long before he has sustained success?

In Jacob's telling, Sherem ironically plays the traditionally prophetic part, signaled by the use of the formula "there came a man" at the outset of the narrative (7:1). (This formula is most often used in scripture to describe a prophet figure who arrives with an unwelcome message.) Sherem comes among Jacob's people as a prophetic rebel, preaching and organizing, moving the populace to remember the law of Moses, calling them to repentance, and confronting those in power with charges of blasphemy. Jacob oddly plays the part normally assigned in such stories about prophets to a King David or King Noah, while Sherem gets to play the part of a Nathan or Abinadi, delivering hard truths to a figure of established power. In this way, the typical prophet-priest power dynamic is, at least at the outset of the Sherem narrative, neatly reversed. It is possible that Jacob's age and institutional power play a more practical part in isolating him from Sherem. Is Jacob too old to take to the streets? Has he withdrawn from his people in light of previous failures (cf. Jacob 1–3)? Has he withdrawn because of his "overanxiety" for his people as a result of their failure to understand the "mystery" that is the doctrine of Christ (4:18)? Might he, in his role as a priest in the Nephite temple, effectively live behind the temple walls, insulated from the daily business of his people (cf. 1:17–19)?

Whatever answers might be given to these questions, even when Jacob does arrive on the scene for his decisive confrontation with Sherem, he is passive. Sherem seeks him out, and Sherem speaks first, leveling the charge of blasphemy. Jacob counters with a series of questions, but Sherem is the one who actively solicits the sign that ends up smiting him. Jacob somewhat passively gives his blessing to whatever God wills. Sherem is felled by "the power of the Lord" for "the space of many days," and it is Sherem's sincere repentance and preaching that spark the mass conversion that returns the people to the scriptures and their love of God (7:15). Jacob figures into this decisive conversion that reboots Nephite society as a whole primarily by way of his belated comment that all this happened because he had, earlier and off-stage, "requested it of my Father which is in heaven, for he had heard my cry and answered my prayer" (7:22). Further, verse twenty-four then recounts, in the passive voice, that "means were devised" to reclaim the Lamanites, perhaps spearheaded by Jacob, but these efforts "all were in vain" (7:24). The chapter then concludes with Jacob's melancholic reflections on his old age, suffering, and mourning, all framed by a sense of life passing "away like as it were unto us a dream" (7:26). The overall effect of these themes is striking: Jacob's explicit commentary on the narrative action (he is the good prophet and Sherem is the wicked man) is consistently in tension with the narrative actions themselves and, in particular, by Jacob's own framing of that



narrative action. Jacob presents himself as passive and peripheral, as both being and not being the hero of his story. This ambiguity, perhaps intentional, may itself be of central theological importance.

### 3. What, in Jacob 7, is the “doctrine of Christ”?

Concluding his record, Jacob reports that their “lives passed away like as it were unto us a dream, we being a lonesome and a solemn people, wanderers cast out from Jerusalem, born in tribulation in a wild wilderness, and hated of our brethren, which caused wars and contentions; wherefore we did mourn out our days” (7:26). Jacob mourns because he and his people have lost Jerusalem and, having lost the holy city, they are lonesome and hated by their brethren. Jerusalem is, for Jacob, a focal point. Jacob and his people had lost Jerusalem for the same reason they were hated by their brothers, Laman and Lemuel. As Laman and Lemuel put it: “And we know that the people which were in the land of Jerusalem were a righteous people, for they keep the statutes and the judgments of the Lord and all his commandments according to the law of Moses; wherefore we know that they are a righteous people. And our father hath judged them and hath led us away because we would hearken unto his word” (1 Nephi 17:22). Laman and Lemuel align Jerusalem with the law of Moses, but they find themselves lost in the wilderness because, rather than keeping the law of Moses, they heeded the words of their father, “a visionary man” (1 Nephi 5:4). Being a visionary man, Lehi dreamed dreams. Without these dreams he would not have “seen the things of God in a vision” or “known the goodness of God,” but would have “tarried at Jerusalem” and “perished with my brethren” (1 Nephi 5:4). This visionary intrusion of dreams into everyday life is the fault line that organizes the whole of Book of Mormon history and, ultimately, distinguishes the law of Moses from the doctrine of Christ.

This same drama—this argument about the law of Moses and the doctrine of Christ that Lehi plays out with Jerusalem and Nephi plays out with Laman and Lemuel—is repeated again in Jacob 7 with Sherem and Jacob. Sherem defends the law of Moses and takes Jacob’s visionary assimilation of that law to be a perversion of the law’s purity. Echoing Laman and Lemuel, Sherem claims that Jacob has “led away much of this people, that they pervert the right way of God and keep not the law of Moses, which is the right way, and convert the law of Moses into the worship of a being which ye say shall come many hundred years hence” (7:7). For Jacob, however, the right way of God is not grounded directly in the law itself but in visions and revelations, and apparently in a rather specific sort of visions and revelations. He claims that his hope in Christ could not be shaken because of his “many revelation”: “for I had truly seen angels and they had ministered unto me. And also I had heard the voice of the Lord speaking unto me in very word from time to time” (7:5). This revelatory power that cannot be confined within the bounds of the law is, as Jacob says, “the power of the Holy Ghost” (7:12). More, this phrase, “the power of the Holy Ghost,” is used consistently in Nephi’s writings in connection with his visions of the larger history of Israel, God’s covenant people. Nephi promises that anyone can gain access to apocalyptic visions of that history (see 1 Nephi 10:17–22). As with Jacob’s talk of “the doctrine of Christ” (Jacob 7:2; see 2 Nephi 31), his references to the power of the Holy Ghost seem to be part of a larger prophetic heritage passed on to Lehi’s children.

Significantly, the basic point of contention in each case is time. According to Sherem, Jacob perverts the law by using his messianic visions to break time’s frame and, thus, to pervert the orderly, temporally normative operation of the law. He “pervert[s] the right way of God” and “convert[s] the law of Moses into the worship of a being which ye say shall come many hundred years hence” (7:7). This visionary subordination of the law to a promised messiah “is blasphemy, for no man knoweth of such things; for he cannot tell of things to come” (7:7). Jacob’s visions are, in effect, destroying or killing the orderly succession of cause and effect imposed by the law with their present tense enactment of future tense events. On this score, Sherem is, in part, correct. The law is dying. Nephi and Jacob both advocate a doctrine of Christ that reorders time by treating the law as if it were already fulfilled in Christ. As Nephi puts it: “And notwithstanding we believe in Christ, we keep the law of Moses and look forward with steadfastness

unto Christ until the law shall be fulfilled, for for this end was the law given. Wherefore the law hath become dead unto us, and we are made alive in Christ because of our faith, yet we keep the law because of the commandments” (2 Nephi 25:25). By converting the law into a machine for reordering time—for treating the past as forgivable, the present as open for action, and the future as already accomplished—the law becomes dead to them and eternal life becomes possible. Sherem experiences this kind of abrupt temporal reeducation personally when, smitten “by the power of the Lord,” he lies comatose for many days (7:15). Asleep to the world, he is exposed to eternity: “he spake of hell and of eternity and of eternal punishment” and he “confessed the Christ and the power of the Holy Ghost” (7:18, 17). The doctrine of Christ, perhaps initially to our terror, superimposes eternity onto time—that is, it superimposes Christ onto the law—and allows life and law to be seen and lived from the far side of their own completion in Christ. And then, in this visionary space of superposition, it is only natural that our lives should pass away as in a dream.

#### *4. How does Jacob 7 fit into the larger structure of the Book of Jacob?*

The Book of Jacob is Jacob’s unique contribution to the Nephite record. (However, it should be noted that a substantial and significant sermon delivered by Jacob is also included by Nephi in his own record in 2 Nephi 6–10.) Contemporary versions of the Book of Jacob break the text into seven chapters. However, the earliest version of the text breaks it more cleanly along thematic lines into just four chapters: Jacob 1, Jacob 2–3, Jacob 4–6, and Jacob 7. Jacob 1 functions as a kind of preface to the book, introducing key themes and providing historical context. Jacob 2–3 records a sermon delivered by Jacob to the Nephites at the time of Nephi’s death. Jacob 4–6 introduces, delivers, and then comments on Zenos’ world-historical allegory of the olive tree. Jacob 7 concludes the book with Jacob’s confrontation with Sherem regarding the doctrine of Christ. Jacob 7 itself segments into three parts: Jacob 7:1–23 narrates Jacob’s confrontation with Sherem; Jacob 7:24–25 recounts an failed attempt to “reclaim and restore the Lamanites to the knowledge of the truth”; and Jacob 7:26–27 concludes the record with some general reflections on the Nephites’ condition as a people, while Jacob formally charges his son, Enos, with care of the small plates. One noteworthy feature of the book’s overall structure is that Jacob 7 appears to be Jacob’s third (and finally successful) attempt to end his record. Jacob initially brings his record to a close at the end of chapter 3, at the conclusion of the sermon delivered at the time of Nephi’s death. After concluding the sermon proper in 3:11, Jacob takes a stab at a formal ending for the book in 3:12–14, concluding that: “These plates are called the plates of Jacob, and they were made by the hand of Nephi. And I make an end of speaking these words” (3:14). Chapter four then reopens the record with an explanation that, though it is difficult to write many words, Jacob hopes now to preserve for his people some “small degree of knowledge concerning us or concerning their fathers” (4:2). In particular, he wants future readers to know “that we knew of Christ, and we had a hope of his glory many hundred years before his coming” (4:4). Jacob’s supplementary attempt to preserve this knowledge in the record suggests that his attempts at teaching the doctrine of Christ to his own people during his own life may have had limited success. Jacob 7:7 indirectly suggests the same. There, Sherem suggests that Jacob has “led away much of this people,” implying that Jacob has not managed to lead *all* of the people to embrace the doctrine of Christ. More, these hints raise, in general, the question of the extent to which Lehi’s, Nephi’s, and Jacob’s personal revelations concerning the doctrine of Christ were available to the Nephite people at large. Regardless, Jacob attempts to bring the record to a close a second time in Jacob 6:12–13. Wrapping up his comments on Zenos’ allegory, Jacob simply concludes: “O be wise! What can I say more? Finally, I bid you farewell until I shall meet you before the pleasing bar of God, which bar striketh the wicked with awful dread and fear” (6:12–13). It appears, then, that Jacob intended to firmly conclude his record with Jacob 6 but that, in the years that followed, his encounter with Sherem so moved him as to motivate the addition of one final coda to his brother’s plates. Having recounted this confrontation, chapter 7 concludes with a formal charge of transmission, leaving the plates in his son’s hands and, directly addressing the reader, offering a final goodbye: “And to the reader I bid farewell, hoping

that many of my brethren may read my words. Brethren, adieu” (7:27). Jacob’s profoundly melancholy concluding reflection on the Nephites’ situation as a people—“our lives passed away like as it were unto us a dream, we being a lonesome and solemn people, wanderers cast out from Jerusalem, born in tribulation in a wild wilderness, and hated of our brethren, which caused wars and contentions; wherefore we did mourn out our days”—together with the “anxiety” that he frequently ascribes to himself (cf. 2 Nephi 6:3, Jacob 1:5, 2:3, 4:18), may supply some crucial context for his apparent inability to cleanly bring his record to a close (7:26). More, insofar as melancholy and anxiety are potentially significant affects with respect to a life lived in Christ, the tripartite stop-and-go structure of Jacob’s book may itself be of theological significance. Further, in its final form, the Book of Jacob ends with an unmistakable turn for the better. After Jacob’s apparent inability to sway the whole of his people toward righteousness after Nephi’s death (see Jacob 1–3), he seems to have largely given up hope of seeing his people return, generally, to righteousness. The story of Sherem, in all its complexity, tells the story of at least a temporary refocusing of the Nephites on their religious and spiritual duties. Jacob 7, in its supplemental fashion, allows the Book of Jacob to end on a happy note, anticipating the wider-spread Christian following on display in subsequent narratives in the Book of Mormon.

# “There Came a Man”: Sherem, Scapegoating, and the Inversion of Prophetic Tradition

Jana Riess

Sherem appears seemingly out of the blue in Jacob 7:1 (“there came a man”), showing up among the people of Nephi with no indication of his origins. Various commentators have speculated that he was a Nephite, or possibly a wandering Jaredite, Mulekite, or Zoramite.<sup>1</sup> But our attention might be better placed in parsing the deceptively simple phrase “there came a man.” This essay explores several places this phrase appears in parallel formations in the Hebrew Bible and discusses how its use in Jacob 7 carefully inverts the prophetic tradition established in those biblical texts. Sherem, as will become clear, is not the “man of God” who appears in the Hebrew Bible stories, but something else entirely. To ascertain what that role might be, the second half of the chapter then reflects upon how Sherem’s death unites the people against a common enemy, functioning as a classic scapegoat in René Girard’s formulation.<sup>2</sup> We will see that the Sherem story is, over and over again, one that consistently reverses well-established expectations.

## 1. The *Ish Elohim* in the Hebrew Bible

When we first meet Sherem, we are simply told that “there came a man among the people of Nephi, whose name was Sherem” (Jacob 7:1). There are echoes here of six places in the Hebrew Bible where similar language is used, and similar situations become apparent. In Hebrew, the phrase *man of God* (*ish elohim*) has special significance as “someone with extraordinary and rather frightening power and insight,” who “knows things you might not want him to know and does things you might not want him to do,” says biblical scholar John Goldingay.<sup>3</sup> The *ish elohim* is a stand-in for God, speaking with God’s voice. Let us analyze three of these passages to identify a general pattern.

First, in 1 Samuel 2:27, we hear that “a man of God came” to the priest Eli to excoriate him about his two shameful sons, who have no interest in the Lord. They have dishonored their father and the Lord by skimming the fat from the top of the sacrifices while the meat is yet raw and by sleeping with loose women at the entrance to the tent of meeting.<sup>4</sup> The mysterious, unnamed man of God tells Eli that the Lord has had just about enough of this; even though Eli and his sons are the direct biological heirs to the priestly line, God has decided to restructure. Eli is going to lose his job, and his sons will both die on the same day. In this first story, the “man of God” inverts the expected line of priestly succession. Eli’s sons have all of the right lineage but none of the faithfulness; the story repeatedly contrasts them with Samuel, a young boy who has been given up to the temple by his mother in gratitude for his miraculous conception. The stories are woven together in vignettes, causing Walter Brueggemann to note that “‘the rise of Samuel’ is narrated in counterpoint to the account of Eli’s fall,” and “there is irony in the fact that [Samuel] is nurtured in faith by Eli, the very one whom he displaces.”<sup>5</sup> It is to Samuel that the priesthood will pass, not the abusive sons of Eli. The *ish elohim* has delivered a message of change, showing that God cares less for lineage than for obedience and devotion. Samuel’s ascendancy as the new priest signals a larger change as well: it will later be Samuel who inaugurates and blesses an entirely new system of government, choosing Israel’s first monarch.<sup>6</sup>

The second story appears in 1 Kings 13:1, when “a man of God from Judah” comes to King Jeroboam in Bethel to inform him that his worship practices are all wrong; he’s not supposed to be erecting altars anywhere he wants to, or designating his own priests outside the line of succession. The stranger prophesies that God’s punishment to Jeroboam will be that every unqualified upstart whom Jeroboam has ever taken on as a priest will be burned to

death on that very altar.<sup>7</sup> But even after all this, the narrator tells us, “Jeroboam did not change his evil ways” (1 Kings 13:33).

One relevant fact about this story for our purposes is that the *ish elohim* here is clearly a foreigner; he is a Judahite who presumes to speak to a king in Israel, or Ephraim.<sup>8</sup> But another point is something that comes a bit deeper into the story, when the visiting man of God has delivered his message and unwisely accepts an invitation to dine at the home of someone who introduces himself as a fellow prophet. God has already commanded the *ish elohim* to deliver his message and return straight home; however, the man of God relaxes his standards and accepts the invitation to dinner. He is soon afterward devoured by lions. This is the only example in the Hebrew Bible where the visiting “man of God” himself is a morally compromised character who misunderstands God’s teachings, something that will come up again in our discussion of Sherem.

A third story merits mention here. In 1 Kings 20:27, a man of God comes to King Ahab of Israel to bring him the good news that his tiny group of Israelite forces will indeed be able to defeat the huge army that’s invading from Syria. But Ahab’s favor does not last long. Right after the battle, he spares the life of the opposing king, calling him “my brother” (1 Kings 20:32). Contemporary readers may approve of this tender act of reconciliation, but Yahweh has other ideas: Ahab’s own life is forfeit because he has allowed himself to enter into a covenant with a foreign, pagan king (1 Kings 20:41). It takes the LORD some time to get around to this particular smiting, however. It isn’t until the following chapter that Ahab and his pagan wife Jezebel finally test Yahweh’s patience to the point of no return when they decide to seize Naboth’s vineyard and accuse that innocent man of blasphemy. Moreover, it isn’t until 2 Kings 9 that God’s final judgment comes upon the couple. But the Lord’s punishment, while not swift, is thorough: chapter 10 details the slaughter of all of Ahab and Jezebel’s descendants so that no one of their line will remain to take the throne.

All three of these stories pertain to a prophetic, kingly, or priestly U-turn.<sup>9</sup> Such political reversals have to do with wrong worship committed by people who inherited their responsibilities and were not directly called by God. Eli’s sons have defiled the priesthood they inherited. Jeroboam has set up shrines outside of Jerusalem and defiled the monarchy he inherited. Ahab and Jezebel not only worship false foreign gods, but also try to seize someone else’s property. Here they deeply misunderstand God’s provisions for distributing the promised land—another aspect of inheritance.<sup>10</sup> They have tried to snatch what is not theirs, what God has apportioned to another.<sup>11</sup>

All of these stories have to do with God punishing those who dishonor him by false worship or faithless service. They teach that inherited status is not enough; whether you are a king or a priest or a prophet, you have to earn your keep by unwavering devotion.

## 2. Sherem and the Inversion of Prophetic Tradition

What does this have to do with Sherem?

Sherem’s story begins with the very same set-up. “There came a man” among the people, teaching and preaching. Like the prophets of the Hebrew Bible, Sherem seeks out someone in a position of power to speak critically about the dangers that can occur when a society is not adhering to Mosaic Law. He is hoping to shake up someone in authority (Jacob 1:5), someone who has fallen away from the strictest practice of the law and the commandments, someone who is interested in a newfangled god from somewhere else—indeed, even from another time entirely. That someone is Jacob, the high priest. Sherem comes into this text as a watchman over public piety, an outsider who is poised to rein in the people of Nephi from what he sees as a dangerous theological heresy. They are

straying from the foundation of their religion, which is the law, and adding to it with this foreign god called the Christ.<sup>12</sup>

Sherem, as an upholder of the law, would have been very familiar with what happens whenever Yahweh's covenant people abandon their foundations and begin to show an openness to worshipping anyone but Yahweh, who admits to being a jealous god. Those stories never end well. So Sherem enters this scene as a trope, as the mysterious man of God whose function is to be more priestly than the priest, to save the people from the brink of ritual disaster. But this is where the similarities end. In some ways, the Sherem story is a reversal of the expected reversal. In most of the Hebrew Bible stories, the men of God approach people in power, whether temporal or religious power, and their very presence signals a changing of the guard. Theological innovation, regarded as idolatry, is quashed. The status quo is upheld in regard to traditional faith but usually reversed in regard to power.

It's important to note that Sherem does not accuse Jacob of being non-religious, but of being *wrong*-religious. Jacob is forsaking the religion of the past, the one based on Mosaic law, in favor of some unknown, unproven deity that is only reachable via a time machine. When Sherem says there will be no Christ, he has logic and tradition *and religion* on his side. He's also apparently sincere in his belief that Jacob has, like Eli's sons, become a false priest, one who has "perverted" the right way of God. Sherem works hard, laboring diligently (Jacob 1:3); he has a way with people; he is fiercely intelligent; and he is as learned as a person can be when the library of extant literature is so very limited.<sup>13</sup> Jacob as narrator seems to go out of his way to use active verbs that show Sherem's agentive power. Sherem preaches and declares in order to "overthrow" the doctrine of Christ, his intentions always overt and obvious. There is nothing subtle or hidden about Sherem, who is said to have "sought much opportunity" to meet with Jacob and persuade him to embrace his point of view.

Jacob as narrator chooses to reveal a fair amount of information about our interloper. In fact, we know far more about Sherem than we do almost any of the "men of God" in the Hebrew Bible. With the exceptions of superstars like Elijah and Elisha, all the others go unnamed in those stories. This should be our first of several clues that something is amiss from the usual pattern. Sherem is named from the very first verse that discusses his actions (Jacob 7:1), even though after this chapter he is never mentioned again in the entire Book of Mormon. Jacob *wants* us to know who this stranger is, because to name Sherem is to have power over him. Sherem will not, like the unnamed "men of God" in the prophetic stories, get to serve as God's anonymous messenger, delivering truth and then vanishing in a whiff of mystery. He gets a name, and therefore an infamy.

A second clue is the pointedly missing phrase "of God" in the Old Testament's typical wording that "a man of God" happened along. Sherem is not a man of God, even though the story bears many of the external trappings of other man-of-God tales in which a holy outsider speaks truth to power. But Sherem is not speaking truth, and Jacob, as he is wont to hint as his book proceeds and his society degenerates, is not entirely in power. By choosing to craft his story in this way, Jacob is not only highlighting the fact that the strange visitor is a heretic, but also calling attention to his own diminished political and religious position. The people have largely ignored his many warnings about their unrighteous behavior, evidenced by the fact that chapter 7 opens "after some years had passed away" since Jacob has last written and the people don't evince any change until after Sherem's death near the end of the chapter. Jacob's sermonizing has fallen on deaf ears.

Finally, Sherem reveals his own lack of prophetic status in his insistence that God provide a "sign" that what Jacob is teaching is true. In the Hebrew Bible stories, it is the man of God who provides a sign, and the man of God's relationship with Yahweh is so unshakeable that he does not even have to ask for it. It simply and dramatically

occurs. For example, in 1 Kings 13, the “man of God from Judah” who has decried King Jeroboam’s construction of an unauthorized altar provides an immediate and miraculous sign that his judgments are true:

And he gave a sign the same day, saying, This is the sign which the LORD hath spoken; Behold, the altar shall be rent, and the ashes that are upon it shall be poured out. (1 Kings 13:3)

The hand with which Jeroboam tries to seize the man of God withers instantly, and the unauthorized altar is torn down in spectacular fashion. By these signs does the man of God demonstrate that, as one commentary puts it, “the God who can ensure that prophecy comes to pass in the short term can surely also do so over the longer term.”<sup>14</sup> In the Book of Mormon story, by contrast, Sherem reveals that he is not a true “man of God” when he asks Jacob for a sign rather than delivering one himself.

### 3. Sherem as Scapegoat

We can understand more of this passage by analyzing the social and political roles Sherem and Jacob play, respectively. It is a situation that makes many readers uncomfortable. It feels wrong that Sherem, of all the heretics and shady characters in the Book of Mormon, has to die. Why not Alma the Younger, who persecuted the church so strongly that he sought to destroy it? Alma gets to live while Sherem, who has (at least in his own estimation) carefully followed the mandates of Mosaic law, gets struck down. Why? For that matter, why do Jacob’s own people, who have been warned repeatedly of their egregious sins over the course of many years, walk away from chapter 7 unscathed while Sherem, who is observant and pious, is dealt a fatal blow after a single episode of outmoded theology? René Girard’s theory of the scapegoat may shed light on this dynamic: Sherem has to die because the people need a scapegoat in order to become united and whole, at least for a time.

In Girard’s view, something called mimetic desire happens when two people or groups are fighting over the same object. One literature scholar states that an analogy would be two brothers playing on their front porch. One takes a GI Joe from the toy box and then the other makes a grab for it, and a full-on fight ensues. Soon they have forgotten the ostensible reasons they are fighting—exclusive rights to that toy—and are fighting for the sake of fighting. In Girard’s view, the fight only stops when an overweight neighbor boy wanders into their yard to see what is going on. “Oh, there’s old fat butt!” one brother cries. “Yeah, it’s big fat butt!” taunts the other. As the overweight boy runs back to his own house crying, the two brothers resume playing with each other, allies once again. Order has been restored.<sup>15</sup> This disturbing story, according to Girard, occurs over and over again in human interaction. When one person or group claims an object or a privilege, suddenly the other wants it too, imitating the first person’s desire. It is called mimetic desire because of this imitative function; if someone else values that thing, the thing itself must be valuable, and therefore we should want it too. The only way to restore order is if a third party functions as a scapegoat to end the conflict. As we will see below, Girard’s five necessary steps of scapegoating intersect in interesting ways with the story of Sherem.<sup>16</sup>

#### *a. Chaos, lack of differentiation, and a blurring of boundaries.*

We don’t know enough about what was going on in Nephite society at the time of Jacob 7 to understand fully how Girard’s theory might play out in this passage. However, 2 Nephi and other sections of Jacob reveal that serious tensions existed among the Nephites. Jacob opens this chapter deeply at odds with his own people. Possibly this instability had a political component; Noel Reynolds has noted that although modern readers often assume that the recently deceased Nephi had been the king of the people, there is little evidence within the text to support that idea.<sup>17</sup> If Reynolds is correct about Nephi, this means that Jacob’s critique of the ruling Nephite king comes as a

further destabilization: he is not only reproving a sitting monarch, but he is doing so at a time when the regime is new and still tenuous. The political situation feels fragile.

Moreover, the Nephites were a people in theological crisis. Recall that Jacob 2 and 3 feature a catalog of all the people's sins, their greed and sexual transgressions and terrible pride. Jacob stands in the temple to deliver this, one of four "temple sermons" in the Book of Mormon.<sup>18</sup> The scene of his address is no accident. Jacob chooses the holiest and most established place to convict the people of their wrongdoing. The sermon warns of dire eternal consequences that will attend them if they do not harken to Jacob's admonitions, an apocalyptic theme that is picked up again in chapter 6. There everything is coming to a head: they will be destroyed by fire in facing the awful judgment of God. Some form of judgment is mentioned half a dozen times in just this short chapter. And this chaotic situation seems to be the note on which Jacob himself plans to gracefully exit as sacred scribe: he says at the end of chapter 6 that he is making an end of his writing.

Jacob 2–3 and 6 establish a doomsday scenario in which chaos is encroaching and the people's end may be nigh. The people will be punished for their sins, probably by fire. According to Girard, the fear and trembling engendered by such a situation is precisely the condition in which a scapegoat becomes most necessary. When chaos is looming and danger is real, that is when the people need an expiation.<sup>19</sup>

The other component of Girard's first step is a blurring of the boundaries and identity markers between people and groups. In chapter 3, we saw Jacob committing what may have been an irreparable breach in his relationship with the Nephites: he compared them unfavorably with their enemies, the Lamanites, saying that the Lamanites were more righteous (Jacob 3:3; 3:5–6) and had more conservative family values. Moreover, he told them that the Lamanites would destroy them with a scourge (Jacob 3:3) while the Lamanites themselves would be blessed and find favor with the Lord (Jacob 3:6).

We can imagine the people's anger rising against Jacob. Whose side was that priest on, anyway? Who was he to give them commandments (Jacob 3:9), tell them they were lousy parents (Jacob 3:10), and warn them to stop being "angels to the devil" (Jacob 3:11)? No wonder in Jacob 4 we see the priest retreating to his written record. Maybe Jacob is doing so only because he has become old and, like many people near the end of life, feels an urge to write a record for posterity. Or maybe it's something else, and he worries that the rift between himself and the people, or at least between himself and the king he has openly criticized, is great enough now that his life is in danger. He does not tell us, but there is a subtext in verse 14 of Jacob 4, when he speaks of how the Jews, "a stiffnecked people" who "despised the words of plainness," killed their prophets. Of his own people he has already said that he must speak the truth to them in "plainness" about their many sins. Does Jacob expect the same dark fate that has befallen other prophets?

*b. A scapegoat is slandered and accused.*

If step one occurred because Jacob in his sacred role as priest and defender of the faith has alienated his people, Sherem comes into this situation as a convenient scapegoat who will reunite Jacob with the Nephites. At first glance, Sherem may seem an unlikely candidate for a scapegoat. He is not disabled or mad, two qualities that Girard positions as attractive because they signal weakness. He is not one of "those at the bottom of the social ladder," as Girard puts it.<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, he is also not at the very top of the social strata, rich and powerful, a visible target in the eye of the hurricane. He is not a king or an official priest to this people. Still, that is the role he is attempting to play, which makes him potential prey. Sherem serves as a suitable scapegoat because he is enough like Jacob, the real focus of the people's anger, to become an acceptable substitute. Sherem desires to serve as



both priest and prophet, Jacob's twin roles, and he is a deeply religious man. He and Jacob also both have the same goal: to win the hearts of the people. Moreover, he clearly comes from outside the community in some sense. He is a foreigner in their midst.

In step 2, the scapegoat must be slandered and accused, which Jacob does. He lays out the theological case against Sherem by alleging that Sherem has not understood the scriptures, which point to Christ. Even more significantly, he actually demonizes Sherem. Jacob makes a strong rhetorical move here, from first stating that Sherem was acting "under the power of the devil" in Jacob 7:4 to the more ontological accusation, given in his face-to-face debate with Sherem in verse 14, that "thou art of the devil." Evil has gone in just ten verses from something that Sherem does to something that Sherem is. This, according to Girard, is not uncommon in scapegoating:

The guilty person is so much a part of his offense that one is indistinguishable from the other. His defense seems to be a fantastic essence or ontological attribute. In many myths the wretched person's presence is enough to contaminate everything around him, infecting man and beast with the plague, ruining crops, poisoning food, causing game to disappear, and sowing discord around him. Everything shrivels under his feet and the grass does not grow again. He produces disasters as easily as a fig tree produces figs. He need only be himself.<sup>21</sup> Note that Sherem never launches the same accusation back at Jacob. Sherem believes Jacob has misunderstood the law and been delinquent in his duties, but Sherem does not go so far as to anathematize his interlocutor.

*c. Evidence is presented that the scapegoat is guilty.*

Step 3 requires that the scapegoat be tried and found guilty, and interestingly enough, Jacob narrates this section so that he is not the one serving as the judge and jury. Jacob may be the prosecuting attorney in the initial cross-examination, asking leading theological questions to elicit Sherem's heresy, but Sherem hoists himself by his own petards here, admitting that he does not believe in the coming Christ (Jacob 7:9) and demanding a sign by the power of the Holy Ghost (Jacob 7:13).

Sherem's need for a sign from God is, ironically, what seems to seal his fate. In Jacob's eyes, even the fact that Sherem asks for a sign is evidence of his guilt. Jacob believes that Sherem secretly knows the teaching about Christ is true, but since Sherem is "of the devil" (Jacob 7:14), he's only going to deny that truth. What will be an unmistakable sign unto Sherem, Jacob suggests, will be the Lord's terrible smiting.

It isn't just Sherem's being struck dumb by the Lord that shows his guilt. When he recovers some days later after falling to the earth in repentance, Sherem presents the evidence against himself by giving the people a helpful checklist of all of his past wrongs. In fact, Jacob has Sherem requesting a public audience just for this purpose. Jacob is more or less absent from that scene, not entering into the conversation at all as Sherem details how he denied the Christ, misunderstood the Scriptures, and lied to God (Jacob 7:19). The language Jacob uses to distantly describe this scene is telling. Note that in verses 17 and 18 Jacob says that Sherem "spake plainly unto them," which at first glance seems merely like a reversal of Sherem's previous pattern of flattery, but on deeper examination may reveal a hint about what is about to happen. Prophets who speak plainly have a distressing tendency to die. Just as Jacob once spoke plainly to the people about their sins, now Sherem speaks plainly about his own, making Sherem even more compelling as a stand-in for the sacrifice that is needed.

*d. The scapegoat is convicted, killed, or banned.*

Sherem's sacrifice comes in Step 4, when he gives up "the ghost." This act is dispensed with in a single verse, verse 20. Both the account's brevity and its ambiguity are intriguing from a Girardian point of view. It is actually unclear from the text just how Sherem dies, or who is responsible for the execution. Has God struck Sherem down directly? Have the people done so, animated by the Spirit and the wrath of God? Or have the people killed Sherem of their own accord? The text does not tell us.

God had previously struck Sherem dumb and then nourished Sherem "for the space of many days" while he came to terms with his theological errors (Jacob 7:15). That was a reckoning, but not a death. The Book of Mormon text never blames God for Sherem's death; if anyone is responsible, it seems to be Sherem himself, who surrenders his life force ("And it came to pass that when he had said these words he could say no more, and he gave up the ghost," Jacob 7:20). Girard notes that in stories of scapegoating, "the study of myths suggests that there was a very strong tendency, especially in Greek mythology, to minimize and even suppress the crimes of the gods."<sup>22</sup> This is part of a larger tendency to conceal collective violence. The ambiguity of Jacob 7 lends itself to this theory of suppression, as does the phrase "gave up the ghost"—especially since that is the expression the KJV uses to describe Jesus' final moments on the cross.

And Jesus cried with a loud voice, and gave up the ghost. And the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom. And when the centurion, which stood over against him, saw that he so cried out, and gave up the ghost, he said, Truly this man was the Son of God. (Mark 15:37–39)

In the case of Jesus, death was a vicarious sacrifice to save humanity. It paved the way for sinful people to reconcile with God. The Sherem story, however, has much the same function, so the mirrored phrasing of "gave up the ghost" seems more than a literary coincidence. Sherem's death was not, like Jesus', able to wipe out all human sin for all time. It was, however, the catalyst for a single group of people to become reconciled to God, if only for a while.

*e. Order is restored.*

It certainly doesn't take long—just one verse—before Step 5 is fully underway and order is restored. The people fall down in repentance, just like Sherem did. But unlike Sherem, the people don't have to die, because their scapegoat has already performed that function in their stead.

Sherem's death galvanizes the Nephite people to greater righteousness. Although after this chapter Sherem is never mentioned again, his effect is clear: Nephite religion changes after his sacrificial death. Sharon Harris has noted a decided uptick in the use of the word "faith," for example, after the small plates were recorded. The small plates account for 27 percent of the Book of Mormon, but only 10 percent of the use of the word "faith," a word that becomes more important going forward.<sup>23</sup> After Sherem's death, the people are reconverted. They have not abandoned Mosaic law—Jacob says they "searched the scriptures"—but they do so now with the love of God in their hearts.

Sherem's death also rebuilds the boundaries between civilizations, refortifying the identity differentiation between Nephite and Lamanite. Whereas in his temple sermon Jacob had blurred those once-sharp edges (Step 1), calling the Lamanites righteous and blessed, after Sherem's death we return to the classic us-them formulation in which Nephite history depicts the Lamanites as wicked aggressors. In verse 24 Jacob says the Lamanites delighted in bloodshed and "sought by the power of their arms to destroy us continually." And in verse 25, the Nephites rise triumphant against these enemies, reassured once again that they are the good guys of history.

It's all thanks to Sherem, really. The "man of God" in this story has come not to vanquish, but to be vanquished. His message, unlike that of the Hebrew Bible men of God, is not one of change. We noted above that in those stories, the status quo is always upheld in regard to religion but usually reversed in regard to power. Monarchies come crashing down and the people return to Mosaic law. In the Sherem story, this is exactly reversed: the priestly order remains the same—its inherited nature reinforced by Jacob's reference in his final verse to passing on the sacred record to his son Enos—but Nephite religion expands to encompass something new. Sherem's sacrificial death makes the Nephite people more than conquerors as they march into battle with God—and Jacob—on their side.

---

## NOTES

1. For an overview of several different theories, see A. Keith Thompson, "Who Was Sherem?" in *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 14 (2015): 1–15. Thompson rejects the notion that Sherem was a Mulekite or Jaredite largely because there is no evidence of interactions between those people and the Nephites until much later in the Book of Mormon narrative. Anderson says that Sherem's eloquent fluency with the Nephite language and the depth of his knowledge of the Law of Moses suggest that it is more likely Sherem was a fellow Nephite from the Zoramite line.
2. I am grateful to Jeremy Walker for first suggesting the connection between Jacob 7 and Girard's theory of the scapegoat.
3. John Goldingay, *1 and 2 Kings for Everyone* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 197.
4. Francesca Aran Murphy notes that the phrase "tent of meeting" is an anachronism, which "updates the scenario to the original audience's frame of reference." Murphy, *1 Samuel* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2010), 24.
5. Walter Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, Interpretation series (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1990), 22.
6. Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, 24.
7. One of several ironies in the Jeroboam material is that the man of God prophesies that many years hence, false priests will be sacrificed on that very altar, but then the "sign" that accompanies this prophecy is that the altar in question is immediately and completely destroyed.
8. As John Goldingay notes, it's salient to ask why God had to send a prophet from so far away; was there no righteous prophet to be found in Ephraim? Goldingay, *1 & 2 Kings for Everyone*, 64.
9. As an aside, it is interesting that so many of these stories share the common theme of evildoers meeting violent ends in the jaws of wild beasts. In 1 Kings 13:24–25, the "man of God" is killed by a lion after he has accepted the hospitality of a self-proclaimed prophet in Ephraim. In 1 Kings 20:36, a prophet is devoured by lions when he refuses to strike down and kill a second prophet who requests it. Later in 1 Kings, Ahab and Jezebel have their blood licked up by wild dogs after their deaths (his in battle, hers from a fall); the text suggests that Jezebel's body was also eaten by the dogs. See Josey Bridges Snyder, "Jezebel and Her Interpreters," in Carol A. Newsom, Sharon

A. Ringe, and Jacqueline E. Lapsley, eds., *Women's Bible Commentary: Twentieth Anniversary Edition, Revised and Updated* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 180–83.

10. See Goldingay, *1 & 2 Kings for Everyone*, 95.

11. In a fourth story, their son Ahaziah seeks physical healing from a prophet of Baal rather than from Elijah, and is found out by the “man of God” who prophesies that Ahaziah’s foxhole conversion to Baal in a time of need will result in the king’s imminent death. The text, interestingly enough, does not immediately identify Elijah, who is unnamed by the messengers who initially encounter him on the road (“there came a man to meet us,” says 2 Kings 1:5), in keeping with the mysterious *ish elohim* tradition. The fifth story is in 2 Kings 4, in which Elijah’s protégé Elisha spends his energies saving widows, resurrecting children, and staving off starvation one miracle at a time. Here the term *ish elohim* is used to reflect the faith of those who seek out his services, like the mother who puts her dead boy on a donkey and rides many miles to find Elisha, who can bring her child back to life. In these stories, no major reversals of power are attendant. The phrase “man of God” does not signal a new priestly or kingly order, though it does presage unexpected reversals of a happier kind: life where there has been no life, stew in the pot that was empty, oil and bread miraculously multiplied to ward off certain death. The sixth and final example is found in 1 Chronicles 25, when King Amaziah casts his lot with the gods of Edom—inexplicably so, for they are the powerless gods of the land he just conquered with Yahweh’s help. Amaziah’s punishment in this tale reflects a return to the significance of “the man of God” for the political and the national, not just the personal.

12. There may be other ways in which the Nephites are not observing Mosaic law to Sherem’s satisfaction. Perhaps he is angry that women have been allowed in the temple (see Jacob 2:7), for example. The text does not specify the ways in which the Nephites “pervert the right way of God”; it is enough that Sherem believes they are flirting with serious theological error. Book of Mormon commentator Monte S. Nyman believes that the presence of women suggests that Jacob’s sermon was given on the temple grounds rather than in the temple proper. However, the text of Jacob 1:17 simply states that Jacob taught all of the people “in the temple,” so Nyman’s hermeneutic is dubious. This is especially true given Jacob’s additional clarification in 2:2, that he came “up into the temple” to preach to the mixed-gender assembly. See Nyman, *These Records Are True: Book of Mormon Commentary* (Orem, UT: Granite Publishing and Distribution, 2004), 18, 21.

13. See Grant Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader’s Guide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 60.

14. Iain W. Provan, “1 Kings,” in Beverly Roberts Gaventa and David Petersen, eds., *The New Interpreter’s Bible One Volume Commentary* (Nashville: TN, Abingdon Press, 2010), 222.

15. Brian McDonald, “Violence and the Lamb Slain: An Interview with Rene Girard,” in *Touchstone: A Journal of Mere Christianity* (December 2003), <http://www.touchstonemag.com/archives/article.php?id=16-10-040-i>.

16. The helpful typology of these five steps is adapted from “René Girard’s Mimetic Desire and *The Scapegoat*,” 31 March 2012, accessed online at <http://180rule.com/rene-girards-mimetic-theory-the-scapegoat/>.

17. Noel B. Reynolds, “Nephite Kingship Reconsidered,” in Davis Bitton, ed., *Mormons, Scripture, and the Ancient World: Studies in Honor of John L. Sorenson* (Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1998), 151–189. See 2 Nephi 5:18, in which Nephi notes how he rejected the people’s desire to set him up as a king, even though he “did for them according to that which was in [his] power.”

18. According to Clark Johnson, there are “only four temple discourses recorded in the Book of Mormon.” Clark V. Johnson, “Jacob: In Harmony with God (Jacob 1–3, 7),” in Kent P. Jackson, ed., *Studies in Scripture*, vol. 7: *1 Nephi to Alma 29* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1987), 177.

19. See René Girard, *The Scapegoat*, translated by Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 94.

20. Girard, *The Scapegoat*, 18.

21. Girard, *The Scapegoat*, 36.

22. Girard, *The Scapegoat*, 80.

23. See, Sharon Harris’ essay, “Reauthoring Our Covenant Obligation to Scripture and Family,” included in this volume

# Reading Signs or Repeating Symptoms

Adam S. Miller

## 1. The Scene

Jacob and Sherem meet but they never connect. They circle the same sun but on wildly divergent planes. This isn't unusual. People talk past each other all the time. Our meetings are framed and spaced by layers of circumstance, ignorance, and protocol. The things that worry me are not the things that interest you. What you'd hope to see in me isn't the profile I wanted to show. And so we feel alone even when we're together.

Some of this is our own fault, but some of it isn't. Part of the problem is language itself. Language helps put us in relation but it also structures those relations, and language, in order to be dependable, must be predictable. The way verbs are conjugated, the way words are ordered, the way certain kinds of statements or questions solicit a certain kind of response—these regularities give language its consistency. But these regularities also give language its rigidity. These words and forms give shape to the lives that we share but, too, the mechanical character of that language invests all of these ready-made words and prefabricated forms with a life of their own. They acquire an almost automatic character such that, rather than speaking a language, language often ends up speaking us.

Some of language's prefabricated forms are common and generic. Think of how greetings have a predictable formality. Or think of how the basic elements of a conversation between strangers at a party are already choreographed—the kinds of questions that can be asked, the kinds of answers that can be given. Most of what we say everyday is just a slight variation on what we said yesterday.

But some of these prefabricated forms are very specific to each person. These specific forms are shaped by the details of our personal histories, the idiosyncrasies of our genealogies, and, especially, by the constellations of need and desire that structured our earliest relationships. The patterns that structure these relationships—patterns that, to this day, situate me in a certain way with respect to my mother, that shape my expectations in relation to a friend, that make me hungry for my father's approval—these originally specialized patterns end up functioning as general templates for my relationships with other people.

These specialized patterns get recycled as all-purpose widgets and so I end up repeating with my boss elements of my relationship with my father, repeating with my wife elements of my relationship with my mother, repeating with my bishop elements of my relationship with my brother, etc. With some concretion, but generally with little awareness, these primal scenes get acted out again and again, automatically, mechanically, in my head, in my dreams, and in real life. At the heart of these scenes is a missing piece—a hole, a need—that fuels the drive to rigidly, symptomatically repeat them with whoever happens to be on hand.

Much of this repetition is futile: the hole never gets filled. But there is also a kind of utility here. Widely applied, the repetition of these scenes can make it easier to deal with people. Rather than needing to respond to the particulars, I can, without reflection, slot people into pre-assigned roles and then, focused on what I need, I can just respond to the generic features of the roles themselves. Rather than responding to you, I can respond to your role in the story I'm compelled—once again, today—to retell. In psychoanalysis this is called transference. In religion we often just call it sin. Sin: when we get bolted into patterns of transference that stubbornly keep us from seeing (and, thus, loving) someone else.

## 2. Jacob's Symptom

A lot of what happens between Jacob and Sherem in Jacob 7 has this feel. They talk right past each other. They can't quite see each other. They don't respond to each other as people but as types. Their projections lock orbits and their symptoms form a complementary pair.

Consider Jacob first. As Jacob narrates their encounter, the story has a stark, didactic simplicity. Jacob is good and Sherem is bad. Where Jacob displays "the power of the Lord" (Jacob 7:15), Sherem displays the "power of the devil" (Jacob 7:4).<sup>24</sup> On the face of it, this isn't wrong. But there is something disappointing about how this unfolds.

When Sherem confronts Jacob with a charge of blasphemy and perversion, Jacob responds in kind. Throughout, Jacob appears more interested in defending a certain kind of Christian doctrine than with enacting a certain kind of Christian behavior. He seems invested in and sharply limited by a certain pattern of speaking and thinking. To be sure, Sherem does the same with Jacob. But where this is predictable in Sherem's case, it feels tragic in Jacob's because the doctrine that Jacob is defending does itself maintain that Christian behavior is more important than any Christian ideas. The idea of Christ's love is not the thing at stake, Christ's love is. It's true that Jacob defends the idea of Christ's love with both force and effect, but it's also true that we hardly see him enacting that love.

Sherem, we're told, "lead away many hearts" from the doctrine of Christ (Jacob 7:3). But Jacob doesn't seek Sherem out. In fact, Sherem has to go looking for Jacob and, apparently, has a hard time finding him. Sherem, Jacob says, "sought much opportunity that he might come unto me" (Jacob 7:3).

Where is Jacob? Why is he so hard to find? Why isn't he actively seeking out Sherem? Or, consider how things play out during and after their confrontation. When Sherem finds Jacob, he immediately levels an apparently sincere charge that Jacob's doctrine of Christ is perverting the law of Moses and misleading the people. Sherem sees himself as defending God's law. Jacob isn't impressed. He responds with some leading questions, invites God to smite Sherem as a sign, and then (wham!) "the power of the Lord came upon [Sherem], insomuch that he fell to the earth" (Jacob 7:15). But immediately following this sign, Jacob again disappears from the text and, in the aftermath, there is no mention of his being present to "nourish" Sherem as he lays stricken or of his being present to hear Sherem's deathbed confession. Essentially, Jacob shows up in the narrative only for the smiting itself.

Perhaps most telling, though, is Jacob's unquestioned confidence that Sherem's request for a sign is disingenuous. Jacob testifies that he knows, "by the power of the Holy Ghost," that "if there should be no atonement made, all mankind must be lost" (Jacob 7:12). Sherem asks for the same revelation:

"Shew me a sign by this power of the Holy Ghost" (Jacob 7:13). But Jacob, without any hesitation, declares that, even if God were to show Sherem a sign, "yet thou wilt deny it because thou art of the devil" (Jacob 7:14). This is strong language and a boldly categorical prediction: even if the Holy Ghost were to intervene, Sherem will deny it, Jacob promises. There is no hope for Sherem.

But Jacob is wrong. The sign comes and—even though the sign comes in the form of a smiting— Sherem confesses Christ and repents. More, his testimony of Christ is sufficiently powerful that the multitude gathered to hear his testimony is "astonished exceedingly, insomuch that the power of God came down upon them and they were overcome, that they fell to the earth" (Jacob 7:21). In turn, this mass conversion is itself so profound that "the peace and love of God was restored again among the people" (Jacob 7:23). Sherem's deathbed preaching appears to be massively successful in a way that Jacob's own preaching was not.

But this isn't how Jacob frames it. Jacob undercuts any part Sherem may have had in sparking this transformation by claiming that all of the above happened because "I had requested it of my Father which was in heaven, for he had heard my cry and answered my prayer" (Jacob 7:22). Here, Jacob's prayers are assigned the role of prime mover and Sherem won't be allowed out of the box Jacob has put him in. And so, with a final parting jab, Jacob baldly concludes the whole story by *still* referring to Sherem as "this wicked man" (Jacob 7:23).

### 3. Sherem's Position

Much of Jacob's treatment of Sherem feels shortsighted and unfair. And though Jacob successfully defends the doctrine of Christ, he doesn't seem to do it in a very Christ-like way. In fact, he defends the doctrine of Christ against the letter of the Mosaic law in a way that, in itself, seems in lockstep with the letter of the law. What's going on here? If Jacob is slotting Sherem into a prefabricated role in a scene that Jacob's own life compels him to replay, what role is this? What position does Sherem occupy?

Something about Sherem sets Jacob off. Something about him reopens an old wound. Jacob clearly bears a such wound. Only moments after recounting his unmitigated victory over Sherem, Jacob drifts right back into melancholy and tell us that, until his dying day, he mourned: "We did mourn out our days" (Jacob 7:26). What is the cause of Jacob's persistent mourning? What can't he put it behind him? The Nephites, Jacob recounts, were "a lonesome and a solemn people, wanderers cast out from Jerusalem, born in tribulation in a wild wilderness, and hated of our brethren, which caused wars and contentions" (Jacob 7:26). Jacob is the bearer of this old wound, his father's wound, a family wound. He mourns for Jerusalem. He mourns for the loss of a city he never knew. But, for Jacob, this wound has some additional specificity. He is also "hated of his brethren," and this is not "brethren" in the abstract. As a first generation Nephite, Jacob means something much more immediate: he means his actual brothers, Laman and Lemuel.

Jacob's lonesome tribulation in the wilderness is framed on the one hand by the loss of a city he never knew and, on the other, by the fact that his brothers hate him. The catalyst for both these losses is the same: the doctrine of Christ. From the start, Nephi reports, the Jews hated and "did mock [Lehi] because of the things which he testified of them" because he "testified that the things which he saw and heard, and also the things which he read in the book, manifested plainly of the coming of a Messiah, and also the redemption of the world" (1 Nephi 1:19). And from the start, Nephi continues, Laman and Lemuel "were like unto [those] who were at Jerusalem" (1 Nephi 2:13).

These are the lines that frame Jacob's primal scene. And this is the scene that will, with a telling mechanicity, repeat itself not only in Jacob's life but, for the next thousand years, in the bodies of his people—again and again, generation after generation—until the repetition itself destroys them all. When Jacob looks at Sherem, why can't he see him? I think the answer is straightforward. When Jacob looks at Sherem all he can see is Laman and Lemuel. He can't engage with Sherem because, throughout their encounter, he's too busy shadow-boxing his brothers.

Sherem, like Laman, Lemuel, and the people in Jerusalem, is a defender of the received tradition. In particular, Sherem, like Laman and Lemuel, is keen to defend the primacy of the law of Moses against the imposition of any novel dreams, visions, or messianic revelations. But these are, as Nephi noted, exactly the objections lodged by Laman and Lemuel against Lehi. "Thou art like unto our father," they tell Nephi, "led away by the foolish imaginations of his heart . . . we know that the people who were in the land of Jerusalem were a righteous people; for they kept the statutes and judgments of the Lord, and all his commandments, according to the law of Moses; wherefore we know that they are a righteous people" (1 Nephi 17:20, 22). Sherem mirrors exactly these claims:



And ye have led away much of this people, that they pervert the right way of God and keep not the law of Moses, which is the right way, and convert the law of Moses into the worship of a being which ye say shall come many hundred years hence. And now behold, I Sherem declare unto you that this is blasphemy, for no man knoweth of such things; for he cannot tell of things to come. (Jacob 7:7)

On Sherem's account the "law of Moses" is itself the "right way of God," not a shadow of it, not a sign of things to come. For Sherem, Jacob's doctrine of Christ looks beyond the mark and ignores the plainness of the law. It "converts" the law of Moses into an apparatus for worshipping a future Messiah and, as a result, it interferes with the law's operation as what structures and orders our everyday lives and relationships.

It's on this score that Sherem's position is more consistent than Jacob's. Sherem's position that the law is what structures and orders our relationship to the world is consistent with his own willingness to submit to and massage the structures imposed by language. But Jacob's willingness to do the same is not consistent with the doctrine of Christ he's defending. Sherem is a master of the law. And, in particular, he is a master of how the law organizes our desires and locks us into repeating certain scenes. Sherem, Jacob tells us, "was learned, that he had a perfect knowledge of the language of the people; wherefore he could use much flattery and much power of speech according to the power of the devil" (Jacob 7:4). Sherem's learning and power are pegged directly to his "perfect knowledge of the language of the people." He understands how language works, he recognizes the constraints that language imposes, and he knows that, at the heart of our compulsion to repeat these primal scenes, is a wound, a need, a desire. Sherem recognizes these templates as symptoms. As a result, Sherem can position himself in a way that is flattering to the stories that people need to repeat.

This is what flattery amounts to: the power to position yourself as a willing mirror for whatever image others hope to see reflected back to them. In this sense, flattery isn't just a name for a certain way of speaking, it's a general name for smoothly functioning transference. When flattery succeeds, it creates order. It gathers people up. It stabilizes the images we project onto each other. Flattery shows us what we want to see. It reflects back to us what we expected. When this happens, a reassuring consistency reigns. But this compelled, mechanical consistency is also quite stifling and, ultimately, lonely. A regulated economy of mirror images is exhilarating but empty.

This is where Jacob and Sherem find themselves: hamstrung by flattery. They are compelled by their wounds to repeat complementary scenes, scenes that bind them together as a pair of prefabricated images but prevent them from connecting as people. Sherem doesn't address Jacob, he addresses only a "law-breaker." And Jacob doesn't address Sherem, he addresses only a "Christ-denier." Though adversarial, these roles collude to reinforce the mutual exclusion of the actual people attached to them.

#### 4. Signs from Heaven

What, then, can be done? It's not as if we could do without these structures that order and regulate our relationships. It's not as if we could do without law and language. Without law and language we would be even more isolated and alone than we are when we're trapped within their confines. What we need, rather, is a doctrine of Christ that can enact a new relation to the law, a doctrine that can retain these structures but give us room to move in relation to them.

The key to this doctrine of Christ is a spirit of prophecy that can read the law itself as sign. Rather than just repeating it as a symptom, a spirit of prophecy can read in the staging of a primal scene the truth about the too-

human wound that compels the repetition in the first place. This spirit can, as Jacob puts it, recognize that “none of the prophets have written nor prophesied save they have spoken concerning this Christ” (Jacob 7:11).

Now, at one level, what Jacob claims about scripture is clearly false. Most of scripture is straightforwardly, like the law itself, about something *other* than Christ. In order to point to Christ, the law and prophets must themselves be read as signs that, at heart, testify to the truth of the world’s original wound and, especially, to the manifestation of Christ in that wound as the lamb slain from the foundation of the world (cf. Revelation 13:8). This is the doctrine of Christ:

And, notwithstanding we believe in Christ, we keep the law of Moses, and look forward with steadfastness unto Christ, until the law shall be fulfilled. For, for this end was the law given; wherefore the law hath become dead unto us, and we are made alive in Christ because of our faith; yet we keep the law because of the commandments. And we talk of Christ, we rejoice in Christ, we preach of Christ, we prophesy of Christ, and we write according to our prophecies, that our children may know to what source they may look for a remission of their sins. Wherefore, we speak concerning the law that our children may know the deadness of the law; and they, knowing the deadness of the law, may look forward unto that life which is in Christ, and know for what end the law was given. (2 Nephi 25:24-27)

The law must be kept and its structures preserved, but they must be kept in such a way that they become “dead unto us.” When this happens, the spell is broken.

In sin, the law takes on a life of its own and we feel dead in relation to it. We feel excluded from our own lives and isolated from other people. But the doctrine of Christ inverts this scenario. When the law becomes dead, when the law no longer has a life of its own, when it loses its automatic and mechanical character, then we discover a new life in Christ. We’re freed from sin. We’re no longer locked into repeating the same futile, bloodless scenes. The key, again, is that the law must start functioning as a sign. We have to learn to read the performance of these scenes not, like Sherem, as a symptom available for manipulation but, like a prophet, as a sign that displays the human wounds that animate them.

This is hard to do. The templates that structure our relationships are themselves a defensive gesture meant to compensate for the wound that compels them. But there is, here, a general lesson to be drawn from Sherem’s own experience of a sign. When signs come, they inevitably come, to one degree or another, as they did for Sherem. As Jacob puts it: “if God shall smite thee, let that be a sign unto thee” (Jacob 7:14). Every sign is smiting. Every sign that reveals Christ reveals him by touching the wound that we were working to conceal. These signs break the tight circle of transference, of collusion and vanity. They collapse our prearranged games. They open us to something beyond the prefabricated scenes and ready-made meanings we work so hard to impose on the world. And they make room for these scenes to be redeployed, instead, as signs of the very wounds they’d been hiding. Signs open us to the possibility of revelation, ministering angels, prophecies, visions, and dreams. Signs, revealing the doctrine of Christ, open us to the possibility of a world where we are not alone.

## 5. Reclamation

In conclusion, allow me to speculate on a final point. When God smites Sherem such that he falls to the earth, this is a sign. But, it seems to me, this sign isn’t just for Sherem. This sign is also meant for Jacob. Granted, the sign wakes Sherem up such that he “confessed the Christ and the power of the Holy Ghost and the ministering of angels” (Jacob 7:17). But the sign gives Jacob a bracing shake as well. It may be true that Jacob never truly sees

Sherem—Sherem dies before they really have a chance—but Jacob clearly signals that, even if he never manages to see Sherem, Sherem has put him in a position to see Laman and Lemuel again.

Note that after Sherem confesses Christ and “the love of God” is restored among the people, Jacob immediately turns his attention to the Lamanites: “And it came to pass that many means were devised to reclaim and restore the Lamanites to the knowledge of the truth” (Jacob 7:24). These effort fail, but the fact that Jacob is moved to *try* is significant. When he looked at Sherem, Jacob could only see the ghosts of Laman and Lemuel. He saw these ghosts so clearly that he was sure that even if God gave Sherem a sign, Sherem (like Laman and Lemuel) would harden his heart and never repent.

But the sign came and Sherem *did* repent. He did confess Christ. And then something happens to Jacob. For the first time in decades, Jacob can see his own brothers more clearly. He can see Laman and Lemuel, not as players in his story but as flesh and blood people. For the first time in decades, Jacob can read in their anger the wound that compelled *them* to repeat their own primal scene. Then, for the first time in decades, Jacob dares to hope that his brothers aren’t lost forever. This is the doctrine of Christ.

---

## NOTES

24. All citations of Jacob 7 in this essay refer to the Royal Skousens critical edition of the text, *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text*, (New Haven: Yale University Press: 2009).

# The Lord's Prayer(s) in Jacob 7

Kimberly M. Berkey

The plot of Jacob 7 is fairly well-known among Latter-day Saints, at least in its broad contours: a meddlesome anti-Christ confronts the Nephite prophet and is fatally struck down by a sign from heaven, delivering with his dying breath a confession so stirring that it overwhelms the attendant crowds, who devote themselves once more to peace and righteous living. The vividness of this narrative, combined with its straightforwardly moralistic assessment of its primary characters, render Jacob 7 a particularly attractive resource for didactic purposes—a use evident in devotional treatments of this chapter but also witnessed in the way the Book of Mormon redeploys elements of Jacob 7 in its later narrative, thus fashioning the concluding chapter of Jacob's record into a kind of type scene for subsequent portions of Nephite history.<sup>25</sup>

But behind the scenes, backstage to the compelling drama of Sherem's confrontation with Jacob and the ecstatic collapse of the Nephite audience, we find the more subdued and generally neglected figure of a praying priest. Twice in this chapter Jacob prays and twice in response a person or group of people falls to the earth. In the course of this double supplication it also seems that Jacob learns something vital about prayer, since his two prayers are marked by a certain tension in how each treats the role of the will. Crucially, the chapter illustrates this tension by the way it incorporates, recontextualizes, and reorders two of Jesus's prayers from the New Testament. What follows in this paper, then, is an extended comparison of Jacob 7:14 with Jacob 7:22 in order to illustrate the way in which Sherem's collapse calls Jacob to repentance and fundamentally alters his approach to prayer.

Jacob's two prayers are found at the core of the chapter, framing Sherem's confession and death, and each is tied to the unfolding drama as a kind of causal force. In the first instance, the heaven-sent sign that ultimately sends Sherem to his death occurs pointedly *not* after Sherem's snide demand ("Show me a sign by this power of the Holy Ghost, in the which ye know so much" [Jacob 7:13]), but after Jacob's petitioning response in the following verse:

What am I that I should tempt God to show unto thee a sign in the thing which thou knowest to be true?  
Yet thou wilt deny it because thou art of the devil. Nevertheless, not my will be done; but if God shall smite thee, let that be a sign unto thee that he has power, both in heaven and in earth; and also, that Christ shall come. And thy will, O Lord, be done, and not mine. (Jacob 7:14)

With these words, Sherem immediately "fell to the earth" and required "nourish[ment] for the space of many days" (Jacob 7:15). He eventually rallies, gathers a group of Nephites around his deathbed, and recants point by point his earlier assertions (Jacob 7:17, 19), after which the group of onlookers was so "overcome" at the power of Sherem's final words that they, too, "fell to the earth" (Jacob 7:21).

Although Jacob had been oddly absent from the confession narrative to this point, the resulting collective experience of the people is not something he can let pass without comment, and so Jacob reemerges as a named and active character precisely in order to take credit for the people's response:

"Now, this thing was pleasing unto me, Jacob, for I had requested it of my Father who was in heaven; for he had heard my cry and answered my prayer" (Jacob 7:22).

The fact that Jacob narrates this prayer only retroactively is significant because it demonstrates the careful construction of the confession scene. Mentions of prayer both begin and end this pericope, a frame which would

have been interrupted had Jacob narrated his second prayer in its proper chronological order. Viewed in this light, the scene of Sherem's confession appears deliberately structured, clearly placing each of Jacob's prayers on the outer edge of a chiastic setting:

A – Jacob's first prayer (Jacob 7:14)

B – Sherem falls to the earth (Jacob 7:15)

C – Sherem anticipates his death (Jacob 7:16) D – Confession (Jacob 7:17–19)

C' – Sherem dies (Jacob 7:20)

B' – The people fall to the earth (Jacob 7:21) A' – Jacob's second prayer (Jacob 7:22)

This parallel structural position is not the only commonality between the two prayers, however. These verses are also linked verbally in the way they echo phrases from Jesus' most famous prayers recorded in the New Testament.<sup>26</sup> Jacob's first prayer reiterates Jesus's words in Gethsemane immediately prior to his betrayal and arrest when he pled with God to "remove this cup from me; nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done" (Luke 22:42). In a parallel too overt to miss, Jacob likewise sacrifices his preference with the words "nevertheless, not my will be done" and then repeats this sentiment a few lines later, this time also incorporating a positive affirmation of God's will: "thy will, O Lord, be done, and not mine" (Jacob 7:14). Perhaps more subtly, Jacob's second prayer echoes another famous moment of Jesus in conversation with the Father, this time drawn from the model prayer presented in the Sermon on the Mount, in which Jesus begins "Our Father which art in heaven" (Matthew 6:9). Likewise, Jacob includes in his second prayer specific reference to God's location: "I had requested it of my Father who was in heaven" (Jacob 7:22). In the two instances in this chapter where Jacob narrates his prayers, the text invokes clear liturgical and theological echoes for its Christian readers by quoting key wording from the New Testament.

In some ways, putting the Gethsemane Prayer in conversation with the Lord's Prayer is hardly a surprising move, since at least one of the gospels seems to stage the comparison already. Matthew grants these prayers structural significance by using them to bookend Jesus's ministry and also stresses their semantic resemblance. Jesus declares "thy will be done" only twice in Matthew's gospel—once in the Lord's Prayer (Matt 6:10) and once in the Gethsemane Prayer ("Matthew 26:42)—and this point of commonality is amply noted in academic commentary on these verses.<sup>27</sup> By placing these two prayers in parallel, Jacob 7 is picking up on a close relationship already signaled within the New Testament. And yet there seem to me two primary oddities about Jacob 7's incorporation of Jesus's prayers.

First is the way the chapter seems to deliberately mute their most obvious parallel. The structure of the confession scene encourages us to compare verse 14 and verse 22 side by side, yet when verse 22 quotes the Lord's Prayer, rather than highlighting the already inherent commonality of the source texts behind these two verses (the phrase "thy will be done"), it echoes the fairly banal opening line about "my Father which was in heaven." If Jacob 7 wants to suggest a comparison of these two New Testament prayers, why does it drop their most overt point of commonality? The second oddity is the inverted order of the Lord's Prayer and the Gethsemane Prayer within Jacob 7. The storyline of the gospels, which traces an arc from Jesus's early ministry to his betrayal and death, seems poised to privilege the climactic events surrounding the end of Jesus's life, including his last recorded prayer uttered in Gethsemane. If, as many readers have assumed, the New Testament thus implicitly privileges the

Gethsemane Prayer, what significance might we find in the fact that Jacob 7 seems to trace the opposite arc, beginning instead with the Gethsemane Prayer in verse 14 and moving toward the Lord's Prayer in verse 22 as the climactic instance of supplication? If we want to posit an implicit theology of prayer in Jacob 7, these seem to be the primary questions to keep in mind.

There are thus three main parallels between the prayers in Jacob 7:14 and Jacob 7:22: both frame the central drama of Sherem's confession, both echo Jesus's most famous prayers from the New Testament, and, as already noted above, both incite an identical result (the respective collapses of Sherem and the people). But if the several commonalities between these two verses justify examining them side by side, close comparison also reveals a series of tensions that are just as significant as their earlier points of convergence.

We might first note the opposing portrayal of God in each prayer. In verse 14 God is a figure of smiting and power, someone Jacob is concerned about "tempt[ing]" or provoking, and in the face of whose sovereignty Jacob takes on an abject, creaturely posture by asking not "*who* am I that I should tempt God," but, rather, "*what* am I?" By verse 22, however, God is given the title "Father" (the only familial designation out of fifteen total references to God in this chapter) and moreover is a father to whom Jacob feels free to make entreaties which are then heard and answered. There is a striking shift, then, from a tone of servility in verse 14 to a tone of intimacy with God in verse 22, and this shift—from a sovereign "God" to a listening "Father," from worries about tempting God to straightforwardly entreating him—accompanies a second shift in how Jacob treats the topic of the will.

In verse 14, Jacob is particularly anxious about the place and role of his will. He moves from denying it ("not my will be done") to affirming God's will ("thy will, O Lord, be done") before returning once again to negate his own desires a second time ("not mine"). It is as if Jacob is caught in an iterative wrestle with his own will, anxiously trying to delineate boundaries between the various desires that want to have sway in this situation. Jacob wants to ensure that there is space here for God's will to direct the possible outcomes that follow from Sherem's demand for a sign, but it seems that he has difficulty suppressing his own potentially opposing will. He no sooner affirms God's will than his own desires emerge a second time and must be wrestled back again. By verse 22, however, Jacob no longer appears conflicted. Although the Lord's Prayer, to which this verse alludes, does contain discussion of the will, it does so only by affirming "thy will be done" without any corresponding negation of the disciple's desire. And since this affirmation of God's will is only distantly implied and never explicitly invoked in verse 22, Jacob seems to have overcome certain anxieties he felt earlier about the role of his will. Indeed, Jacob has been so completely reconciled to his will that he actively issues a "request" and admits to its outcome as "pleasing," a behavior and an affect which imply a commitment to one's own desires.

Or, to frame this shift in the treatment of "will" from another angle, we might also compare the frustrated tone of Jacob's prayer in verse 14 with the relative sincerity on display in verse 22. Jacob begins his response in verse 14 by describing unilaterally what he takes to be the stakes of Sherem's demand for a sign. He refuses to "tempt God to show unto thee a sign" because he is convinced that Sherem's request is insincere—a heavenly portent would only signify "the thing which thou knowest to be true" and, in any case, "thou wilt deny it, because thou art of the devil" (Jacob 7:14). It is only here, after having laid out what he takes to be the unambiguous reality of the situation, that Jacob begins to echo Jesus's words: "Nevertheless, not my will be done." Read in context, this echo is less a sincere attempt to find out God's will and rather functions as Jacob's exit from the conversation. He is, in effect, throwing up his hands in frustration and absolving himself of any responsibility for the outcome.

Although Jacob echoes Jesus's words, he seems to lack the intent associated with the Gethsemane prayer, instead replacing the sincerity of Jesus's original pronouncement with the detachment of Pilate's infamous hand-washing

(Matthew 27:24). “If God shall smite [Sherem],” that’s well and good, but Jacob wants no part of it. By the time we reach verse 22, however, Jacob is praying sincerely and actively, a far cry from the frustration and self-willed passivity of his first prayer. Instead of simply absenting himself by attempting to remove his will, Jacob here issues a straightforward “request,” and instead of leaving the outcome up to God to do whatever he pleases, in verse 22 Jacob makes a specific entreaty that requires his careful attention to and engagement with the situation in which he finds himself.

We might then summarize the shifts between Jacob 7:14 and Jacob 7:22 as follows. Where Jacob is in the first prayer abject before God and anxious about his own will, he appears in the second prayer to be in a much more intimate relationship with God as “Father” and not at all conflicted regarding his own desires. Additionally, where the first prayer demonstrates Jacob’s frustrated wish to be uninvolved— he negates his will in order to absolve himself of responsibility—the second prayer shows him actively concerned, attending to his will as what allows him specific engagement with the situation at hand. In the space of less than ten verses, it seems that something fundamental has changed Jacob’s orientation to God and to his own will. What, then, has changed Jacob, and how?

The most dramatic moment in the intervening verses between these prayers, and thus the most likely place to look for answers, is of course the sign given to Sherem and his immediate collapse. We can speculate about what that moment revealed to Jacob and then trace the shifts between his two prayers back to what he learned from this sign. Recall that when Jacob initially refused Sherem’s demand for a sign, he did so on two grounds: first, his confidence in Sherem’s duplicity and second, his conviction that a sign would be ineffectual since Sherem would simply deny it. That early self-assurance, however, must have been abruptly shattered as soon as Jacob spoke the words “thy will, O Lord, be done” and witnessed his opponent’s collapse. In an instant, Jacob comes to the dreadful realization that God *did* intend to smite Sherem after all, that Sherem *would* repent after receiving a sign, and that the only thing standing in the way of that sign’s occurrence had been Jacob’s unwillingness to invoke it. In short, Jacob is shown in dramatic fashion how he had misunderstood the stakes of his confrontation with Sherem.

I want to suggest that Jacob also came to a realization about his will in the course of this profoundly humbling moment. At a first, too-hasty glance, it would seem that Sherem’s collapse drives home to Jacob the problematic status of his will, since the event demonstrates how Jacob’s desires had run counter to God’s wish to smite Sherem with a sign. But it is just as clear from verse 14 that Jacob had already recognized this problematic tension—after all, this is precisely the disparity he was trying to resolve by saying “not my will be done.” Jacob *already* knew that his will and God’s will were likely at odds or he would never have attempted to negate his will in the first place. Thus, what Jacob learns at this moment is not something about the problematic status of his will (a fact already tacitly knew) but realizes rather that he had sought to resolve that tension in the wrong way.

Jacob’s solution to the disparity between his will and God’s will was to assume a self-imposed passivity, to negate his desires and effectively get out of God’s way. Taking this approach, he too-hastily resolved the ambiguity between his will and God’s by endeavoring to subtract his own. What he may have realized, however, is that negating his own will was an insufficient gesture. If simply disavowing one’s wishes was adequate to enact God’s will, we might have expected the sign to occur midway through verse 14 when Jacob said “nevertheless, not my will be done.” In actual fact, however, it was not until Jacob had additionally *affirmed* God’s will that the sign occurred. The moment that finally invoked God’s power was the same moment that Jacob switched from referring to God in the third person (“if God shall smite thee”) to directly addressing him (“O Lord”), the moment when he was at his most active and prayerful. As Sherem hit the ground, Jacob recognized that something about his words and active involvement proved crucial to accomplishing God’s will.

In sum, Jacob had misapprehended the nature of prayer. He seemed to understand prayer in verse 14 to be an arena for wrestling his will out of the way, turning prayer into a conflict between his will and God's will and inadvertently rendering God as his opponent. It was this conception of prayer that introduced the distance and servility noted above ("what am I that I should tempt God?"). Jacob realizes, however, that he is more than just a potential obstruction to God's will and that in fact his prayer can be a vital medium for realizing divine power. Although there may indeed be a disparity between Jacob's will and God's will, prayer is not primarily intended to address that discrepancy.

According to Jacob 7, there is instead an entirely different disparity that prayer attempts to address, and this is demonstrated in a curious convergence between verse 14 and verse 22. Although the chapter deliberately mutes the original resonance of the phrase "thy will be done" between the Lord's Prayer and the Gethsemane Prayer, it appears to have done so in order to replace it with a different resonance. When these prayers are incorporated in Jacob 7, the chapter adds one small phrase that dramatically reconfigures the way Jacob's two prayers interact. After admitting that God may intend to smite Sherem despite Jacob's own pessimism about the effectiveness of such a gesture, Jacob outlines what he hopes this portent would communicate: "let that be a sign unto thee that [God] has power, both in heaven and in earth" (Jacob 7:14). Although easily overlooked because of the more obvious echoes of the

Gethsemane Prayer on either side, Jacob's mention of "heaven and ... earth" seems to anticipate the reference in the Lord's Prayer to God's will having sway "in earth, as ... in heaven" (Matthew 6:10), and this may help explain why verse 22 quotes such an oddly prosaic portion of the Lord's Prayer rather than one of its more familiar and seemingly more potent lines. When Jacob says that he prays to "my Father who was in heaven" (Jacob 7:22), the emphasis on God's location "in heaven" directs the reader's attention back to the "heaven and ... earth" reference in verse 14.<sup>28</sup> The chapter thus seems to indicate that, although there is a disparity at the heart of prayer, it is not the disparity between divine and mortal wills, as Jacob had initially assumed. Rather, the disparity that prayer most fundamentally addresses is a disparity of *location*.

As it turns out, Jacob is no stranger to the importance of this division. The discrepancy between heaven and earth is, in fact, absolutely crucial to his broader theology. Like so much of his theology, Jacob's interest in the heaven/earth divide seems to have its genesis in the parting words of his father,

Lehi, whose teachings on mortality and redemption are recorded in 2 Nephi 2. Midway through the chapter, Lehi testifies to his sons that "there is a God, and he hath created all things, both the heavens and the earth" (2 Nephi 2:14), an assertion that, on its surface, seems entirely straightforward. Just a few verses later, however, Lehi's assertion is recast in dramatically spatial terms when he describes "an angel" who "had fallen from heaven" (2 Nephi 2:17). In Lehi's final sermon to his family, an event that is formative for Jacob's later theology, the devil is introduced as someone who has traversed the divide between heaven and earth and remains confined to the mortal world. That same devil, Lehi goes on, entices the first humans to follow a similar course when, as a consequence of partaking the forbidden fruit, Adam and Eve are cast out of the divine garden "to till the earth" (2 Nephi 2:18). This earth-bound mortality then gives rise to one of Jacob's principal theological obsessions: the status of the flesh.

Nothing seems to strike existential horror in Jacob like the thought that "this flesh must ... crumble to its mother earth, to rise no more" (2 Nephi 9:7), and although we typically hear in this "rising" little more than the standard scriptural image for resurrection, it may also articulate an interest in actual vertical movement. For Jacob, the problem of the flesh is precisely its restriction to the earth: how can something mortal and corruptible ever regain



a share in the divinity and perfection that redemption seems to require? What are we to do, in other words, in the face of the disparity between heaven and earth?

The solution to this dilemma is the coming Christ, a being who quite literally incorporates elements of both divinity and mortality in order to overcome the division between them. In fact, articulating the soteriological role of Christ in terms of this discrepancy may explain why Jacob designates God's "power... in heaven and in earth" as the primary information a sign would communicate to Sherem, relegating the testimony "that Christ shall come" to second place (Jacob 7:14). Sherem must first fathom the spatial backdrop in which God's power operates in order to understand the salvific trajectory of the coming Christ. It is safe to say, at the very least, that for Jacob the divide between heaven and earth is vital, and forms perhaps the central question of his entire theology.

And yet despite all the importance he ascribes to the heaven/earth disparity and his commitment to the coming messiah as its primary solution, Jacob seems ironically to have missed certain practical implications of this theology for his own discipleship and ministry. There is perhaps no role more suited to reflecting about one's responsibility to mediate heavenly power on earth than the role of Israelite temple priest, and yet Jacob appears to have problematically withdrawn from certain components of his earthly ministry.<sup>29</sup> There are clues in Jacob's record, for instance, that he gradually retreated from the public sphere and understood his role to be oriented primarily around his record and its future audience, rather than around his contemporary Nephite brethren. After recording one of his public sermons in Jacob 1–3, the fourth chapter of his record opens with an extended reflection on the nature of engraving on metal plates (Jacob 4:1–2) and his purpose in writing (Jacob 4:3–4), followed by direct exhortation to his readers (Jacob 4:10–18). Jacob seems to have shifted rather suddenly from a public project of direct preaching to a written project, no longer recording his sermons or his public ministry, but instead reflecting on the purpose of the plates, his hopes for his future readers, and copying over the allegory of Zenos like a dutiful scribe (Jacob 5). Perhaps the reason Sherem must "[seek] much opportunity" (Jacob 7:6) to find Jacob is because Jacob has, in some sense, retreated from his public role among the people.<sup>30</sup> Even when he reemerges into the public sphere in the narrative of chapter 7, Jacob seems marginal, difficult to find, and his posture remains almost entirely passive—so passive, in fact, that during Sherem's repentance and confession (arguably the most important scene in the chapter)

Jacob is so far removed from the event that he narrates his own pivotal prayer outside the pericope altogether! Jacob's record has subtly communicated his steady retreat from among the people, who presumably did not take kindly to the stern rebuke of his opening sermon, and it is not hard to imagine that Jacob may have decided to confine himself to his somewhat-sequestered role as temple priest (Jacob 1:18). Has Jacob tried to confine himself to heavenly things? Has he misunderstood his priestly role as primarily a question of holy aloofness from his people instead of atoning for and reuniting with them through the rituals of the Israelite temple—rituals that were intended, after all, to mediate Jehovah's heavenly holiness to his chosen people on earth? Perhaps the moment of the sign in verse 15 convicts Jacob as much as it had convicted Sherem, reminding him that discipleship is not a question of ascetically removing oneself to contemplate heaven but of making God's will and power incarnate on earth. By confining himself to the heavenly role of temple priest and reifying the distance between himself and his people, Jacob may have inadvertently denied his relationship with and responsibility for the messy and even profane situation on earth.

This brings us full circle to a reflection on how Jacob approaches himself and his will in prayer. In light of his broader theology and what we have seen in this chapter about the role of the will, Jacob may see his earthly embodiment as, at root, a *problem*. Seeing his embodiment as a problem, prayer may then be seen as the solution. In this light, we might reconfigure what Jacob learned at Sherem's collapse as follows: although he had previously

affirmed that God “has power, both in heaven and in earth” (Jacob 7:14), Jacob comes to see that God’s possession of that power is somehow insufficient to equally accomplish the divine will in both realms. The full expression of God’s power requires Jacob’s prayer in order to be accomplished, and writing himself out of the situation by negating his will hadn’t helped. In fact, by praying with a focus on his will as part of the problem, praying as an abject creature tentatively estimating the claims of a distant sovereign, Jacob would have inadvertently reified the very disparity that prayer was meant to address. If the project of prayer is to overcome the distance between heaven and earth, it was not Jacob’s opposing will that had nearly obstructed the miraculous sign but the distance he had imposed between earth and heaven by refiguring the relationship of creature and creator as a contest of wills.

When Jacob’s prayer focused on the problem of negating his own will, it was ultimately motivated by a self-centered anxiety that ironically reinforced the very difficulty he hoped to resolve. By taking prayer to be a question of negating his will, prayer became an internal, affective project rather than an external, spatially oriented task. What Jacob comes to learn and enact by verse 22 is that his desires are not the point of prayer, whether he takes a positive or negative stance toward those desires. Jacob’s task is not to save himself by praying perfectly, but rather to assume a certain mediating role on earth in order to help enact God’s will “in earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10), and that mediation is only possible when he views himself more as God’s colleague than God’s vassal. After all, mankind was formed from “the dust of the ground” and given stewardship over the world (Genesis 2:7, 15; Moses 2:28)—made out of earth in order to tend the earth. By fretting over the status of his mortal will and retreating from his earthly stewardship over his people, Jacob may have misunderstood the individual and practical stakes of the heaven/earth divide.

In this respect, Jacob’s second prayer is a far cry from his earlier aloofness and frustration. Here we find him actively and sincerely involved in the circumstance at hand, attending to the ways God might leverage the potential of this situation to manifest his divine power, and then submitting that idea to God in the form of a specific “request” (Jacob 7:22). God is no longer a distant and terrifying sovereign, but instead a “Father” and a partner. And although the full text of the Lord’s Prayer is only echoed in verse 22 rather than quoted, we might reflect at least briefly on how that prayer treats the will. In the Lord’s Prayer, the disciple affirms only “thy will be done” without explicitly negating his own will and this affirmative, tranquil attitude toward desire seems to match Jacob’s general disposition in verse 22.

God’s will has been removed from any relation of dialectical antagonism with Jacob’s, as was the case in verse 14. By verse 22 “thy will be done” is now something Jacob can seek in its own right. Jacob is content to let his will be checked in his pursuit of the larger project: prayer as a means to close the distance between heaven and earth. Jacob thus figures a type of prayer that acts as a conduit to convey God’s will down to earth, rather than conveying his will (positive or negative) up to heaven.

With this in mind, we may have also arrived at an explanation for the chronological inversion of the two New Testament prayers in Jacob 7, an inversion which places the Lord’s Prayer after the Gethsemane Prayer. Although there is something unquestionably vital about Jesus’s words in Gethsemane for what they teach about the potentially obstructive character of the human will, it may be significant that the model of prayer Jacob finally comes around to in verse 22—and thus the model of prayer which the chapter ultimately privileges—is the very same model which Jesus himself explicitly privileged with the command “after *this* manner ... pray ye” (Matthew 6:9). The New Testament gives us the Lord’s Prayer as the explicit model we should follow, perhaps because the Lord’s Prayer more clearly models the stance a disciple must take toward his or her own will.

Jacob 7 shows not only that Christ came to heal the gap between heaven and earth (Jacob 7:11–12, 14), but that we can obstruct that healing through a misconceived notion of prayer. The sign from heaven in Jacob 7 forced not only Sherem to the ground, but recommitted Jacob to the earth as well.

---

## NOTES

25. I have in mind primarily Alma 30, which contains a host of verbal allusions to Jacob 7, and 3 Nephi 1, in which Nephite multitudes fall to the earth after witnessing a sign. The similarities between Jacob 7 and Alma 30 are usually treated thematically rather than verbally as part of the triple comparison of Sherem, Nehor, and Korihor. See Brigham D. Madsen, “B.H. Roberts’s Studies of the Book of Mormon,” *Dialogue* 26.3 (1993): 77–86; Mark D. Thomas, “Dying Heretics,” in *Digging in Cumorah: Reclaiming Book of Mormon Narratives* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Signature Books, 1999), 161–171; John W. Welch, “Comparing Sherem, Nehor, and Korihor,” in *The Legal Cases in the Book of Mormon* (Provo, Utah: BYU Press, Maxwell Institute, 2008).

26. This is not the first time Jacob’s record alludes to the New Testament. Elizabeth Fenton notes that Jacob 5 seems to develop imagery drawn from Romans 11:24 such that “the parable of the olive tree not only describes grafting but also operates as a kind of grafting itself.” Elizabeth Fenton, “Open Canons: Sacred History and American History in *The Book of Mormon*,” *The Journal of Nineteenth-Century Americanists* 1 (2013), 344.

27. W.C. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, International Critical Commentary 26 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 1:605, 3:500; Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, Word Biblical Commentary 33B (Dallas, Tex.: Word Books, 1995), 784; John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, New International Greek Testament Commentary 1 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2005), 288, 1103; R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2007), 1006; Ulrich Luz, *Matthew*, Hermeneia (trans. James E. Crouch; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 44:319, 46:397.

28. This same allusion also highlights the double emphasis on “earth” in the intervening confession scene in which Sherem’s collapse sends him specifically “to the earth” and in which the attendant Nephite crowds are similarly so “overcome” that they “fell to the earth,” in particular (Jacob 7:14, 21).

29. Jacob’s priestly appointment is mentioned in 2 Nephi 5:26 and Jacob 1:18. John W. Welch speculates about the added legal and ritual resonance that a temple setting would afford to the confrontation between Jacob and Sherem. See “The Case of Sherem” in *The Legal Cases of the Book of Mormon* (Provo, Utah: BYU Press, Maxwell Institute, 2008) and “The Temple in the Book of Mormon: The Temples at the Cities of Nephi, Zarahemla, and Bountiful” in *Temples of the Ancient World* (ed. Donald W. Parry; Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book, 1994), 309, 339.

30. Sherem’s odd admission that he “sought much opportunity” to find Jacob is also a key feature of the discussion surrounding Sherem’s ethnic identity. See Kevin Christiansen, “The Deuteronomist De-Christianizing of the Old Testament,” *FARMS Review* 16.2 (2004): 59–90; Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness* (Draper, Utah: Greg Kofford Books, 2007), 2B:565–66; A. Keith Thompson, “Who Was Sherem?” *Interpreter* 14 (2015): 1–15.

# Divine Dream Time: The Hope and Hazard of Revelation

Jacob Rennaker

Jacob's concluding words are among the most poignant in all of scripture: "the time passed away with us, and also our lives passed away like as it were unto us a dream" (v. 26). However, far from being the mere poetic waxing of a dying man, I believe that the concept of "dreams" is critical to understanding Jacob's theology and his writings as a whole. Within our dreams, we experience time differently than when we are awake. Rather than events following after each other in a linear and understandable way, they often present a different sort of logic altogether—one where time is not linear and connections between events are mysterious at best. Jacob's description of revelation seems to reflect this sort of "dream time."<sup>31</sup> In fact, Jacob's father Lehi explicitly describes one of his own revelations as dream-like: "Behold, I have dreamed a dream; or, in other words, I have seen a vision" (1 Nephi 8:2). In my view, Jacob 7 highlights the dream-like nature of revelatory experiences, illustrates the dangers involved, and demonstrates how to avoid these potential hazards through a "hope in Christ."

## 1. Isn't it about time?

Central to Jacob's perception of the world is his revelatory experience with Christ. Dietrich Bonhoeffer once wrote a letter puzzling over whether or not it is possible to have what he calls a "religionless Christianity."<sup>32</sup> In this letter, he wrestles with the relationship between the structural aspects of "religion" on the one hand and the essence of Christianity on the other, and he investigates how necessarily entangled those two ideas are. Ultimately, Bonhoeffer suggests that there *could* be a form of Christianity that is not bounded by the traditional strictures of "religion." In Jacob 7, Sherem seems to be doing just the opposite—he has wrestled with the relationship between the structural aspects of the law of Moses and the essence of Jacob's Christian message, and determines that they have been *unnecessarily* entangled in the public mind. He contends that there should be a form of Nephite "religion"—completely circumscribed by the law of Moses—that is *not* tied to the idea of "Christianity." Instead of a "religionless Christianity," Sherem argues for a Christ-less religiosity.

The conflict between Jacob and Sherem revolves not only around their acceptance of Christ but also around their understanding of time. Sherem begins the story with a very linear way of looking at time and life that is largely oriented toward the past—his knowledge is rooted squarely in the "law of Moses" that he so vigorously defends (Jacob 7:7). Sherem is clearly invested in this law and sees it as the necessary foundation of Nephite religion—his way of knowing the "right way" is focused on the past, through the clearly defined, linear terms outlined in the law of Moses. Sherem's problem with Jacob doesn't appear to be centered in the general concept of Christ's atonement. Rather, he seems much more concerned with Jacob putting so much rhetorical and theological weight on an event that will supposedly happen "many hundred years hence." This is "blasphemy; for no man knoweth of such things; for he cannot tell of things to come" (v. 7). Eschewing the future as unknowable, Sherem is focused on the permanence of the past, where events are fixed in a dependable linear chain that inevitably leads to the present.

At first, Jacob seems to express a view that is the polar opposite of Sherem's, a view that is oriented toward the future. And, in a sense, this is correct: Jacob testifies that Christ will come and make an atonement at some point in the future. However, Jacob's Christ-centered religiosity does not simply require a person to change their orientation from looking backward in time to looking forward in time. More is required. A Christ-centered religiosity requires a person to step outside the tyranny of linear time and into a dream-like space. In this dream

space, the focus is not on permanence but on possibility. This sort of non-linear, atemporal Christian framework gives Jacob the ability to see the past *in light of* the future, while still allowing for the mystery of God in the present.

Jacob describes his own particular “dream-like” way of experiencing time and life as a “hope in Christ.”<sup>33</sup> Jacob first uses this term in his sermon to the Nephites at the temple (see Jacob 2:19) and then expands on this idea in Jacob 4. In this passage, he states that he “knew of Christ...[having] a hope of his glory many hundred years before his coming” and it was this “hope in Christ” that allowed him to perceive that same hope in “all the holy prophets which were before us.” (Jacob 4:4). This “hope in Christ” served as an interpretive lens through which Jacob could enter into a qualitatively different relationship with the scriptures. In other words, this “hope” allowed Jacob to experience the words of the prophets not as permanently fixed statements trapped within a linear stream of time but as words suggesting expansive and redemptive possibilities. This also fits with Jacob’s statement in chapter 7 that “none of the prophets have written nor prophesied save they have spoken concerning this Christ” (Jacob 7:11). On their surface, the prophetic writings of the Hebrew Bible appear to largely lack explicit references to Christ. But Jacob’s atemporal “hope in Christ” allows him to see clearly the *implicit* Christian dimension of those very same ancient words. And, as one of Sherem’s central concerns is with Jacob’s “perversion” of the law of Moses (Jacob 7:7), Jacob also suggests that it was his “hope in Christ” that allowed him to read even the law in terms of its redemptive possibilities: “for this intent we keep the law of Moses, it pointing our souls to [Christ]; and for this cause it is sanctified unto us for righteousness” (Jacob 4:5).

This reconfiguration of prophetic and legal words from the past and their relationship to Jacob in the present also extends into the future by virtue of his continued “hope in Christ.” Again in chapter four, Jacob posits a present reconciliation with God through the future atonement of Christ—what he calls a “good hope of glory in [Christ] before he manifesteth himself in the flesh” (Jacob 4:11). Jacob then explains that he received this significant knowledge of the present (in light of the future) through the divine intervention of the Spirit: “for the Spirit speaketh truth and lieth not. Wherefore, it speaketh of things as they really are, and of things as they really will be” (Jacob 4:13).<sup>34</sup>

Sherem, because of his own fixed, linear view of time, seems to misunderstand Jacob’s worldview because it is centered in a “hope in Christ.” Jacob’s prophecies do not isolate him in a projected future, they root him firmly in the present. Rooted in the presence of Christ, Jacob can then perceive truths in both the past and the future. We see this “present-ness” of Jacob as he opens his response to Sherem’s accusations: “Behold, the Lord God poured in his Spirit into my soul” (Jacob 7:8). This “pouring” of God’s Spirit suggests a present and immediate experience. The phrase is reminiscent of several passages in the Hebrew Bible, of which the book of Joel is a good example: “I will *pour out* my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall *prophesy*, your old men shall *dream dreams*, your young men shall *see visions*” (Joel 2:28, emphasis added). The Hebrew verb for “pour out” here is שפך (*shaphach*), which means “to pour out, [or] to shed,” and “does not mean a gradual pouring...but rather a *sudden*, massive spillage.”<sup>35</sup> Thus, the phrase “the Lord God poured in his Spirit into my soul” suggests a sudden reception of divine communication that grounds the individual in a revelatory present and opens both the future and the past.

We can also see this idea of experiencing a divine “dream time” in Jacob’s description of how he received heavenly knowledge. Jacob claims to have seen angels, to have been ministered by them, to have heard the Divine voice and, more, frames his account of these experiences with the phrase “from time to time” (Jacob 7:5). The Lord speaking “from time to time” takes Jacob *out of* time and allows him to simultaneously perceive the past (Christ present in the writings of the law and the prophets), the present (“things as they really are”), and the future (“things as they really will be,” including Christ’s advent in the flesh). Thus, I believe that Jacob’s teachings were ultimately focused

on becoming open to a “hope in Christ.” Such teachings helped the people to form a worldview that would allow the Divine to mysteriously and immediately impart knowledge in the present, allowing them to break free of linear time and experience—as Jacob did—the word of the Lord “*from* time [linear time] *to* time [dream time].”

## 2. Jacob's Dream and Sherem's Nightmare

It appears as though Jacob is able to navigate this dream-like experience of non-linear time in a relatively productive way. But Jacob's ability to maintain a coherent framework capable of holding together past, present, and future at the same time was only made possible through his “hope in Christ.”<sup>36</sup> Jacob's distinctively Christ-centered religiosity created space for this mystery of divine “dream time,” whereas Sherem's Christ-less religiosity erected barriers God had to overcome in order to reveal that same mystery. To put it another way, Jacob is an open valley into which God can “pour” his Spirit. Sherem, on the other hand, has erected a dam against God's revelations by focusing entirely on the words of the past (especially as revealed in the law of Moses). Sherem's shattering encounter with God's revelations shows that these revelations can themselves be dangerous if they must first violently overcome human-created barriers.

Perhaps the “power of the Lord” that ultimately comes upon Sherem at the climax of his conflict with Jacob was one of these non-linear, “dream-like” experiences that allowed Sherem to truly know about Christ (Jacob 7:17). This view appears to be substantiated by the frenzied shifting of tenses in Sherem's confession:

I fear lest I have committed the unpardonable sin, for I *have* lied unto God [past tense]. For I *denied* the Christ [past tense] and said that I *believed* the scriptures [past tense]—and they truly *testify* of him [present tense]. And because that I have thus *lied* unto God [past tense], I greatly *fear* [present tense] lest my case *shall be* awful [future tense]; but I *confess* unto God [present tense]. (Jacob 7:19)

We can see here the “power of the Lord” violently breaking Sherem free from the tyranny of linear time and linear thinking—a radical departure from his Christ-less religiosity that had been oriented primarily toward the past and the heavily sequential nature of the law of Moses. However, this “breaking free” has a different effect upon Sherem than it does upon Jacob. Sherem doesn't only see the hopeful aspect of “the gospel” which Jacob has most recently emphasized—the ministering of angels and the word of the Lord. Rather, Sherem is at least equally struck by the nightmarish aspects of this divine “dream time.” On the one hand, Sherem tells us that through this revelation, he has now experienced “the Christ,” “the power of the Holy Ghost,” and “the ministering of angels” (Jacob 7:17). Here, three elements are specifically mentioned. But immediately thereafter, we see the “other side” of this revelation in verse 18. Sherem speaks of “hell,” “of eternity,” and of “eternal punishment.” Once again, three elements are specifically mentioned, but this time, with a much darker tone.

Sherem's problem seems to come from seeing not only the positive and negative repercussions of actions from a non-linear, “dream-like” point of view, but in also trying to fit his past actions *into* this newly acquired atemporal framework. He clearly recognizes both the positive and negative implications of an “eternal” perspective, but even after experiencing this perspective he is still oriented toward the past. This is suggested by the language Sherem uses to describe his internal state. He says, “I *fear* lest I have committed the unpardonable sin,” not “I *know* that I have committed the unpardonable sin.” In other words, Sherem's revelation and his newfound knowledge is not about his definitive condemnation before God, nor about his own “eternal punishment.” He doesn't know these things, he only fears them. But while he recognizes that he has received a knowledge of Christ in the present—Christ is a reality, he really was in the scriptures all along, and he will come “many hundred years” in the future—these revelations are still framed by his own past actions (“I *have* lied unto God”).

I'd like to suggest that Sherem was not intentionally lying to God or the people with his earlier teachings. I believe that Sherem's anxiety about "lying" is the result of his wrestle with a new and unfamiliar "dream time" that has been violently imposed upon him. Sherem is experiencing a sort of revelatory post-traumatic stress syndrome. In these passages, I see Sherem viewing God's revelations from of his own personal framework, a framework that unfortunately lacks the sort of charity that a "hope in Christ" would provide. Sherem is trying to reorganize the pieces of his previously linear worldview, but instead of completely embracing this different way of looking at time and life, Sherem is holding on to his previous perspective. In other words, he is trying to force God's new wine into his own old bottles (cf. Matthew 9:17).

In light of his overwhelming revelation of Christ, Sherem is now (understandably) even more sensitive to his past actions that ran counter to Christ. Consider, for instance, his declaration that Jacob was causing the people to "pervert the right way of God" by not keeping the law of Moses (Jacob 7:7), his claim that "there is no Christ, neither hath been nor never will be" (v.9), and his claim that the scriptures supported both of these views (v. 10). But Sherem still sees each of these past actions as being decisive for his relationship to God. He has been exposed to a view of Christ's infinite atonement, but he can't yet allow his own finite mistakes to be swallowed up by that infinite love.

Rather than being condemned by God, Sherem is here condemning himself—and condemning himself needlessly. He sees his past actions as incongruent with his present knowledge, but since time has been shattered for him, both events (his present knowledge of Christ and his past denial of Christ) carry an equal weight in his own judgement. For someone who had been functioning within a strictly linear and temporal framework, the sudden apprehension of a dream-like, atemporal framework would be maddening (which might help to explain his fixation on "eternity" and "eternal punishment"), and could easily lead to Sherem's unnecessarily harsh self-judgement and self-condemnation. In this scenario, God does not "strike" a person dead after they recognize the error of their ways—Sherem's "smiting" here very well may be reflexive.<sup>37</sup> Though one could agree with Longfellow that "whom the gods would destroy, they first make mad,"<sup>38</sup> the text of Jacob nowhere states that God is directly responsible for Sherem's death. A self-inflicted descent into madness, on the other hand, would better explain the fact that in verse 15, Sherem does not die immediately, but is "nourished for the space of many days" before he dies. For Sherem, the "dream-like" experience of revelation threatens to become a living nightmare.<sup>39</sup>

Jacob, though he clearly understands both the positive and negative aspects of a non-linear, atemporal framework, does not go mad because of his "hope in Christ." In his dream-like state, Jacob sees Christ not simply as existing in the past (in the words of the prophets—Jacob 7:10-11), the present (the "word of the Lord" coming to him "from time to time"—Jacob 7:5) and future (Christ's coming "many hundred years hence"—Jacob 7:7), but he also understands that Christ's redemption can essentially reconfigure the past so that actions once made outside of (and even against) Christ are reconciled to one's present knowledge and experience of grace. Thus, for Jacob, time has not simply been freed from permanence and linearity, but it has also been unified and reconciled in Christ. In other words, both time and life itself have been brought into a special relationship with Christ.

However, this experience of a divine "dream time" is clearly not all rainbows and unicorns (or cureloms, if you'd like to get technical). We see the mental, emotional, and spiritual toll that this sort of non-linear, atemporal view had on Sherem, and I believe that at the end of Jacob's writings, we see more clearly the sort of toll that even an atemporal view bolstered by a "hope in Christ" has had on this prophet—he is "lonesome," "solemn," a "wanderer," "hated," and "mourn[ful]" (Jacob 7:26). We can actually see glimpses of the toll that experiencing this divine "dream time" can cause throughout Jacob's writings—we read of Jacob's "anxiety" (which accounts for exactly half of the references to "anxiety" in

To be, or not to be? That is the question— Whether 'tis nobler **in the mind to suffer** The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,

And, by opposing, end them? To die, to sleep— No more—and by a sleep to say we end

The heartache and the thousand natural shocks That flesh is heir to—'tis a consummation Devoutly to be wished! To die, to sleep.

**To sleep, perchance to dream—ay, there's the rub, For in that sleep of death what dreams may come**

When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,

Must give us pause. There's the respect

That makes calamity of so long life. (*Hamlet*, Act III, Scene 1, emphasis added)

the entire Book of Mormon), his being “weighed down” (Jacob 2:3), his “burden” (Jacob 2:9, 23), and his “grief” (which, incidentally, seems quite similar to the “grief” of the Lord—appearing a staggering 8 times in Jacob’s allegory of the olive tree in Jacob 5—suggesting that even God’s own “dream time” can sometimes be difficult).

What, then, makes this temporally-disorienting, dream-like experience with the Divine worth the trouble? Perhaps Jacob found hope in his father Lehi’s deathbed blessing for him that God would “consecrate thine afflictions for thy gain” (2 Nephi 2:2).<sup>40</sup> Yes, there would be afflictions—perhaps most especially in experiencing time and life “like as it were...unto a dream”—but through such an experience in Christ, Jacob could also gain both time *and* life.

### 3. A Waking Dream

If we return to the final verses that Jacob wrote before he died and reread verse 26 carefully, we see that Jacob seems to be encouraging us to read his religious writings from within a similar dream-like framework. He states that the Nephite experience of both time and life were “*like as it were* unto us a dream.” The consecutive use of the comparative words “like” and “as it were” may be intentionally evoking a “dream-like” state. In fact, Jacob’s text seems to be structured in a way to bring us, the audience, into this divine “dream time.” Within this chapter alone, we are confronted with an odd shifting of tenses and strange ways of talking about time: “*now* it *came* to pass,” “*from* time to time,” “he *did* speak unto me, *saying*,” “nourished for the *space* of many days,” “*before* that I *should* die,” “my Father which *was* in heaven,” “they *sought*...to destroy us *continually*,” “it came to pass that I Jacob *began* to be old,” “*the* time passed away with us,” and “I *saw* that I *must soon* go down to my grave.” Such vacillations in temporal phraseology suggest a non-linear sense of dreaming, preparing the audience for God to break into their own sense of time and life.<sup>41</sup>

By crafting his text in a way that would help ease his audience into a divine “dream time” (stabilized by a “hope in Christ”), Jacob’s textual vision resonates strongly with that of the deeply Christian author George MacDonald, who wrote:

Strange dim memories...look out upon me in the broad daylight, but I never dream now. It may be, notwithstanding, that, when most awake, I am only dreaming the more! But when I wake *at last* into that life which, as a mother her child, carries this life in its bosom, I shall know that I wake, and shall doubt no more...Our life is no dream, but it should—and *will* perhaps—become one.<sup>42</sup>



Like MacDonald, Jacob ultimately invites his audience into a relationship with Christ—one that can transform their mundane lives into a redemptive, waking dream.

---

## NOTES

31. Canonically speaking, Nephi's vision (1 Nephi 11-14) of Lehi's dream/vision (1 Nephi 8) is a good, proximate example of how an individual's experience of divine communication can be both temporally jarring and logically disconnected.

32. In a letter to Eberhard Bethge, 30 April 1944, Bonhoeffer wrote, "Our entire nineteen hundred years of Christian preaching and theology are built on the 'religious a priori' in human beings. 'Christianity' has always been a form (perhaps the true form) of 'religion.' Yet if it becomes obvious one day that this 'a priori' doesn't exist, that it has been a historically conditioned and transitory form of human expression, then people really will become radically religionless...If religion is only the garb in which Christianity is clothed—and this garb has looked very different in different ages—what then is religionless Christianity?" See Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, ed. John W. de Gruchy, trans. Isabel Best (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2009), pp. 362-363.

33. For a discussion of the inseparable connection between "hope" and "daydreaming," see Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope* [trans. Neville Plaice, Stephen Plaice, and Paul Knight (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1986)], pp. 77-113.

34. This particular phrase differs in an interesting way from a similar phrase in the Doctrine and Covenants: "And truth is knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come" (93:24). Perhaps Jacob does not speak here of the Spirit's ability to communicate the truth of the past because he has already covered this subject earlier in the chapter when he discussed the law and the prophets (Jacob 4:4-5).

35. Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994), p. 1629, s.v. שֹׁכֵן, emphasis added.

36. We can see this principle quite clearly in Alma the Younger's narration of his own "conversion" experience, where the only thing that spares him from the madness of an atemporal revelation (Alma 36:12-16) is his desperate hope in Christ (36:17-20).

37. We see this very principle at work in Hamlet's famous soliloquy:

38. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *The Masque of Pandora* (Boston, MA: James R. Osgood and Company, 1876), p. 33.

39. There is an interesting connection between dreams, experiencing the Divine, and the possibility of madness at the very outset of the Hebrew Bible. Immediately preceding the creation of the woman, the Lord God causes a "deep sleep to fall upon Adam" (Gen. 2:21). This "deep sleep" (תַּרְדֵּמָה, *tardemah*) was translated into Greek using the word ἔκστασις (*ekstasis*), which is related to the English "ecstasy" and "ecstatic." The Oxford English Dictionary explains, "The classical senses of ἔκστασις are 'insanity' and 'bewilderment'; but in late Greek the etymological meaning received another application, viz., 'withdrawal of the soul from the body, mystic or prophetic trance';...

Both the classical and post-classical senses came into the modern languages, and in the present fig[urative] uses they seem to be blended" ("ecstasy, n.". OED Online. June 2015. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/59423?rkey=UKxmTX&result=1&isAdvanced=false> [accessed September 01, 2015]). Thus, it is possible to see the "deep sleep" that God set upon Adam as involving some sort of experience with the Divine, which also carried with it the possibility of insanity.

40. Echoes of priestly language in this phrase nicely ties together divine "dream time" and a hope in Christ. In Leviticus 21:10, the author explains that the high priest had not only been consecrated (literally, "his hand was filled [with sacred oil]"), but that the anointing oil (literally משיח [*meshiach*] or χριστος [*christos*] oil) had been "poured out upon his head." Thus, in "pouring out" his disorienting, dream-inducing Spirit into Jacob's soul (Jacob 7:8), God could at the same time use that oil-like Spirit to anoint the priestly Jacob (Jacob 1:18) unto holiness. Such priestly imagery may help to explain the frequent uses of the term "Christ" in Jacob 7 (nearly half of its uses in the entire book of Jacob), as opposed to other epithets for the Son of God that Nephi seems to prefer in his writings.

41. On a much larger scale, we can see a sort of "dream logic" organizing the entire book of Jacob in the constant shifting between genres from chapter to chapter—in the first chapter, narrative gives way to the quotation of a public sermon (in chapters 2-3), which is immediately followed by an editorial explanation (chapter 4), which leads directly into an extended allegory about plants (chapter 5), which is followed by an analysis of that allegory (chapter 6) that seems to definitively end his writings (6:13), before beginning a brand new narrative (ch. 7) that officially ends the book with the statement that Jacob's experience of time and life has been like a dream (7:26). It is almost as if Jacob has been inviting us to join him in this divine "dream time" all along.

42. George MacDonald, *Lilith* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1896), pp. 350-351.

# Weeping for Zion

Joseph M. Spencer

Readers of the Book of Mormon are familiar with the morose conclusion to the Book of Jacob.

Marilyn Arnold cites the passage as evidence of Jacob's "unusually tender" nature,<sup>43</sup> and John Tanner uses it to exhibit "the sensitivity, vulnerability, and quiet eloquence" of this minor Book of Mormon prophet.<sup>44</sup> Hugh Nibley called Jacob's final words a "solemn dirge,"<sup>45</sup> Sidney Sperry wrote of the "sincere nature" of the farewell,<sup>46</sup> and Terry Warner has said that Jacob's conclusion betrays the "emotional and spiritual tribulation" that "never ended for Jacob."<sup>47</sup> In a creative "street-legal version" of the Book of Mormon, Michael Hicks has more recently reworded Jacob's farewell in part as follows: "We always talked about rejoicing but were mostly overserious and glum. We had this promised land, this New Canaan, but felt sad and put down and unfulfilled all the time. I hate to end this way. But it's true. Honest. Plain."<sup>48</sup> Few miss the opportunity, it seems, to highlight the almost depressive nature of Jacob's closing words.

In the following pages, however, I would like to propose a rather different reading of Jacob's farewell. He mourned, and he felt time's passage like a dream, but what might we learn if we were to read these as *normative* experiences—not as the peculiar feelings of a despairing individual, but as something Jacob as a prophet models and that we should strive to emulate? Might we outline a theology of mourning that recognizes the positive and the productive in Jacob's relation to the world? In line with certain early (and other not-so-early) Christian thinkers, I want to outline here a theology of what I will call *consecrated melancholy*. Or rather, borrowing from the language of a revelation to and about Joseph Smith, I want to begin to work out the meaning of *weeping for Zion*.<sup>49</sup>

I will proceed as follows. In the first section, I will investigate the basic structures that underlie Jacob 7:26. My aim in doing so is to reveal some of the complexity of the passage, but also and especially to bring out the possibility that the core of Jacob's farewell exhibits a kind of progression from one psychological diagnosis of the Nephite condition to another—the first presented only in a simile but the second presented as the actual psychological state of Jacob and his people. In a second section, I will then provide a detailed philosophical assessment of the two psychological conditions mentioned by Jacob. My intention will be to clarify the basic nature of melancholy and to spell out in a preliminary way what it might mean for melancholy to be consecrated. Finally, in a third section, I will draw out what I take to be the significance of the focus of Nephite mourning, according to Jacob. The point of this last section will be to develop as fully as possible the idea of consecrated melancholy and to bring out with real force the normative features of Jacob's and his people's morose spirit.

## 1. Some Questions of Structure

The words Jacob uses to bid his readers farewell are deeply familiar. Unfortunately, for all its apparent familiarity, the passage's complexity passes largely unnoticed by readers. It deserves quotation in full here, since we will be looking at it in great detail:

And it came to pass that I, Jacob, began to be old, and the record of this people being kept on the other plates of Nephi—wherefore, I conclude this record, declaring that I have written according to the best of my knowledge, by saying that the time passed away with us, and also our lives passed away, like as it were unto us a dream, we being a lonesome and a solemn people, wanderers cast out from Jerusalem, born in

tribulation in a wild wilderness, and hated of our brethren—which caused wars and contentions.

Wherefore, we did mourn out our days. (Jacob 7:26.)<sup>50</sup>

At first, perhaps, the passage reads as highly disorganized, a kind of haphazard concatenation of anxieties, so many serial witnesses to Jacob's poignant feelings. Closer investigation, however, shows that it follows a careful plan, and that a remarkably tight structure organizes the culminating "saying" toward which it works.

In broadest terms, a triple intention animates the passage. Three successive verbs organize this triple intention: "to conclude," "to declare," and "to say." Isolating the part of the passage in which these three verbs appear in rapid succession should help to clarify this point: "I *conclude* this record, *declaring* that I have written according to the best of my knowledge, by *saying* that . . ." Each of these moments might be considered in turn. Jacob unsurprisingly states at the outset of this fragment that the point of his farewell is to accomplish *a gesture of conclusion*: "I conclude this record." But he then immediately qualifies this move by making *a solemn declaration* regarding the relationship between his personal knowledge and the record he aims to conclude: "declaring that I have written according to the best of my knowledge." And then, apparently because he recognizes the destabilizing effect of his declaration, he finally offers *a clarifying saying* intended to justify any disparity between "the best of [his] knowledge" and simple reality: "by saying that . . ." A gesture of conclusion, secured by a solemn declaration, which then requires a clarifying saying—these are the basic elements of the plan underlying Jacob 7:26.<sup>51</sup>

Of the three elements of this plan, the second is the simplest. This is because the first, the gesture of conclusion, arises with an odd introductory "wherefore" in the middle of what seems at first to be an interrupted thought, while the third element, the clarifying saying, has as its content the whole remainder of the verse with its own independent structure. Only the solemn declaration comes across as straightforward: the expression of an entirely understandable desire that readers recognize Jacob's sincerity and good faith. The other two elements therefore deserve closer scrutiny. I aim here, of course, primarily to investigate the theological force of the clarifying saying (the third element), since there Jacob outlines the Nephite experience of time's passing and the psychological conditions that attend it. Nonetheless, before turning directly to the saying and its fascinating structure, I would like to say a few words about the context of the gesture of conclusion that opens the verse. At the very least, an illuminating reading of that first element of the triple plan of Jacob 7:26 should help to motivate close and charitable reading when we turn to the saying meant to clarify the solemn declaration that accomplishes the gesture of conclusion.

Jacob's gesture of conclusion seems, at best, oddly introduced. Were the opening part of the passage to be lacking the incomplete thought regarding "the record . . . kept on the other plates of Nephi," it would read far more naturally: "And it came to pass that I, Jacob, began to be old, . . . wherefore, I conclude this record." The difficulty, of course, is that Jacob inserts between his statement regarding death's approach and his gesture of conclusion a straying aside that appears never to be completed: "and the record of this people being kept on the other plates of Nephi . . ." This clause seems to be either unrelated to the rest of the verse or inexplicably but definitively abandoned before its relevance ever manifests itself. But a closer reading, one invested in questions of structure, points to apparent motivations for Jacob's inclusion of the odd clause. A triple contrast establishes a close relationship between the statement regarding the "other plates" and Jacob's gesture of conclusion.

Parallel to the phrase "the other plates" in the apparently stray clause is Jacob's reference to "this record" in the gesture of conclusion. A similar parallel exists between "this people" in the apparently stray clause and the first-personal "I" in the gesture of conclusion. Finally, the gerundive "being kept" of the apparently stray clause stands in

parallel to the conjugated “conclude” of the gesture of conclusion. It should be noted that these parallels follow one after another in rather strict order:

the record of [this people] [being kept] on [the other plates of Nephi]

- **[conclude] [this record]**

The strictness of these parallels suggests that they are to be read as intentional.

All of these parallels are contrastive in nature. Jacob seems intent on distinguishing himself, an individual prophet, from the undifferentiated mass of individuals making up “this people.” His gesture of conclusion (“I conclude”), moreover, stands in contrast to the ongoing work of keeping a national chronicle (“being kept”). And this, finally, underscores the essential difference between “this record,” Jacob’s and Nephi’s small plates with their overarching theological programs,<sup>52</sup> and “the other plates of Nephi,” the ever-proliferating annals of the Nephite people.<sup>53</sup> All these details make clear the close relationship between Jacob’s gesture of conclusion and the only-apparently-stray clause that immediately precedes it. Moreover, the nature of the overarching contrast between the individual prophet who concludes his programmatic record and the non-individualized people who keep their chronicle in an ongoing fashion marks the relevance of the still-earlier reference to Jacob’s approaching death. Individuals grow old and face death, but peoples do not (or do so only seldom, and then under extreme circumstances).<sup>54</sup> The contrastive parallels between the second and third clauses of the verse rest on the foundation of the death-announcement of the first clause of the verse.

Structural analysis of the opening lines of Jacob 7:26 exhibits remarkable explanatory power. What at first reads as sloppy and directionless ultimately reveals itself as complex and even sophisticated.<sup>55</sup> There is much already in the opening lines of Jacob 7:26 that can be clarified greatly by paying close attention to structure. This is all the truer when attention turns from Jacob’s gesture of conclusion to the clarifying saying that makes up the largest and most detailed part of the verse—the part of the verse to which we will give focused theological attention throughout the rest of this paper. I would like to turn to this clarifying saying now.

At the broadest level, it should be said that Jacob’s clarifying saying, meant to explain the possible disparity between his account and history itself, contains three simple parts: two distinct psychologically-fraught statements regarding time’s passing (first, “the time passed away with us, and also our lives passed away, like as it were unto us a dream,” and second, “we did mourn out our days”), and one complex description of the Nephite worldview (“a lonesome and a solemn people, wanderers cast out from Jerusalem, born in tribulation in a wild wilderness, and hated of our brethren—which caused wars and contentions”). These are the basic parts of the saying. In terms of sequence, however, Jacob positions the description of the Nephite worldview between the two statements regarding time’s passing, using brief rhetorical gestures to mark transitions between parts:

[statement] The time passed away with us, and also our lives passed away, like as it were unto us a dream,

[transition] we being

[description] a lonesome and a solemn people, wanderers cast out from Jerusalem, born in tribulation in a wild wilderness, and hated of our brethren— which caused wars and contentions.

[transition] Wherefore,

[statement] we did mourn out our days.

This, then, provides the most basic structural organization of the saying. Much more, however, can and should be said about structure here.

First, it seems best to see Jacob's description of the Nephite worldview as dividing rather naturally into four parts: (1) "a lonesome and a solemn people," (2) "wanderers cast out from Jerusalem," (3) "born in tribulation in a wild wilderness," and (4) "hated of our brethren—which caused wars and contentions." A relatively clear logic organizes this fourfold sequence. Jacob follows (1) the basic character of the Nephite people of his day with (2) a word regarding their pre-history and (3) an explanation of their own beginnings, all this leading up to (4) their devastating ongoing condition: the unending conflict between Nephites and Lamanites. Jacob tells a kind of story here, that of a solemn people engaged in eternal warfare with their brothers in direct consequence of their having come into a world of conflict in exile. Jacob and his generation were born too late to see better days in Jerusalem, just as they were born too early to pass by the difficulties of travel and daily family conflict. The central description that lies at the heart of the clarifying saying of Jacob 7:26, then, provides what might be called the fourfold nature of Jacob's way of being, as well as that of his people—those of his peculiar generation.

This first further elaboration of the structure of Jacob's clarifying saying opens immediately onto a second. The transitional markers noted above clearly indicate a very specific relationship between this quadruply traumatic core of Nephite being and the Nephite experience of time's passing, described in the opening and closing statements of the saying. The "we being" that marks the transition from the first statement to the description of the Nephite worldview clearly serves to indicate that the traumas listed in the latter underlie the psychologically complex experience indicated in the former. Time passed like a dream for the Nephites precisely because they were a lonesome and a solemn people, and so on. Similarly, the "wherefore" that marks the transition from the description of the Nephite worldview to the second statement regarding time's passing indicates that the same traumas underlie the psychologically troubled experience laid out at the verse's end. The Nephites mourned out their days precisely because they were a lonesome and a solemn people, and so on. Thus Jacob clearly wants his readers to understand that the traumas reported in the description at the saying's heart ultimately lay behind his people's psychologically-fraught experience of time's passing—which is described in two parallel statements.

We might, in light of these comments, put a finer point or two on the overarching structure of Jacob's clarifying saying. The fourfold nature of Nephite trauma can be more fully articulated by lining up the several clauses of the description as sequential statements. Further, the transition markers might be presented as indicating the causal relationship between the traumatic condition of the Nephites of Jacob's generation and their psychologically complicated experience of time's passing, presented in two distinct statements. Further, the parallel presentation of those two statements might be productively marked. In all, then, the structure of Jacob 7:26 is as follows:

The time passed away with us, and also our lives passed away, like as it were unto us a dream,

we being

*causal relation*

*parallel statements regarding the Nephite experience of time's passing*

a lonesome and a solemn people, wanderers cast out from Jerusalem, born in tribulation in a wild wilderness,

and hated of our brethren—which caused wars and contentions.

*causal relation*

Wherefore,

we did mourn out our days.

This visual representation brings out much more of the complexity of Jacob's saying.

Now, so much structural investigation demands that an answer be given to a question too seldom asked (or too non-committedly asked) when attention focuses on structure: *What light do these structural features of Jacob's clarifying saying shed on its meaning?* Because the structure outlined above exhibits at least loosely chiastic features, we must avoid the temptation to provide this question with what has become among Latter-day Saints a too-ready answer, an answer based on a rather popular understanding of chiastic structure. One too readily claims that every chiasm privileges whatever lies at its center as somehow focal, the whole point of the use of structure. But examples abound of chiasms where the point of utilizing the textual structure seems to be otherwise: in some cases to emphasize a certain mirroring or intertwining of ideas (a good example is Isaiah 5:7: "for the vineyard of the Lord of Hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant"); in other cases to set up boundaries within a textual unit (as in the chiastic framing of Alma 36, according to a reading I have defended elsewhere);<sup>56</sup> in still other cases to highlight the formal or even ritual flavor of what is said (for instance, in Nephi's oath to Zoram in 1 Nephi 4:32: "if he would hearken unto my words, as the Lord liveth, and as I live, even so that if he would hearken unto our words, we would spare his life"); and in yet still other cases to trace a transformation or inversion of things (as in the common scriptural formula, "the first shall be last and the last shall be first"). If there is in fact reason to stress the loosely chiastic structure of Jacob's clarifying saying—and this remains unsure—it has to be asked which of these purposes might underlie the structural features of the text.

It seems to me relatively clear that Jacob's way of structuring his clarifying saying has little to do with emphasizing or otherwise privileging what lies at its structural heart. The point of the saying in the first place is to help explain the existence of any possible discrepancy between actual history and what Jacob reports of history in his record. And this he accomplishes primarily in the opening and closing statements of the clarifying saying, not in the structurally central description of the Nephite worldview.

The context privileges Jacob's attempts at identifying the Nephites' psychological condition, not his identification of that condition's underlying cause. For this reason, it seems to me that the chief purpose for Jacob's structuring of his clarifying saying in a loosely chiastic fashion is to trace a transformation or an inversion of sorts. I take it that the point is to see how the dream-simile of the saying's opening statement, after a careful rehearsal of the actual traumas underlying the Nephites' psychological condition, gives way to a more straightforward description of the Nephite experience of time's passing in terms of mourning. Jacob's saying, it seems to me, works its way from an approximate account of the symptoms to a more staid diagnosis of the actual condition of the Nephites.

A glance back at the fuller visual presentation of the structure of Jacob's saying might help to confirm this conclusion. Even as the fully articulated structure underscores the parallel nature of the opening and closing statements regarding the experience of time's passing, it marks an important lack of balance between them. The opening statement is longer and more complex. It twice attempts to state the Nephites' experience of time's passing, in subtly but significantly different ways ("the time passed away with us," and "our lives passed away"). One

cannot help but wonder whether Jacob is unsatisfied with his first attempt at describing the experience, but then also whether he ends up just as unsatisfied with his second attempt immediately thereafter. He goes on, of course, to compare this inadequately articulated experience to a dream-state, but he inserts between the appropriate preposition (“like”) and that to which he compares the experience (“a dream”) two hesitating qualifications of the simile: “as it were” and “unto us.” With the first of these, Jacob weakens the simile, marking its artificial character.

With the second, he subjectifies the simile, limiting its force to those undergoing the experience. All this complexity stands in stark contrast to the unapologetic “we did mourn out our days” that closes the verse. And the consequent imbalance of sorts between the opening and closing statements of the clarifying saying seems to me to highlight the fact that the structure marks the transformation of a hesitant and merely provisional attempt at clarification in the opening statement into a confident and conclusive diagnosis in the closing statement.

With this final point regarding structure, it is perhaps possible at last to leave these merely preliminary considerations to one side and turn to philosophical or theological reflection on Jacob’s clarifying saying. In the course of the saying, Jacob traces a shift from a comparison of the Nephite experience of time with having a dream to a straightforward equation of the Nephite experience of time with mourning. Perhaps the whole thing can be encapsulated in a formula of sorts: *From dreams to mourning, by way of an articulation of experienced trauma*. In the following sections, it is this summary formula, made visible thanks to close structural analysis, that will guide the following reflections above all.

## 2. On Matters Psychological

Interestingly, the formula of sorts with which I have concluded the above structural considerations describes not only the flow of Jacob’s clarifying saying in Jacob 7:26, but also the career of the twentieth century’s most influential (as well as most notorious) psychologist: Sigmund Freud. Freud’s revolution in psychotherapy began in earnest when, in 1900, he announced his discovery that the analysis of dreams provided the key to discovering the unconscious.<sup>57</sup> The project only came to real maturity, however, beginning in 1917, when Freud finally undertook to outline what he called his metapsychology, taking his orientation at that point in his career from the experience of mourning.<sup>58</sup> Moreover, what drove his work on the “talking cure” was of course, from start to finish, his careful attention to what people experiencing psychological suffering had to say about their traumatic experiences. *From dreams to mourning, by way of an articulation of experienced trauma*. Jacob’s attempt at diagnosing his own and his people’s condition follows, peculiarly, Freud’s attempt at fixing the nature of psychoanalysis.

Of course, these parallels only go so far. Nonetheless, I would like to take them as a basic motivation for using Freud’s thought to clarify at least some of the stakes of Jacob’s references to dreams and mourning. I want to be clear, however, that I do not do so uncritically. There have been a few attempts to critique Freud from a specifically Mormon perspective, and I take these attempts seriously.<sup>59</sup> And psychologists in the English-speaking world have, of course, been less and less inclined to take Freud’s work seriously in recent decades, something that cannot be ignored. Nonetheless, it seems to me that the development of scientific distaste for Freud, along with attempts at critique from a specifically Mormon perspective, often (and perhaps understandably) fail to recognize the richness of Freud’s thought, allowing certain definitely problematic aspects of his work to get in the way of its more fruitful aspects—aspects that I think speak in particularly poignant ways to Mormon theology.<sup>60</sup> Perhaps if one reads Freud as a philosopher or as a thinker rather than as a scientist in the strict sense of the word, it is possible to allow his attempts at clarifying things like trauma, dreams, and mourning to inform careful reflection. It is as a philosopher that I use his work here, aware of both the danger and the promise of his thought.



To begin to assess what Jacob says about both dreams and mourning, let me first highlight again the contrast between the respective ways he refers to them. First he speaks of dreams, but only in a simile, which he further doubly qualifies. Jacob refers to dreams only to help his readers understand something that is *not* actually a dream, something that is only dream-like. And his qualifications of the simile (“as it were,” “unto us”) seem meant to underline the fact that the simile *is* just a simile. Jacob wishes his readers to understand something of the way he and his people experienced the passing of time, but he wishes just as much that his readers recognize that his illustrative images are *only* images. All this contrasts sharply with the way Jacob subsequently talks about mourning. There he leaves off similes for direct description. He and his people actually *did* mourn out their days. They *really* experienced time in terms of mourning. In this description, Jacob employs no image to help his readers grasp what he means to convey; he assumes they can understand the brute fact he reports to them.

The contrast here works because dreaming and mourning share certain features, even as they differ in important respects.<sup>61</sup> Their differences are, of course, much more obvious than their similarities.

Dreams occur while we sleep, when our conscious awareness of the world retreats and our unconscious desires make themselves manifest. The work of mourning, on the other hand, unfolds while we remain conscious—in fact, all *too* conscious, due to the depth of our loss; in mourning we are entirely aware of our desires, the intensity of which often keeps us awake at night. And this is only the first of several obvious differences. We experience mourning in a focused way, our loss providing everything in life with a kind of focal point, deeply painful. But we experience dreams as profoundly disjointed and non-linear, moving by metaphorical leaps and metonymical bounds.<sup>62</sup> Where mourning seldom gives us any reprieve from the mental effort it requires, keeping us focused on what has slipped from our grasp, dreams present us with uncanny associations and comforting discontinuities—or even abruptly conclude, allowing us to wake up when they become too horrific. Other obvious differences might be named too. It certainly must be said that mourning is a difficult and painful process, even if it eventually results in healing. Dreams, however, while they might at times take the shape of nightmares, are often enough pleasurable experiences, or at least entirely neutral, letting us forget most of them. Further, we might note that mourning usually comes to an end, while we go on dreaming throughout our lives.

All of these differences are important, but the network they form is woven also of crucial similarities. For instance, despite the obvious disjointedness of dreams, which seems to distance them absolutely from the focused experience of mourning, it must ultimately be said that a disguised coherence underpins every dream. All of a dream’s metaphoric disruptions and metonymic concatenations organize themselves into a network whose center of gravity is some kind of trauma. Whether as simple and quotidian as a passing desire for something one lacks, or whether as complex and deep as horrified fascination with self-destruction, *some* kind of trauma serves as the principle—both causal and organizational—of every dream.<sup>63</sup> And it is this center of gravity in every experience of dreaming that links dreams to mourning. As dreams organize a whole network of (imagistic) associations around some kind of trauma, ostensibly in an attempt to help us cope with our frustrated or forbidden or frightening desires, the work of mourning undertakes to revise the network of our conscious associations around the experience of deep loss. Confronted with the frustration of intense desires to be with a loved one, working through the forbidden anger we feel toward the one who has abandoned us, and coming to recognize the frightening fragility of life as we know it, we mourn.<sup>64</sup> In essence, the work of dreaming is like the work of mourning because, in each case, we find ourselves maneuvering a landscape organized around what seems impossible to speak about—or, at least, what seems impossible to speak about without somehow committing an act of sacrilege. In dreaming as in mourning, we work out our relationship to what remains inaccessible to us.

Despite important differences in outward appearance, then, dreams and mourning share much that is essential. Jacob can make sense for his readers of his people's response to their traumatic circumstances in terms either of dreams or of mourning—although, as we have seen, it is quite clear that he means to claim that his people actually mourned, while their experience was only like dreaming.

That Jacob provides his readers with *both* the simile *and* the direct description, asking them to understand his people's experience in terms of *both* dreaming *and* mourning, is important, because it draws attention to the shared underlying structure of the two sorts of experience. Were Jacob only to speak of mourning, readers might too easily take him to mean just that his people grumbled about their less-than-perfect circumstances. But because he couples mourning with dreams, it becomes clear that his talk of mourning indeed bears psychological significance. His and his people's time was occupied by actual mourning, by the slow process of transformation that aims at eventually stabilizing one's affairs despite deep loss. For this reason, their experience was not *actually* that of dreaming, though it was apparently very much *like* dreaming.

Implicit in the preceding few paragraphs is what seems to be the major motivation for Jacob's nonetheless drawing a contrast between dreaming and mourning in attempting to describe his generation's experience. The very first point of difference we drew above between the two sorts of experience concerns the fact that dreaming is unconscious while mourning is conscious. This distinction, presumably, plays a particularly important role in the shift from mere simile to direct description in the clarifying saying of Jacob 7:26. Dreaming is, so to speak, automatic, something that happens on its own despite our conscious intentions. We might wish for dreamless sleep, but we have no guarantee that our wish will be granted. And after being rudely awakened, we might wish to return to a pleasant dream, but we are as likely as not to move on to other dreams when we return to sleep. Mourning is a different affair entirely, however. Although we seldom have control over the events that cause or motivate our mourning, the work of mourning unfolds in anything but an automatic or unconscious way. Not only are we only too aware of our desires and our consequent pain, but we work our way toward regained normalcy only by working consciously and intentionally on seeing the world in a new way. To say that the Nephite experience during Jacob's generation was only like dreaming but was actually a matter of mourning is, it would seem, to indicate that they had to focus conscious effort on grappling with what they experienced as deep loss.

Even as we make this major point of contrast explicit, however, we should note yet another feature of Jacob's clarifying saying that brings his talk of dreams and his talk of mourning into close continuity— another feature of the saying, that is, that seems to indicate why Jacob should wish to claim that his people's mourning was *like* dreaming and therefore was *unlike* mourning to some extent. The final point of difference we drew above between the two sorts of experience concerns the fact that mourning is a work that, generally speaking, comes to a kind of resolution. Mourning comes to an end when, although we remain fully aware of our loss, we have found a way of being oriented by it or to it that allows us to go on. Something like normalcy returns. Dreams, however, as products of the incorrigibly inconsistent unconscious, do not so much end as they are interrupted, always in the middle of things. We come back from our dreams to the normal world, but we do so only by leaving the world of our dreams behind. And the world of our dreams *never* achieves normalcy. Our unconscious states never work all the way through our traumas.

This marks a further point of contrast between dreams and mourning. And yet it must be said that Jacob describes his people's mourning in the closing statement of his clarifying saying in language suggestive of dreams. When he says that he and his people "did mourn out [their] days," he clearly indicates that his people's mourning never came to an end.<sup>65</sup> And this is quite strange. Although it is certainly possible for someone never to work all the way through the stages of mourning, and so never to achieve normalcy again, such cases are exceptional; they are,

precisely, cases that are out of the ordinary. The sort of deep loss that leads to mourning certainly traumatizes, but it does not usually traumatize so deeply that it cannot be overcome. Typically speaking, one *does not* mourn out one's days. One mourns for a time, works at reconfiguring one's world for a time, and then one lives on.<sup>66</sup> Jacob, however, seems clearly to say that his people *never ceased to mourn*. They worked, quite consciously it seems, at giving a new shape to their world, a new shape that would allow them to return to normalcy and routine. They worked, that is, at the possibility of being at last at their ease. But, apparently, they failed. They failed ever to live on, to breathe easily, to be consoled, to experience equilibrium. It would seem that their loss was too deep to allow them—or at least those of Jacob's generation—ever to rest.

At this point, then, it becomes necessary to ask exactly what it was that Jacob and his people lost. What was it that caused perpetual, unceasing mourning, preventing their coming to a point of rest or of normalcy? Actually, Jacob states the answer to this question quite straightforwardly in the course of his fourfold description of the traumatic experience that underlay his and his people's dream-like mourning. What Jacob and his people lost was *Jerusalem*. In fact, he informs us that he and his people had a particularly odd relationship to that loss, indicated by the essential incompatibility between two things Jacob says about his people's relationship to Jerusalem. In the course of his fourfold description of Nephite trauma, he says both that they were "born . . . in a wild wilderness" and that they were "cast out from Jerusalem." The combination of these two claims, of course, makes no sense. If one has been cast out of the city of her nativity, then she must have been born there—not in "a wild wilderness." Or if she has been born elsewhere and in fact has never been to the city in question, it makes little sense to say that she has been "cast out" from it. Yet Jacob combines these two incommensurable experiences into one traumatic whole, which underlies the Nephite psychological condition. His generation was at once born at a distance from Jerusalem, and yet they were always poignantly aware of their being in a kind of exile. It was thus that they "did mourn out [their] days."

I will come back to the significance of Jerusalem as the focus of Nephite loss in the final section of this paper. For the moment, it is enough just to recognize from Jacob's paradoxical description of the Nephite experience that they underwent a rather unique sort of mourning. Their mourning was not of the sort that comes to an end. Jacob and his people mourned a constitutive, irreparable loss. Helpfully, Freud has a name for this condition, or for something quite like it—a venerable name drawn, in fact, from Christian theology: *melancholia*.<sup>67</sup> Actually, the condition Jacob describes differs in at least one important respect from what Freud calls melancholia, since the latter emphasizes the unconscious nature of the condition as framed by psychoanalytic practice, while Jacob, with his talk of mourning, emphasizes the conscious nature of his people's experience. Perhaps precisely for this reason, it might be useful to examine melancholia from the perspective of one of Freud's more insightful critics: Giorgio Agamben. At its real heart, Agamben explains, "melancholy would be not so much the regressive reaction to the loss of the love object [described by Freud] as the imaginative capacity to make an unobtainable object appear as if lost." The melancholic in effect "stages a simulation where what cannot be lost because it has never been possessed [nevertheless] *appears* as lost."<sup>68</sup> Put in other words, there lies at the heart of the melancholic experience a paradoxical transformation of the merely *inaccessible* into the actually *lost*. And this seems to me a remarkably apt characterization of the situation Jacob describes. Although he and his people had never actually seen Jerusalem, they related to it as if it had nonetheless once been theirs; they experienced it as constitutively, irreparably lost.

Not only does Agamben's slight-but-significant corrective to Freud's conception of melancholia point in the direction of Jacob 7:26, it also aims to sum up a longstanding Christian theological tradition. Agamben is explicit about the fact that the Christian tradition oddly and perhaps ironically lies behind Freud's attempt to think about

melancholia. Even more usefully, though, Agamben—unlike Freud—draws from that tradition to distinguish between two sorts of melancholy. There is on the one hand what early Christian thinkers called *tristitia mortifera*, deadly sadness, a kind of sickness unto death.<sup>69</sup> And there is on the other hand what early Christian thinkers called *tristitia salutaris*, saving sadness, akin in certain ways to what Latter-day Saints often call godly sorrow.<sup>70</sup> Focusing on the latter of these two sorts of melancholy, Agamben speaks of an “obscure wisdom according to which hope has been given only for the hopeless”—a formula very much resonant with my own recent attempt to lay out a Mormon theology of hope.<sup>71</sup> Like Sarah and Abraham, confronted with the genuinely objective impossibility of a child, but precisely *therefore* free to hope for a child from the God who covenants to undermine the objective order of the world, it is “they that mourn” whom Jesus calls “blessed,” because “they shall be comforted” (Matthew 5:4).<sup>72</sup> Agamben rightly says of melancholic or ceaseless mourning, “the greatest disgrace is never to have had it.”<sup>73</sup> Or perhaps it would be most relevant to cite in this connection a formula Jacob first heard falling from the lips of his dying father, given in the form of a final blessing on the melancholic child: “In thy childhood thou hast suffered afflictions and much sorrow, . . . [but] thou knowest the greatness of God, and he shall consecrate thine afflictions for thy gain” (2 Nephi 2:1–2). From quite early in his life, Jacob knew of the possibility of a kind of *consecrated melancholy*.

How is one to distinguish between the two sorts of melancholy identified by the Christian tradition—between a sort of interminable mourning that results in the death of the soul and a sort of interminable mourning that somehow deserves commendation? What makes Joseph Smith’s “weeping for Zion” a good thing (D&C 21:8) and what Mormon calls “the sorrowing of the damned” a clearly bad thing (Mormon 2:13)? What differentiates the wandering “pilgrims” of Hebrews 11:13 from those condemned for having “loved to wander” in Jeremiah 14:10? Why should we not limit ourselves to speaking of the joy of the saints and the misery of the rebellious, avoiding the complexity implied by the fact that even the redeemed experience “sorrow . . . for the sins of the world” (3 Nephi 28:9)—not to mention the even starker complexity implied by Enoch’s vision of “the God of heaven” who “looked upon the residue of the people, and . . . wept” (Moses 7:28)? How do we know whether our hearts broken because we see that we cannot reach on our own what we nonetheless rightly desire, and when are our hearts broken because we see the impossibility of having what we should not but cannot help but desire?

There are, I suspect, dozens of good and productive answers to these questions. Leaving their enumeration for another occasion, however, I wish to focus in on just one possible answer—the one implied by Jacob’s exclusive focus on what he and his people experienced as definitively lost: *Jerusalem*. It is well and good to speak of consecrated dream-like mourning, but what lies behind that consecrated dream-like mourning for Jacob is something quite specific. For the remainder of this theological investigation, I mean to ask what we might learn by turning our attention to what Jacob saw as forever lost.

### 3. Next Year in Zion

Everything we have said to this point makes clear that there are at least some reasons to think that Jacob’s sort of melancholy, famously on display in Jacob 7:26, is redemptive rather than lamentable. It is possible and even right to speak of consecrated melancholy, a sort of saving sadness or a mourning that aligns with God’s purposes. In Jacob’s own words, such mourning assumes the right shape when it takes as its object or its focus Jerusalem’s loss, the fact that Zion has not as yet been redeemed or rebuilt. And so, it seems, to go any farther in understanding what it might mean to take Jacob’s mournful spirit as a guiding spirit, it will be necessary to investigate the basic meaning of his and his people’s relationship to the city of Jerusalem, to the city they had never seen but nonetheless experienced as definitively lost. To do so—that is, to seek evidence concerning Jacob’s and his people’s

understandings of Jerusalem—we can have recourse only to Jacob’s words, since he is the only person from his unique generation whose words appear in the Book of Mormon. It will be necessary, then, to proceed with a survey of what Jacob has to say about the city whose inaccessibility he mourned all his life.

References to Jerusalem in the Book of Jacob are few. It is perhaps telling, nonetheless, that Jacob opens his record by situating its beginnings at the time when “fifty and five years had passed away from the time that Lehi left Jerusalem” (Jacob 1:1).<sup>74</sup> Even before Nephi’s death, but also and just as surely during the years following, it seems that the Nephites measured time itself in terms of Jerusalem’s loss. That is certainly significant, but it should be noted that Jacob’s formula does not, strictly speaking, refer to Jerusalem’s loss. Rather, it speaks of the time that Lehi *left* Jerusalem, the family abandoning the city rather than the city exiling the family. Despite the nostalgic tone of Jacob 7:26, Jacob 1:1 suggests something of Nephite disgust for the city left behind. And what follows throughout the Book of Jacob confirms this sense of antipathy for the city whose loss Jacob’s final words lament so touchingly. In Jacob 4, for instance, Jacob speaks with a kind of contempt for the people of the city his family had left behind before his birth: “Behold, the Jews were a stiffnecked people, and they despised the words of plainness, and killed the prophets, and sought for things that they could not understand” (Jacob 4:14). Jacob’s distaste, perhaps personal, for Jerusalem and its people is fully on display here.

Even more striking is the complex treatment of Jerusalem to be found in Jacob 2–3. There Jacob lays out less apparently personal (and therefore much more compelling) reasons for his family’s having been directed to leave Jerusalem. In the course of a sermon dedicated to berating the Nephites for nascent wickedness among them—wickedness displayed most egregiously in problematic conceptions of gender relations<sup>75</sup>—Jacob quotes the Lord as saying the following:

I have led this people forth out of the land of Jerusalem by the power of mine arm that I might raise up unto me a righteous branch from the fruit of the loins of Joseph. . . . I the Lord have seen the sorrow and heard the mourning of the daughters of my people in the land of Jerusalem—yea, and in all the lands of my people—because of the wickedness and abominations of their husbands. And I will not suffer, saith the Lord of Hosts, that the cries of the fair daughters of this people, which I have led out of the land of Jerusalem, shall come up unto me. (Jacob 2:25, 31–32.)

Here again the almost nostalgic feel of Jacob 7:26 is missing. Jerusalem is less something lost that should therefore be mourned than the very seat of wickedness, something that must be left behind to pursue true righteousness. In the place of Nephites mourning for a lost city, one finds in this text “the mourning of the daughters . . . of Jerusalem,” the unceasing sorrow of women who have lost confidence in “their husbands.” When Jacob confronts his people and their own wickedness, he sees Jerusalem primarily as the city of “David and Solomon,” whose examples he does not hesitate to call “abominable” (Jacob 2:24).

In none of these texts from earlier in the Book of Jacob does one find talk of the Lehighites being “cast out” from Jerusalem, as in Jacob 7. Instead, in these earlier texts, the Lehighites are “led out” of the abominable city—or, as in the time-measurement of the book’s opening verse, they simply “left” the city as they sought their own promised land. A holistic view of the Book of Jacob thus seems to complicate the deep sense of loss expressed at the book’s conclusion. From the references reviewed here, it seems unlikely that what is *really* at issue in Jacob’s mournful final words in Jacob 7:26 is just the fact that the Lehighite peoples are no longer acquainted with Jerusalem. There is, it seems, something more complex at work in Jacob’s lament concerning his people’s being “wanderers cast out from Jerusalem.” The key to making better sense of this lies, I think, in a lengthy, well-known sermon delivered by Jacob but not included in his own book; it appears, rather, in 2 Nephi 6–10, gathered into the complex project of

Nephi's written record.<sup>76</sup> To get to the heart of what interests Jacob when it comes to Jerusalem and its fate, it is necessary to turn from the Book of Jacob to this sermon, even if its meaning has been channeled by Nephi's editorial interests.

The first reference to Jerusalem in the sermon of 2 Nephi 6–10 comes at the outset of a kind of commentary on a passage from Isaiah (specifically, Isaiah 49:22–23), a passage assigned to Jacob by Nephi as the text for his preaching. Describing the first of a series of events in Judah's history that Jacob understands to be relevant to the interpretation of the Isaiah text, he says: "The Lord hath shewn me that they which were at Jerusalem, from whence we came, have been slain and carried away captive" (2 Nephi 6:8). Two points seem especially salient here. First, Jacob cites as his source for this information regarding Jerusalem and its inhabitants a *vision*. Second, Jacob claims that the vision in question has given him to witness *Jerusalem's fall*, its loss in a much deeper sense than any we have mentioned to this point, which results in an exile of world-historical significance. Observant Jews to this day mourn *this* loss and experience *this* exile, symbolized most poignantly in the glass crushed at Jewish wedding ceremonies in memory of the destruction of Solomon's temple. As the psalmist sings of Jerusalem's destruction at Babylon's hands: "If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy" (Psalms 137:6).

Yet Jacob's visionary witness of Jerusalem's fall only sets up his interpretation of Isaiah, and he focuses that interpretation on subsequent events in Jewish history. Significantly, the next three of Jacob's references to Jerusalem come in a lengthy quotation (of Isaiah 50:1–52:2), which he uses to provide context for the briefer Isaiah passage (Isaiah 49:22–23) on which he means to comment in his sermon. The first of these Isaianic references to Jerusalem echoes Jacob's own talk of destruction and exile, even as it begins to point beyond it: "Awake! Awake!" Isaiah says to Judah. "Stand up, O Jerusalem, which hast drunk at the hand of the Lord the cup of his fury!" (2 Nephi 8:17, quoting Isaiah 52:17). The other two references to Jerusalem come as a pair a few verses later in a reprise of these heartening words: "Awake! Awake! Put on thy strength, O Zion! Put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city! For henceforth there shall no more come into thee the uncircumcised and the unclean! Shake thyself from the dust! Arise, sit down, O Jerusalem! Loose thyself from the bands of thy neck, O captive daughter of Zion!" (2 Nephi 8:24–25). Beyond loss and exile, Jacob sees the promise of Jerusalem's redemption. But of course, he sees such redemption only at a distance, envisioned as occurring at a time thousands of years in the future. And so there is much to mourn in the meanwhile.

Perhaps, then, this begins to explain Jacob's mourning. And yet there is more Jacob has to say in his sermon regarding Jerusalem. After concluding his long quotation from Isaiah and immediately before pursuing a long theological tangent regarding the nature of resurrection, Jacob refers to another event associated with Jerusalem that might give him reason to mourn. "In the body [God] shall shew himself unto they at Jerusalem, from whence we came," he explains (2 Nephi 9:5). The bad news he does not give in full until further along, however. It comes with these words: "Because of priestcrafts and iniquities, they at Jerusalem will stiffen their necks against him, that he be crucified. Wherefore, because of their iniquities, destructions, famines, pestilences, and bloodsheds shall come upon them. And they which shall not be destroyed shall be scattered among all nations" (2 Nephi 10:5–6). Unfortunately (and not without a style of language that makes twenty-first-century readers uncomfortable), Jacob sees in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ a major feature of Jerusalem's sacred history.<sup>77</sup> In *that* he finds reason to mourn as well. The alienation of Israel from their would-be deliverer causes him—as he explains later in his own book—a great deal of anxiety, what he even calls "overanxiety" (Jacob 4:18). It may be of real significance that such language is psychologically freighted like the language of Jacob 7:26.

Now, what is to be gathered from all these Jacobite references to Jerusalem's sad history? At the very least, it is necessary to countenance the possibility that what worried Jacob and his people was less *their own* distance from Jerusalem than the way their distance from Jerusalem *symbolized the city's loss in a much larger historical sense*. The exile of sorts experienced by Jacob's people was a constant reminder of the Exile they had barely missed by leaving Jerusalem during Zedekiah's reign—the Exile that God nonetheless showed them in vision. At the very time Lehi and his family left Jerusalem for the New World, those whom they left behind left Jerusalem for lowly exile in Babylon. And of course *that* Exile was itself a symbol of a much larger history, in which Judah has been consistently homeless and traumatized, waiting for messianic redemption.<sup>78</sup> This the Nephite prophets of the first generation saw clearly in their visionary experiences, and they thereby knew all too keenly that redemption for Jerusalem and the covenant people lay only in an inaccessible future, too far off to find any real joy in it.<sup>79</sup> The best among Jacob's people apparently mourned out their days because they were attuned to the Abrahamic in the Christian gospel, because they saw that even the Messiah's arrival could only *start* the process of redeeming Israel, as well as the process of Israel's associated redemption of the world.<sup>80</sup> Fulfillment would be waiting a very long time.

There is a key theological term central to the story of Jacob's encounter with Sherem that is relevant to all this talk of the covenant and its delayed fulfillment, although the term hardly appears relevant at first sight. As the encounter with Sherem unfolds, Jacob eventually testifies that his knowledge was rooted in "the power of the Holy Ghost" (Jacob 7:12), and Sherem responds by asking for a sign executed by that same power (see Jacob 7:13). Close reading of the small plates suggests that these references to "the power of the Holy Ghost" have a quite specific meaning. The phrase appears in Nephi's writings in very strategic places and with highly specific associations. Although Latter-day Saints are accustomed to conflating the power of the Holy Ghost with the witness of the Spirit of God, Nephi— and presumably therefore Jacob as well—seems to have something narrower in mind when using these words, and that something has everything to do with Jerusalem and the Abrahamic covenant.

According to Nephi, the power of the Holy Ghost is specifically that by which one can "see and hear and know" of Israel's history. He effectively promises his readers that *everyone* can have an apocalyptic vision of the world's Abrahamic history so long as they "diligently seek" it. As he says, "the mysteries of God shall be unfolded to them by the power of the Holy Ghost" (1 Nephi 10:17). To deny this, according to Nephi, is to deny the Lord's "one eternal round" (1 Nephi 10:19), to deny that he is "the same yesterday and today and forever" (1 Nephi 10:18), working at one and the same massive historical project. The power of the Holy Ghost is thus not only the power by which Nephi *himself* witnesses in vision the whole of Israel's future; it is also a power relevant to the era in which the Book of Mormon would eventually circulate—that is, of course, *our own era*. In a vision of the "last days," Nephi says that "they which shall seek to bring forth [the Lord's] Zion at that day . . . shall have the gift and the power of the Holy Ghost" (1 Nephi 13:37). To be contrasted with such repentant people, according to Nephi, are those Christians who symptomatically fail to recognize that their "bible" came "from the Jews, [the Lord's] ancient covenant people" (2 Nephi 29:4). In exasperation, Nephi quotes the Lord:

And what thank they the Jews for the bible which they receive from them? Yea, what do the gentiles mean? Do they remember the travails and the labors and the pains of the Jews—and their diligence unto me—in bringing forth salvation unto the gentiles? O ye gentiles, have ye remembered the Jews, mine ancient covenant people? Nay, but ye have cursed them and have hated them and have not sought to recover them. But behold, I will return all these things upon your own heads, for I the Lord hath not forgotten my people! (2 Nephi 29:4–5.)



While culturally-Christian Europe has hated and persecuted—and *massacred*—Jews, the power of the Holy Ghost, according to Nephi, has attempted to find its way into open hearts, seeking to restore a sense of the promises linked to a city now lost for thousands of years.

In closely related passages, Nephi excoriates the latter-day world, so deeply secular that even its Christians deny the power of the Holy Ghost. The symptom of this denial, Nephi says, is that they are “at ease in Zion,” crying, “All is well!” (2 Nephi 28:24–25). Failing to weep for Zion, failing to mourn out their days, they—if not *we*—ignore the very power by which one should be reminded of the Abrahamic underpinnings of the Christian gospel. Today, it would seem, the world is made up mostly of Sherems, skeptical of revelation or of any real power of the Holy Ghost. We satisfy ourselves that all is well in Zion—or, alternatively, that there is *much* to mourn in Zion while ignoring all things Abrahamic in favor of our own moral concerns, traditional or fashionable as the case may be. We continue to forget what God claims he cannot forget. And we thereby deny the very power that Jacob says lay behind his deepest theological and existential concerns. It would seem that it was always and only by that same power—the power of the Holy Ghost—that Jacob and his people mourned in a consecrated way.

To weep for Zion, or to mourn out our days as we think of Jerusalem’s loss—*this* is what, according to Jacob and Nephi, the power of the Holy Ghost would lead us to do. If they are right, then perhaps the woes they pronounced upon the last days are ones we should take most seriously. How many tears do we shed for the Zion envisaged in the Abrahamic covenant? Far too few. But perhaps, reading the small plates carefully, we might be led to shed a few more.

---

## NOTES

43. Marilyn Arnold, “Unlocking the Sacred Text,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 8.1 (1999): 52.

44. John S. Tanner, “Literary Reflections on Jacob and His Descendants,” in *The Book of Mormon: Jacob through Words of Mormon, To Learn with Joy*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate, Jr. (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Religious Studies Center, 1990), 267.

45. Hugh W. Nibley, *Teachings of the Book of Mormon: Transcripts of Lectures Presented to an Honors Book of Mormon Class at Brigham Young University 1988–1990*, 4 vols. (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1993), 1:409.

46. Sidney B. Sperry, *Book of Mormon Compendium* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1968), 267.

47. C. Terry Warner, “Jacob,” in *The Book of Mormon: “It Begins with a Family”* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1983), 44.

48. Michael Hicks, *The Street-Legal Version of Mormon’s Book* (Provo, UT: Tame Olive Press, 2012), 105.

49. The passage is to be found in D&C 21:7–8: “For thus saith the Lord God: Him [Joseph Smith] have I inspired to move the cause of Zion in mighty power for good, and his diligence I know, and his prayers I have heard. Yea, his weeping for Zion I have seen, and I will cause that he shall mourn for her no longer; for his days of rejoicing are come unto the remission of his sins, and the manifestations of my blessings upon his works.” For some helpful context regarding what “Zion” meant to the early Saints before the revelation concerning the actual building of a



New Jerusalem, see Kerry Muhlestein, “One Continuous Flow: Revelations Surrounding the ‘New Translation,’” in *The Doctrine and Covenants: Revelations in Context, the 37th Annual Brigham Young University Sidney B. Sperry Symposium*, ed. Andrew H. Hedges, J. Spencer Fluhman, and Alonzo L. Gaskill (Provo and Salt Lake City: BYU Religious Studies Center and Deseret Book, 2008), 40–65.

50. Throughout this essay, I use as a base text—but with my own punctuation—Royal Skousen, ed., *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

51. Jacob shares with Moroni a sense of uncertainty when it comes to concluding his writings. Both seem to have concluded their respective contributions to the Nephite record three distinct times: Jacob at the end of Jacob 3, the end of Jacob 6, and the end of Jacob 7; and Moroni at the end of Mormon 9, the end of Ether 15, and the end of Moroni 10. It might be significant that both Jacob and Moroni write in a kind of supplementary fashion, very much in the shadow of a far more prolific and unquestionably primary author (respectively Nephi and Mormon). For an illuminating discussion of Moroni’s struggles to conclude his contribution to the Book of Mormon, see Grant Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader’s Guide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 248–67.

52. I have written extensively about the overarching theological program of Nephi’s and Jacob’s small plates. See Joseph M. Spencer, *An Other Testament: On Typology* (Salem, OR: Salt Press, 2012), 33–104.

53. Statements regarding the differences between the two Nephite records can be found in 1 Nephi 9:2–5 and 1 Nephi 19:1–5.

54. Jacob’s Nephites, of course, would eventually face extinction, at a point when they had grown “ripe,” as the text says (Helaman 13:14), but that time was in the distant future for Jacob—even if he had himself prophesied of it (see Jacob 3:3).

55. It seems to me possible to explain even the odd gerundive construction of the second clause’s “being kept” in light of these structural points. One most naturally takes such a construction to render the first of two clauses grammatically dependent on but explanatorily foundational for the second: “X being Y, Z must be the case.” The difficulty in Jacob’s farewell is, first, that the gerundive clause (“the record of this people being kept on the other plates of Nephi”) reads as if it were dependent on some clause that is never stated and, second, that it seems to be in no way explanatorily foundational for the independent clause that follows it (“wherefore, I conclude this record”). The series of contrastive parallels already enumerated go some distance in alleviating these difficulties, but they do not seem to go far enough, since the rhetorical construction of the verse suggests a still-tighter connection. But the structural points highlighted above indicate the possibility of another interpretation. Annals and chronicles have no *one* keeper and no *identifiable* set of keepers (until the whole people have become fully extinct, anyway). Might it then be better to regard “being kept” not as a gerundive construction that marks the second clause as subordinate to the third (or to some other clause that never appears in the text), but rather as an oddly-but-meaningfully-constructed independent clause—one that deliberately removes the grammatical subject and then eliminates the verb’s indicative status by granting it instead an imperfect aspect (in the grammatical sense)?

56. See Spencer, *An Other Testament*, 2–7.

57. Freud put this point this way: “The interpretation of dreams is the *via regia* [the royal road] to a knowledge of the unconscious element in our psychic life.” A. A. Brill, ed., *The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud*, trans. A. A. Brill

(New York: Modern Library, 1995), 508.

58. The key paper marking this maturation in Freud's thought is Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," in *Sigmund Freud, Collected Papers*, 5 vols., ed. Joan Riviere (New York: Basic Books, 1959), 4:152–70.

59. Most such attempts have been indirect, actually. Representative is the collection: Aaron P. Jackson, Lane Fischer, and Doris R. Dant, eds., *Turning Freud Upside Down: Gospel Perspectives on Psychotherapy's Fundamental Problems* (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 2005).

60. Although it comes with its own problems, the larger Lacanian attempt at rehabilitating Freud's work exemplifies the ability to extract the productive from the unproductive in Freud's extant writings. Perhaps more a propos, however, is the use of Freud by someone like Paul Ricoeur, who specifically investigates his relevance to philosophical reflection. See Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, trans. Denis Savage (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977). For a good introduction to the Lacanian project, see Bruce Fink, *A Clinical Introduction to Lacanian Psychoanalysis: Theory and Technique* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997).

61. The similarities between dreaming and mourning explicitly motivated Freud's investigation of the latter. See Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," 152.

62. Freud used the technical terms "displacement" and "condensation" to describe the connections and disconnections that organize the experience of dreaming. Jacques Lacan has usefully shown that these two terms maps nicely onto the linguistic notions of metaphor and metonymy. See Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W. W. Norton, 2006), 412–41.

63. It is an open question whether the initially indiscernible coherence of a dream is a feature always already of the dream as originally and unconsciously experienced, or whether it is instead only a feature of the dream as reconstructed afterward and in a conscious state. This is, of course, an important distinction for the psychoanalyst, but it seems to me unnecessary to give it detailed attention here.

64. Freud's succinct description of the work of mourning is perhaps worth citing: "Each single one of the memories and hopes which bound the libido to the object is brought up and hyper-cathected, and the detachment of the libido from it accomplished. . . . When the work of mourning is completed the ego becomes free and uninhibited again." Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," 154. Another helpful description appears later in the same essay: "Reality passes its verdict—that the object no longer exists—upon each single one of the memories and hopes through which the libido was attached to the lost object, and the ego, confronted as it were with the decision whether it will share this fate, is persuaded by the sum of its narcissistic satisfactions in being alive to sever its attachment to the non-existent object." Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," 166.

65. Time's passing shows up in Jacob's talk both of dreams and of mourning, but its formulation differs. Note that in the dream-simile, Jacob seems to struggle to articulate what he has in mind. He speaks first of "the time" that passed away, but then, before he introduces the dream-simile itself, he uses a different locution: "and also our lives passed away." The difference between "the time," abstract and in the singular, and "our lives," concrete and in the plural, is suggestive. Jacob seems at first unsure whether what passes should be regarded as something formal but accessible to all, or as something real but privately experienced. Whatever their differences, however, these two locutions share an important feature: objectivity. Both are sorts of things that can *pass away*. Jacob's formulation of time's passing in the statement that concludes his clarifying saying, however, operates in a non-objective way. In his direct description of the experience of mourning, Jacob seems to combine the dream-simile's two terms ("the

time” and “our days”) in a single term: “our days.” This term seems to indicate something that is shared like time in general and therefore irreducible to the privacy of a singular life, and yet that is unquestionably concrete and therefore irreducible to merely formal accessibility. Moreover, this conception of temporal experience makes time immanent to the work of mourning. It no longer passes one by, but rather is what one passes through in mourning. People “mourn out” their days. Despite these clear differences between the ways of talking about time in the opening and closing statements of Jacob’s clarifying saying, however, it seems perfectly clear that the processes described in each never come to an end. Nephiite mourning is dream-like at least in the odd fact that it does not come to an end.

66. Freud notes that occasionally the “struggle” of mourning “can be so intense that a turning away from reality ensues.” Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia,” 154.

67. See, again, Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia.” It may be significant that Jacob speaks of mourning rather than, strictly speaking, of melancholia. Freud emphasizes the strictly *unconscious* nature of melancholic suffering, but Jacob’s emphasis on mourning suggests the *conscious* nature of his and his people’s experience.

68. Giorgio Agamben, *Stanzas: Word and Phantasm in Western Culture*, trans. Ronald L. Martinez (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 20, italics added.

69. I borrow this last phrase from John 11:4, but also from Søren Kierkegaard’s book-length commentary on that passage. See Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling/The Sickness unto Death*, trans. Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954), 133–278.

70. This language comes, of course, from 2 Corinthians 7:10.

71. Agamben, *Stanzas*, 7.

72. The story of Sarah and Abraham I draw from Paul’s discussion in Romans 4. See my discussion of Paul’s analysis in Joseph M. Spencer, *For Zion: A Mormon Theology of Hope* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2014), 15–23. 73 Agamben, *Stanzas*, 7. Also recommended is the treatment of melancholia in Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 132–38.

73.

74. Note that a similar formula appears in Nephi’s writings in 2 Nephi 5:28. The major difference between the two is, of course, that Jacob speaks of his father’s departure, while Nephi speaks of leaving Jerusalem in the plural first person.

75. For an analysis of these and related texts, see Joseph M. Spencer and Kimberly M. Berkey, “‘Great Cause to Mourn’: The Complexity of Gender and Race in the Book of Mormon,” forthcoming in *The Book of Mormon: Americanist Approaches*, ed. Jared Hickman and Elizabeth Fenton (Oxford University Press).

76. I have analyzed the structure of Nephi’s record, including the role played there by Jacob’s sermon, in Spencer, *An Other Testament*, 34–58. I might note that I would revise many aspects of that analysis today.

77. 2 Nephi 10:3–6 has often been labeled anti-Semitic in tone, especially because of the claim there that “the Jews” constitute “the more wicked part of the world,” a claim supposedly justified because “there is none other

nation on earth that would crucify their God.” Perhaps one could exonerate the Book of Mormon by noting that it goes on in the same passage to provide a further point of justification by using the language of the New Testament (such that its anti-Semitic spirit is borrowed rather than originary) or by insisting that the passage explicitly limits the “wicked” to those involved in “priestcrafts and iniquities” (presumably referring just to certain opportunistic leaders). But the point stands that Jacob’s language is troubling, and this should not be overlooked.

78. N. T. Wright has recently spelled out at length and quite beautifully the way the brief exile in Babylon took on larger historical meaning. See N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 2 vols. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 1:139–63.

79. On this point, see Spencer, *For Zion*, 71–78.

80. 3 Nephi 15:1–9 serves as a kind of commentary on the mismatch between the Messiah’s arrival and the longer history of Israel’s redemption. It is, in many ways, the interpretive key to the remainder of the Book of Mormon.

# Contributors

Kimberly M. Berkey is a graduate student in philosophy of religion at Harvard Divinity School. Prior to graduate work, she studied as a Hinckley Scholar at Brigham Young University. She is the author of several articles on the Book of Mormon, including publications through the Journal of Book of Mormon Studies.

Sharon Harris is a PhD candidate in early modern English literature at Fordham University, and her research focuses on literary representations of music. In Mormon studies Sharon has been a participant in both the Summer Seminar and the Mormon Theology Seminar. Her research in Mormon studies has focused on LDS scripture and on LDS singles. Sharon is on the editorial staff of *19th-Century Music* published by UC Press. She also holds degrees from Brigham Young University and the University of Chicago.

Adam S. Miller is a professor of philosophy at Collin College in McKinney, Texas. He earned a PhD in Philosophy from Villanova University. He is the author of six books including *Letters to a Young Mormon* (Maxwell, 2013), *The Gospel According to David Foster Wallace* (Bloomsbury, 2016), and *Future Mormon* (Kofford, forthcoming). He directs the Mormon Theology Seminar and co-edits a series of books for the Maxwell Institute entitled “Groundwork: Studies in Theory and Scripture.”

Jacob Rennaker has a Ph.D. in Religious Studies from Claremont Graduate University, and has published articles on the Bible, Mesopotamian religion, Mormon scripture, and religion in popular culture. He also received degrees in Comparative Religion from the University of Washington and Ancient Near Eastern Studies from Brigham Young University. After wandering for years, he finally married the girl of his dreams and lives with her in California as a freelance writer, researcher, and consultant.

Jana Riess is a senior columnist for Religion News Service and holds a Ph.D. in American religious history from Columbia University. She is the author or co-author of numerous books, including *Flunking Sainthood*, *The Twible*, *Mormonism and American Politics*, and *Selections from the Book of Mormon, Annotated and Explained*.

Joseph M. Spencer recently earned his Ph.D. from the University of New Mexico and is currently an instructor in the Department of Ancient Scripture at Brigham Young University. He is the author of *For Zion* and *An Other Testament*, as well as of numerous articles on philosophy and Mormon studies. He serves as the associate director of the Mormon Theology Seminar and is an associate editor of the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*. He and Karen, his wife, live in Provo, Utah, with their five children.

Jenny Webb lives in Huntsville, Alabama with her husband, Nick Webb, and two children. She has an MA in comparative literature from Brigham Young University and works as an editor and production manager for several academic journals. She has contributed chapters to *Perspectives on Mormon Theology: Scriptural Theology*; *An Experiment on the Word: Reading Alma 32*; and *Reading Nephi Reading Isaiah: Reading 2 Nephi 26–27*, which she co-edited along with Joseph M. Spencer. She is the current president of Mormon Scholars in the Humanities and serves on the Mormon Theology Seminar Executive Board.