



# Insights: The Newsletter of the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship

---

Volume 23 | Number 4

Article 3

---

January 2003

## Jacob's Connections to First Temple Traditions

Kevin Christensen

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



Part of the [Mormon Studies Commons](#), and the [Religious Education Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Christensen, Kevin (2003) "Jacob's Connections to First Temple Traditions," *Insights: The Newsletter of the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship*: Vol. 23: No. 4, Article 3.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/insights/vol23/iss4/3>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in Insights: The Newsletter of the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship by an authorized editor of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact [ellen\\_amatangelo@byu.edu](mailto:ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu).

---

## Jacob's Connections to First Temple Traditions

In a previous report I showed how the Book of Mormon's portrayal of Nephi, son of Lehi, compares favorably to a preexilic Hebrew wisdom tradition reconstructed by biblical scholar Margaret Barker.<sup>1</sup> This report highlights further connections between the Book of Mormon and traditions from ancient Israel that Barker asserts "have been lost but for the accidents of archaeological discovery and the evidence of pre-Christian texts preserved and transmitted only by Christian hands."<sup>2</sup>

Nephi's vision of the first-century apostasy, wherein "plain and precious things were taken away" from the Bible (1 Nephi 13:29), is consistent with Barker's view that key scriptural texts and traditions were suppressed after the deaths of the apostles. She also asserts that such materials were lost or suppressed from the canon much earlier as well, by Deuteronomist reformers during the exile, though those materials survived in significant circles in Palestine until the first century A.D.<sup>3</sup> It is significant that certain themes in the writings of the Book of Mormon prophet Jacob can be seen as reflecting a familiarity with those lost traditions. The connections are not direct, but they suggest the possibility that certain temple-related traditions were known to Lehi and persisted in the writings of his sons, Nephi and later Jacob.

Jacob 4:14 reads:

The Jews were a stiffnecked people; and they despised the words of plainness . . . and sought for things that they could not understand. Wherefore, because of their blindness, which blindness came by looking beyond the mark, they must needs fall; for God hath taken away his plainness from them.

Interestingly, the verses preceding that statement regarding a lost "plainness" summarize the plain and simple themes of Jacob's ministry (see vv. 4–13) and appear to mirror the very things

that the Deuteronomists deemphasized during reforms begun in King Josiah's day and continued during and after the exile.

Jacob's reference to "the Jews" probably meant not all of the Jewish nation but specifically "the Jews who were at Jerusalem, who sought to take away the life of [Lehi]," having rejected his visions (1 Nephi 2:13). With the fall of Jerusalem in 587 B.C., many of the Jews at Jerusalem became exiles (see Jeremiah 52:28–30), while the people of the land, who were not deported to Babylon, preserved some of that "plainness" until the time of the early Christians.<sup>4</sup> Against this background, Jacob's words in Jacob 4:4–13 take on added interest, echoing several points that appear in Barker's reconstruction of what had been lost and at whose initiative.

---

The plain and simple themes of Jacob's ministry appear to mirror the very things that the Deuteronomists deemphasized.

---

The brief points that follow suggest that the writings of Jacob, like those of Nephi, may preserve aspects of Hebrew religious understanding that persisted from Old World preexilic times on into Jacob's time in the New World. The clues in Jacob's writings are

not as strong as those in Nephi's writings, but the fact that they fit well with Barker's reconstruction makes them worth consideration.

Barker asserts that Israel's "wisdom [tradition] was eliminated" during the Deuteronomist reforms, while Jacob states that the Lord "counselth in wisdom" (Jacob 4:10), supporting the idea that the Nephites, who did not experience the exile, were still comfortable seeing God associated with wisdom (if not Wisdom), as was true in ancient Near Eastern literature.<sup>5</sup> Barker writes that "the vision of God [was] abandoned," and Jacob, consistent with the preexilic concept of the heavenly ascent (in which mortals can enter the heavenly realm physically, as did Enoch, or through a visionary experience, as did Isaiah), reports that his people have "many revelations and the spirit of prophecy" (v. 6) and urges them to "despise not the revelations of God" (v. 8).

Barker describes a reaction against "the hosts of heaven and the angels" in favor of a strict monotheism and explains that, in the tradition of the First

Temple, “there was a High God and several Sons of God, one of whom was Yahweh, the Holy One of Israel.”<sup>6</sup> In keeping with earlier tradition, Jacob records, “Behold, they [the holy prophets] believed in Christ and worshiped the Father in his name, and also we worship the Father in his name” (v. 5). Barker quotes from biblical, pseudepigraphal, and early Christian writings that emphasize the priestly visionaries’ knowledge of things past and future as depicted on the temple veil and as shown to them in visions.<sup>7</sup> Jacob, a temple priest, speaks to the same theme: “The Spirit speaketh the truth and lieth not. Wherefore, it speaketh of things as they really are, and of things as they really will be; wherefore, these things are manifested unto us plainly, for the salvation of our souls” (Jacob 4:13).

Barker argues that part of the Deuteronomist reform involved the rejection of a view of wisdom that predicts the future.<sup>8</sup> Jacob 4:4 acknowledges that ancient Israel had just such a prophetic tradition: “We knew of Christ, and we had a hope of his glory many hundred years before his coming; and not only we ourselves had a hope of his glory, but also all the holy prophets which were before us.” This point is of added interest because Jacob’s mention of the Jews’ lost plainness later in verse 14 may allude to, among other things, the very kind of lost or suppressed prophetic tradition that Barker believes was a distinctive feature of Israel’s First Temple period.

How do we account for this correspondence of themes? Jacob was born to Lehi and Sariah in the wilderness, probably very shortly before the family’s departure to the New World (see 1 Nephi 18:7, 19), and so had no direct contact with the Jews at Jerusalem. But Jacob’s father, Lehi, did have that contact. As a contemporary of King Josiah, Lehi was likely aware of the discovery of the book of the law in 621 B.C. (see 2 Kings 22:8–14) and familiar with the early phases of the Deuteronomist reform. Jacob probably acquired his knowledge of a lost plainness from Lehi and Nephi, both of whose visions and teachings are rich in themes that accord with Barker’s reconstruction of First Temple traditions.

Jacob may have learned much of this from the blessing Lehi gave to him in 2 Nephi 2, which reflects in several ways the wisdom tradition that Barker associates with the temple at Jerusalem—for

example, the emphasis on revelation, an Eden story containing an account of fallen angels, and the idea of the Holy Messiah as redeeming sacrifice, all suggesting the priestly role of the Holy One.<sup>9</sup>

Because Lehi and Nephi likely had direct knowledge of the plain and simple truths that the Jews in Jerusalem rejected, they would have taught them to Jacob. Sometime in the three decades after the journey to the New World, Nephi consecrated Jacob as a priest over “the land of my people” (2 Nephi 5:26). So it is appropriate that Jacob’s writings in Jacob 4, as well as his discourses in 2 Nephi 6–11, are particularly dense in temple themes that recur in Barker’s reconstruction. !

---

Lehi’s blessing to Jacob contains  
much that reflects the wisdom  
tradition that Barker associates  
with the temple at Jerusalem.

---

#### Notes

1. See “Nephi, Wisdom, and the Deuteronomist Reform,” *Insights* 23/2 (2003): 2–3. Barker is an accomplished Old Testament scholar and a Methodist preacher.
2. Margaret Barker, *The Older Testament: The Survival of Themes from the Ancient Royal Cult in Sectarian Judaism and Early Christianity* (London: SPCK, 1987), 7; emphasis removed.
3. See my study “Paradigms Regained: A Survey of Margaret Barker’s Scholarship and Its Significance for Mormon Studies,” *FARMS Occasional Papers*, no. 2 (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2001), 28–30. See also Margaret Barker, “Text and Context,” in *The Great High Priest* (London: T & T Clark, 2003), 294–315.
4. See Barker, *Lost Prophet* (London: SPCK, 1988), 18–19.
5. For a discussion of possible connections between ancient Hebrew wisdom literature and the Book of Mormon, see Daniel C. Peterson, “Nephi and His Asherah,” in *Mormons, Scripture, and the Ancient World: Studies in Honor of John L. Sorenson*, ed. Davis Bitton (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1998), 209–17.
6. The preceding quotations from Barker come from her book *The Great Angel: A Study of Israel’s Second God* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox, 1992), 15, 3.
7. See Barker, *The Great High Priest*, 193, citing 3 Enoch 45; Habakkuk 2:2–3; 1 Enoch 87.3; Jubilees 1.26; 2 Baruch 59.4–10; Ignatius, *Philippians*, 9; Clement, *Miscellanies*, 6: 7, 7.17; and Origen, *Celsus* 3.37.
8. Barker, *The Older Testament*, 95–97.
9. See my “Paradigms Regained,” 21–22, 40, 47–49, 51–52, 63–65.

By Kevin Christensen