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At the time Jacob gave his speech in 2 Nephi 6-10, the Nephites had already been driven from two lands of inheritance and felt an ongoing concern of being cut off from God’s promises. Belnap illustrates that Jacob’s speech answers these concerns through emphasizing and expounding on the covenantal relationship made possible by God acting as the Divine Warrior. Jacob quotes Isaiah passages in his discourse and in some instances makes his own additions to emphasize important aspects. He illustrates how the Divine Warrior provides the hardships, knowledge, and power for an individual to become a divine warrior, and he discusses the Divine Warrior’s defeat over the monster of Death. The promises made by the Divine Warrior can provide hope and assurance to all.
“I WILL CONTEND WITH THEM THAT CONTENDETH WITH THEE”

THE DIVINE WARRIOR IN JACOB’S SPEECH OF 2 NEPHI 6–10

DANIEL BELNAP
It is unclear from the text exactly where or when Jacob offered his magnificent discourse recorded in 2 Nephi 6–10, but while such details are missing, the discourse itself stands as one of the most powerful passages of scripture in the Book of Mormon.¹ The purpose of the speech was to answer an ongoing concern of the Nephites. Since their departure from Jerusalem it appears that the Nephites had felt cut off and isolated from God’s promises because they lacked a permanent land of inheritance. By the time of Jacob’s speech, the Nephites had been driven from two lands of inheritance and thus it seems that questions had arisen as to whether or not the covenant made to Israel was still in force with this community who had been broken off and scattered from both the greater house of Israel and their own family in the New World.
Jacob answers this by teaching and expounding on the covenantal relationship that exists between Israel and their God, itself made possible by God acting as the Divine Warrior who provided peace and security to Israel even in their scattered state. Though God as warrior is not imagery familiar to us in our day, it was commonly used throughout the scriptures to describe God’s power and therefore was a perfect symbol to represent his ability to care for and defend Israel—indeed all mankind—from the forces of chaos that sought to overwhelm the people no matter where they were. Utilizing divine warrior imagery in Isaiah, which comprises chapters 6–8 and makes up the first part of the speech, and then in his own commentary, comprising chapters 9–10, Jacob was able to teach his people “concerning the covenants of the Lord that he has covenanted with all the house of Israel” (2 Nephi 9:1), so that “[they] may rejoice, and lift up [their] heads forever” (v. 3).

**The Divine Warrior and the Purpose behind Jacob’s Speech**

In the first chapter of his discourse, Jacob tells the congregation that “the Lord God will fulfil his covenants . . . wherefore, they that fight against Zion and the covenant people of the Lord shall lick up the dust of their feet” (2 Nephi 6:12–3). Jacob then comments on this promise stating that the Messiah “will manifest himself unto [Israel] in power and great glory, unto the destruction of their enemies” (v. 14). Finally, in verses 17 and 18, Jacob quotes Isaiah, who provides the words of God himself: “I will contend with them that contendeth with thee—and I will feed them that oppress thee, with their own flesh; and they shall be drunken with their own blood as with sweet wine; and all flesh shall know that I the Lord am thy Savior and thy Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob.” Though gruesome, this imagery of God as the warrior who will slaughter the enemies of Israel would have been familiar, even comforting, to those who were the covenant people. God as Redeemer and Savior meant he was their warrior delivering them as he delivered their forefathers in the great salvific act of the Exodus, which itself was a type of the creative act in the beginning when God as the Divine Warrior defeated the forces of chaos, engendering the cosmos.

**Creation and the Divine Warrior**

In many cultures of the ancient Near East, the creation narrative was used as a foundation to their own specific cultural narratives. In brief, the creation narrative describes the process by which God, or the Gods, took preexisting element, or chaos, and organized it into a cosmos, or state of order and organization. The precosmic state was conceptualized as an ocean of primal water, dark and fathomless. It was from this “sea” that God established the world in Genesis 1:2: “And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of
the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.” Throughout the ancient Near East, a common variation on this narrative was to personify the precosmic ocean, characterizing it as a serpent or monster, transforming the creation process into a battle between God, the creator, and chaos, the monster. Following the “death” of the monster, the warrior deity then took the carcass and fashioned the cosmos from it, thereby imposing “order” onto chaos. Though more descriptive and vivid, the same meaning is present in the two variations—chaos is organized into the cosmos. Of course, this general narrative was tailored to reflect specific cultural identities. Thus, for example, while the Babylonian creation story and the biblical version are similar, the narrative was used differently to define each individual culture’s relationship to the divine. As we shall see, Israel’s use of the narrative was applied to their historical experience, unique in the ancient Near East.

The conflict between God as the Divine Warrior who brings about the cosmos and the forces of instability, darkness, and chaos can also be used to describe the creation of a community. In Deuteronomy 32:10, the words used to describe where Jehovah found his people are the waste howling wilderness. The Hebrew for this “waste howling wilderness” is tohu, or the primeval chaos in Genesis 1:2. Thus, the founding of Israel was associated with the creation of the world, in that both emerged from chaos. Elsewhere, this creation is associated with God as the Divine Warrior. According to the Old Testament, immediately following the Red Sea experience, Moses offered a hymn of thanksgiving to God, known as the Song of the Sea, which extolled God’s act of deliverance in his role as the warrior:

The Lord is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation: He is my God, and I will prepare him an habitation; my father’s God, and I will exalt him. The Lord is a man of war: the Lord is his name. . . . Thy right hand, O Lord, is become glorious in power: thy right hand, O Lord, hath dashed in pieces the enemy. (Exodus 15:2–3, 6)

Though in the song God delivered Israel from the Egyptian, in Psalm 106:9 it is the Sea that feels God’s martial power: “He rebuked the Red sea also, and it was dried up: so he led them through the depths, as through the wilderness.” This “blending” of the concepts of the enemy and the sea, arise because both are destructive, one of the physical cosmos, the other of the social cosmos, and thus can be placed on the same continuum of the primordial chaos conquered by God. For instance, in Psalm 18:16–17, the sea and the enemy are paralleled one to another with God delivering the psalmist from both:

He sent from above, he took me, he drew me out of many waters
He delivered me from my strong enemy, 
and from them which hated me.

Similarly, in Isaiah 59:19, we read: “When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him.” Thus God, who defeated the forces of the primal chaos at the creation, did so again during the Exodus, “creating” his people Israel, and and for later Israelites continuing in this role as their defender against any force seeking their destruction; not coincidently all three scenarios have covenantal implications. 

The Covenant and the Divine Warrior

According to Deuteronomy 7:19–23, the covenant between Israel and God stipulates that if Israel is obedient to the covenantal obligations then God will “deliver [your enemy] unto thee, and shall destroy them with a mighty destruction, until they be destroyed” (v. 23), for “the Lord thy God is among you, a mighty God and terrible” (v. 21). Later, in Deuteronomy 28:7, the Lord reiterates this theme: “the Lord shall cause thine enemies that rise up against thee to be smitten before thy face: they shall come out against thee one way, and flee before thee seven ways.” Deuteronomy 32:41–43 is even more explicit: “If I whet my glittering sword, and mine hand take hold on judgement; I will render vengeance to mine enemies . . . I will make mine arrows drunk with blood, and my sword shall devour flesh . . . rejoice, O ye nations, for he will avenge the blood of his servants.” This covenantal promise lies behind Israel’s plea recorded in Isaiah 51:9–10 (repeated by Jacob in 2 Nephi 8:9–10):

Awake, awake,  
Put on strength, O arm of the Lord;  
Awake, as in the ancient days,  
in the generations of old.  
Art thou not it that hath cut Rahab, and wounded the dragon?  
Art thou not it which hath dried the sea, the waters of the great deep;  
that hath made the depths of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over?

Similar pleas are found in the communal lament psalms. In Psalm 44 the plea is found in verses 23–24, 26:

Awake, why sleepest thou, O Lord?  
Arise, cast us not off for ever.

Wherefore hidest thou thy face,  
and forgettest our affliction and our oppression?  
Arise for our help,  
and redeem us for thy mercies’ sake.

In Psalm 74:20, following a description of God’s enemies “roaring” in the midst of his congregations, Israel pleads with God to: “Have respect unto the covenant! . . . Arise! . . . Remember!” (vv. 20, 22). That God can do this is explained in an earlier passage (vv. 12–13, 15):

For God is my King of old,  
working salvation in the midst of the earth.  
Thou didst divide the sea by thy strength:  
Thou brakest the heads of the dragons in the waters.  
Thou didst cleave the fountain and the flood:  
Thou driedst up mighty rivers.

Jeremiah 20:11 speaks specifically of God’s fighting the enemy of Israel: “But the Lord is with me as a mighty terrible one: therefore my persecutors shall stumble, and they shall not prevail.” Habakkuk 3:12–14 is a particularly descriptive passage concerning God as the Divine Warrior defeating the enemy of the covenant people:

Thou didst march through the land in indignation,  
Thou didst thresh the heathen in anger.  
Though wentest forth for the salvation of thy people,  
Even for salvation with thine anointed;  
Thou woundest the head out of the house of the wicked,  
By discovering the foundation unto the neck . . .  
Thou didst strike through with staves the head of his villages.

In all of these cases, Israel understood that God as warrior would deliver them from their enemies, just as he had against the earlier forces of chaos at the creation and during the Exodus, for God as warrior was one of the stipulations that he agreed to in the covenant.

The promise of God’s martial power in defense of Israel was directly associated with the covenantal promise of a land of inheritance since it is the inhabitation of Israel that requires God’s defense. Deuteronomy 4:37–38 describes God as the warrior giving them the promised land because of the covenant: “And because he loved thy fathers, therefore he chose their seed after them . . . driving
out nations from before thee greater and mightier than thou art, to bring thee in, to give their land for an inheritance.” Yet the keeping of the promised land, like the other elements of the covenant, was contingent on Israel’s personal righteousness. The loss of the promised land and the wandering motif following the loss of homeland would have been understood as emblematic of being cut off from the covenant relationship with God, as Jon Levenson has pointed out, “Adversity—drought, famine, epidemic, defeat, or whatever—could be accounted for by reference to a violation of covenant obligations.”

This was certainly understood within the covenant relationship itself as Israel is warned if they forget the covenant:

The Lord shall make the rain of thy land powder and dust . . . the Lord shall cause thee to be smitten before thy enemies: thou shalt go out one way against them, and flee seven ways before them: and shalt be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth . . . and ye shall be plucked from off the land whither thou goest to possess it. (Deuteronomy 28:24–25, 63)

As with their counterparts in the Old World, the reassurance that God as warrior still watched over them, and that therefore the covenant promises would still be met, would have provided the community the faith necessary to establish a new home in this wilderness.

This is reiterated in Deuteronomy 29:28: “And the Lord rooted them out of their land in anger, and in wrath, and in great indignation, and cast them into another land.” Jeremiah, a contemporary of Lehi, understood the impending invasion by Babylon to be the result of broken covenants: “Your fathers have forsaken me . . . and have not kept my law and ye have done worse than your fathers . . . therefore will I cast you out of this land into a land that ye know not” (Jeremiah 16:11–13). Thus, being cast out of one’s land of inheritance becomes a sign that the covenant relationship between the individual and God has been broken. Moreover, the loss of land would have meant that God was either unwilling or unable to act as the Divine Warrior.

The Nephites and the Broken Covenant

It is at this point that our discussion returns to the Book of Mormon, since the Nephites experience a loss of covenanted land, not once but three times over their first four hundred years in the New World. The first loss is the original journey into the wilderness, leaving behind the lands of inheritance in the area around Jerusalem. Though we are told this loss is not the result of their unrighteous behavior, the murmurings and rebellions of the small group meant a journey that could have taken at most months ended up taking over eight years to accomplish. Later, after reaching the New World, it appears the newness and foreign nature of the promised land left them feeling lost, forgotten, and broken off. At least this is what Nephi suggests in his speech recorded in 1 Nephi 19–21, which he delivered so that his people “may have hope as well as your brethren from whom ye have been broken off” (1 Nephi 19:24).

As this clause suggests, Nephi is concerned that his people do not possess hope because of their “broken off” status from the rest of Israel. Though Nephi never tells us explicitly what that hope is, earlier in the chapter he had spoken of a time in which God would remember “the covenants” and the “isles of the sea” (vv. 15, 16). Later, in chapter 21, verse 1 (Isaiah 49), this awareness of scattered Israel by God is made on an individual level:

Hearken, O ye house of Israel, all ye that are broken off and are driven out because of the wickedness of the
pastors of my people; yea, all ye that are broken off,
that are scattered abroad,
. . . the Lord hath called me from the womb;
from the bowels of my mother hath he made mention of my name.

As these verses indicate, the message was given to all who claim the name of Israel, especially to those who were broken off, scattered, and driven out of their lands of inheritance, a message particularly suited to the Nephites. The rest of chapter 21 (Isaiah 49) relates the manner in which God remembers all of his covenant people, ending with the promise that God as warrior would “contend with him that contendeth with thee . . . and I will feed them that oppress thee with their own flesh,” the same Isaianic promise that Jacob quotes in 2 Nephi 6.

Jacob’s Speech

Jacob’s discourse is also delivered during a time of crisis for the Nephites. Second Nephi 5 recounts the Nephites leaving the land of first inheritance in the New World and traveling again into the wilderness. This would have been the second loss of a land of inheritance and would have further accentuated the feelings of loss the Nephites felt earlier. In fact, Jacob, describing the overall mood of his people, confessed:

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 wilderness, and hated of our brethren, which caused wars and contentions; wherefore we did mourn out our days. (Jacob 7:26)

From the above description, it would seem clear that the Nephites felt abandoned and lost, cast out into a wilderness, and therefore forgotten by God. It is this aura of depression that Jacob seeks to address in his speech, as he himself states: “Let us remember him, and lay aside our sins, and not hang down our heads, for we are not cast off; nevertheless, we have been driven out of the land of our inheritance” (2 Nephi 10:20).

The Divine Warrior in Jacob’s Isaiah

The Isaiah passages used by Jacob in the first three chapters of this discourse are replete with divine warrior imagery, depicting God as the warrior defeating the sea monster and as the warrior defeating the mortal enemy. Yet it is the manner in which Jacob integrates this imagery into the
Nephite understanding of the covenants that makes his use of Isaiah particularly interesting as certain themes are emphasized by additions to the text, made by Jacob, which enhance the specific points he is addressing. As we shall see, his conflation of the Isaiahic material, coupled with his own commentary, uniquely tailors the divine warrior imagery so Jacob can respond to the Nephite concern.

Chapters 6–7 and Jacob’s Additions

After his introductory material in 2 Nephi 6:1–5, Jacob begins his discourse by quoting from Isaiah 49:23–24 in verses 6–7, which is then followed by commentary on those verses. What is covered in the commentary is a quick summary of Israel’s future. Prominent in the commentary is the conflict that will arise between Israel and the Gentiles and their eventual restoration to the covenantal promises:

And the day cometh that they shall be smitten and afflicted . . . they shall be scattered, and smitten, and hated . . . and blessed are the Gentiles, they of whom the prophet has written; for behold, if it so be that they shall repent and fight not against Zion, and do not unite themselves to that great and abominable church, they shall be saved. (2 Nephi 6:10–12)

With this brief commentary Jacob now repeats Isaiah 49:23–24, coupled with his own commentary equating God’s promise of covenantal fulfillment with his role as Divine Warrior:

Wherefore, they that fight against Zion and the covenant people of the Lord shall lick up the dust of their feet. . . . He will manifest himself unto the power and great glory, unto the destruction of their enemies . . . and they that believe not in him shall be destroyed . . . and they shall know that the Lord is God. (2 Nephi 6:13–15)

This meaning is reinforced in the next set of verses as Jacob continues quoting from Isaiah 49:24–26, adding his own words to provide the explicit context of these verses and their imagery he wished his people to understand. To fully recognize what Jacob is doing, comparing his version of this specific Isaiah passage with the biblical version and Nephi’s version quoted in 1 Nephi is useful. The biblical version reads as follows:

But thus saith the Lord;
Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away, and the prey of the terrible shall be delivered;
for I will contend with him that contendeth with thee,
and I will save thy children. (Isaiah 49:25)

Nephi, who uses the same passage of Isaiah in his discourse, quotes it exactly the same:

But thus saith the Lord, even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away, and the prey of the terrible shall be delivered; for I will contend with him that contendeth with thee, and I will save thy children. (1 Nephi 21:25)

But Jacob’s version reads:

But thus saith the Lord:
Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away, and the prey of the terrible shall be delivered;
for the Mighty God shall deliver his covenant people.

For thus saith the Lord:
I will contend with them that contendeth with thee. (2 Nephi 6:17)

As can be seen from the above comparison, Nephi’s use of a version identical with the biblical passage suggests that the biblical form is correct and that Jacob is not revealing lost Isaiah clauses, but is instead adding his own commentary to emphasize the link between God as warrior and his covenantal obligations to defend and deliver Israel from the enemy.

A similar addition can be seen in the next chapter as Jacob quotes from Isaiah 50. Whereas Isaiah simply begins with the clause:

Thus saith the Lord:
Where is the bill of your mother’s divorcement? (Isaiah 50:1)

Jacob’s version begins:

Yea, for thus saith the Lord:
Have I put thee away, or have I cast thee off forever?
For thus saith the Lord: Where is the bill of your mother’s divorcement? (2 Nephi 7:1)
In this instance, we do not have another version of this verse in the Book of Mormon and therefore cannot determine whether Jacob’s addition is material lost from the original Isaiah and restored to us by the brass plates, or if it is Jacob again providing his own words. Either way, it is clear that it provides context for the rest of the chapter. The first word, “yea,” suggests continuity from the concepts at the end of 2 Nephi 6 (that the Mighty God will deliver his covenant people from those who would contend with them) to the opening question of chapter 7, how one is cast off from God. The very existence of the question suggests that Israel had asked at times whether God was still acting on their behalf or standing back without mercy, perhaps even unable to do anything. God provides the answer in 7:2–3, beginning with a rhetorical question of his own:

O house of Israel, is my hand shortened at all that it cannot redeem, or have I no power to deliver? Behold, at my rebuke I dry up the sea, I make their rivers a wilderness and their fish to stink because the waters are dried up, . . . I clothe the heavens with blackness, and I make sackcloth their clothing.

God’s hand was often used to describe his martial prowess, and here his power to redeem or deliver is the same power that he uses to demonstrate his utter control over the sea. The fourth and fifth lines emphasize this theme as God is often found rebuking the sea and other nations, as in Psalm 106:9–10:

He rebuked the Red sea also, and it was dried up: so he led them through the depths, as through the wilderness. And he saved them from the hand of him that hated them, and redeemed them from the hand of the enemy.

Thus, the question asked in 2 Nephi 7:2 is answered by the confluence of divine warrior imagery: because he is able to control the sea, he is able to redeem his people and it is by virtue of his mastery over the waters that Jehovah can remind his servant that he hasn’t forgotten them (see Isaiah 50:2).

Later in Jacob’s version of Isaiah 50 (2 Nephi 7) an unnamed individual representing Israel recognizes this, and can therefore declare after his humiliation at the hand of the enemy:

And the Lord is near, and he justifieth me. Who will contend with me? Let us stand together. Who is mine adversary? Let him come near me, and I will smite him with the strength of my mouth.

For the Lord God will help me. (vv. 8–9)

As emphasized by the bold print, Jacob has again included material not found in the biblical version, specifically the martial power of the word. The imagery of the word of God as a weapon is found elsewhere in Isaiah. Isaiah 11:4 describes God as warrior in the following manner: “And he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked.”

This smiting by the strength of the mouth relates back to the power of God in rebuking his enemies, yet Jacob’s additional phrase adds a new aspect to the divine warrior imagery, for it is not God who will do the smiting but the individual himself. He becomes a type of divine warrior through the power of the Divine Warrior. Similarly, Zechariah 10:10–12 describes God’s deliverance of Israel by giving them the power in which they shall “pass through the sea with affliction, and shall smite the waves in the sea, and all the deeps of the river shall dry up . . . and I will strengthen them in the Lord.” Like the reference in Zechariah, 2 Nephi 7:8–9 describes an individual who had been helpless against the enemy, but now, through the aid of the Divine Warrior, will himself participate in the conflict. This personal transformation reflects the creative power of God, as the individual becomes a new creature—a divine warrior himself. It is this theme of personal transformation that lies at the heart of the divine warrior imagery in the next chapter.

Chapter 8 and the Divine Warrior’s Exhortation

While there is no major change or textual addition in Jacob’s version of Isaiah 51 and 52, divine warrior imagery is even more prevalent and centers around the imagery found in 2 Nephi 8:9–11:

Awake, awake! Put on strength, O arm of the Lord; awake as in the ancient days.
Art thou not he that hath cut Rahab, and wounded the dragon?
Art thou not he who hath dried the sea, the waters of the great deep;
that hath made the depths of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over?
Therefore, the redeemed of the Lord shall return, and come with singing unto Zion;
and everlasting joy and holiness shall be upon their heads;
and they shall obtain gladness and joy, sorrow and mourning shall flee away.

This imagery is tied directly into the restoration of the promised land, for when the Divine Warrior comes, the covenant is fulfilled. The word therefore, beginning verse 11, suggests that because God is the warrior, those who have been lost and scattered will eventually attain everlasting joy, exchanging sorrow and mourning for gladness and joy. In fact, by personifying these negative qualities, Isaiah has made them another form of the enemy that God battles. As noted above, these appear to be the same feelings the Nephites themselves were experiencing. The mention of these emotions lying upon the heads of Israel will work as a device used later in Jacob’s own commentary.

Yet, it is God’s answer to Israel’s exhortation in verses 9–11 that makes up the majority of the chapter. Beginning in verse 12 and ending in verse 25 God responds, repeating language used by the plea itself. He begins his answer by announcing himself: “I am he; yea, I am he that comforteth you” (v. 12). As before the bold text represents material not found in the biblical version. In this case it emphasizes the nature of God as the I AM, the title with which God announced himself to Moses immediately prior to the Exodus (Exodus 3:14), the great salvific act of Israel’s history. God then asks a series of questions beginning with “Behold, who art thou?” This question is the crux of the problem for the Nephites. Israel is defined by its covenant. It was created through the covenantal experience. Therefore, if the covenant is broken, then their identity is also called into question. No doubt this is part of the Nephite predicament, as both 2 Nephi 5:6 and Jacob 1:13 describe the family of Lehi breaking apart, the role of each in the greater family structure now being threatened.

God’s second question emphasizes that it is their lack of knowledge, not his, that has caused the problem: “Forgettest the Lord thy maker, that hath stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth . . . ?” (2 Nephi 8:13) This, in turn, has led to their feelings of helplessness as noted in the next question: “hast [thou] feared continually every day, because of the fury of the oppressor, as if he were ready to destroy?” (v. 13) Like the first half of chapter 7, these questions point out that Israel’s shortcomings, not God’s, have kept them in the fearful state they are in. More importantly, their “forgetting” of God, or not understanding what exactly the Divine Warrior does in the covenantal context, has led them to not recognize the works of the Divine Warrior. As the rest of the chapter will demonstrate, God does not expect Israel to merely stand by waiting for deliverance; he expects them to stand up and participate in the conflict.

In verse 16 God provides an answer to the question “Behold, who art thou?” he himself asked in verse 12:

And I have put my words in thy mouth, . . . that I may plant the heavens and lay the foundations of the earth, and say unto Zion: Behold, thou art my people.

The answer is a simple one, “Behold, thou art my people,” but it acts as a reminder to Israel that God has not abandoned them, nor forgotten them. The verse also connects this chapter to chapter 7, since the first line corresponds to the promise made by the unnamed individual against his enemies: “I will smite him with the strength of my mouth” (2 Nephi 7:8). Moreover, the entire verse suggests
the reason as to why Israel has experienced hardship: so that God could make them his people, his divine army to battle against the adversary.

This declaration is followed by a series of commands that reflects Israel’s plea in verses 9 and 10 and emphasizes the personal transformation of the individual from helpless creature to divine warrior. In chapter 8, verse 17, God commands Israel to: “Awake, awake, stand up, O Jerusalem,” and in verses 24 and 25 he commands:

Awake, awake,  
put on thy strength, O Zion;  
put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem.  
. . . Shake thyself from the dust;  
arise, sit down, O Jerusalem;  
loose thyself from the bands of thy neck, O captive daughter of Zion.

This imagery emphasizes the obligations Israel has to awake and arise on her own, even if God has defeated their enemies. Like the unnamed individual in chapter 7, Zion and Jerusalem themselves are to become agents of action through the great might of the Divine Warrior. Israel must be part of the restoration by doing works of righteousness, not merely waiting on the Lord, which is exactly the theme Jacob teaches in his commentary.

**The Divine Warrior in 2 Nephi 9**

It is in his commentary, comprising chapters 9 and 10, that Jacob brings all of his themes together to provide an answer for his people. As he himself states in 9:1: “And now, my beloved brethren, I have read these things that ye might know concerning the covenants of the Lord.” As we have suggested, central to those Isaiah passages is the promise of the Divine Warrior who will deliver his people from affliction not only on his own, but also by giving them the power and knowledge to become “warriors” themselves. Similarly, the divine warrior imagery used by Jacob in his own commentary performs the same function.

**“That Awful Monster . . .”**

Perhaps the most striking and explicit example of Jacob’s use of the divine warrior imagery begins in 9:10:

O how great the goodness of our God, who prepareth a way for our escape from the grasp of

The personification of death as a monstrous entity is not unique to the Book of Mormon, but found throughout the Bible. Isaiah mentions covenants made with Death (see Isaiah 28:15, 18), and in Job, personified Death is seen with his attendants, Pestilence and Sickness (see Job 18:11, Psalm 91:6) hunting down and destroying the wicked. Elsewhere its voracious appetite is highlighted (Isaiah 5:14). Similar descriptions of death are found in areas adjacent to ancient Israel, for instance the Ugaritic deity Mot (lit., “death”) also possessed a limitless
appetite and was one of the primary enemies of Baal (the other being Yamm, or “sea”).

Even the compound name of the monster, Death-and-Hell, is not unique. Hosea 13:14 parallels the two terms: “I will ransom them from the power of the Grave [literally, “from the hand of Sheol”]; I will redeem them from death. O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction,” and a late text by Philo of Byblos, recounts the Phoenicians naming the god of the underworld as “Death and Pluto.” Thus, the description of God fighting Death would have been one which Jacob’s people would most likely have recognized.

It also highlights the ultimate form of being cast off and experiencing chaos: death without the mediation of the atonement.

As Jacob himself states, if it were not for God who prepared the way:

Man must needs have remained to an endless duration . . . our spirits must become subject to that angel who fell . . . to rise no more. And our spirits must have become like unto him, and we become devils . . . to be shut out from the presence of our God . . . in misery. (2 Nephi 9:7–9)

In such a state, there was no way in which any of the covenantal promises could have been kept. Israel, indeed all mankind, would have been cut off, cast out, and helpless in the face of such. Death is a monster that must be defeated by God for salvation and deliverance to even be possible; all other creative, martial endeavors are but types of this battle. Similarly, the covenants of the promised land are also types of God’s victory over death: “they shall inherit the kingdom of God, which was prepared for them from the foundation of the world, and their joy shall be full forever” (9:18).

This last verse concerning the true land of inheritance is followed by another exclamation of God’s power:

O the greatness of the mercy of our God, the Holy One of Israel! For he delivereth his saints from that awful monster the devil, and death, and hell, and that lake of fire and brimstone, which is endless torment. (v. 19)

In this verse, the monster has become the devil, an association commonly found in the scriptures.

In light of the above, the atoning event can be described as a martial act, as Jacob does in verses 25 and 26:

for they [those who knew not the law] are delivered by the power of him. For the atonement satisfieth the demands of his justice upon all those who have not the law given to them, that they are delivered from that awful monster, death and hell, and the devil and the lake of fire and brimstone.

In each one of these references, Jacob increases our understanding of the Divine Warrior by adding elements not found in the preceding passages. In verse 10, God prepared a way, another exodus for his people to escape the monster; in verse 11 this way is God’s deliverance for his people; and in verse 26 the deliverance is the act of the atonement.

There is one more element in verse 10 that must be pointed out. Whereas in verses 19 and 26 God delivers his people, in verse 10 he prepares a “way” for our escape. This reminds us of Israel’s plea in 8:10, in which God is remembered as having rebuked and split the sea providing a “way” for Israel to cross over during the Exodus. Throughout Isaiah one can read of the future promise in which God as the Divine Warrior will provide a “way” for his people to be delivered like the way he made for them in the Red Sea.

Verse 10 is not the only mention by Jacob of the “way.” In verse 41, the invitation to “come unto the Lord, the Holy One” includes entering into “the way” and at the end of the discourse, Jacob reminds his people that they are: “free to . . . choose the way of

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**God may have split the sea, but it is up to the individual to walk forward on that dry ground. Similarly, while only God can defeat death, it is up to the individual to make that victory meaningful.**
everlasting death or the way of eternal life” (2 Nephi 10:23), made possible by the Divine Warrior. Yet, in each one of these references, Israel is asked to be an active participant in the process. God may have split the sea, but it is up to the individual to walk forward on that dry ground. Similarly, while only God can defeat death, it is up to the individual to make that victory meaningful.

“Lift Up Your Heads”

This meaning also lies behind the imagery of the “lifting of the heads” mentioned throughout this paper. In 2 Nephi 9:3, Jacob states that he has spoken “these things that ye may rejoice, and lift up your heads forever.” Later, in 10:20, Jacob ends his discourse in the following manner: “And now, my beloved brethren . . . let us remember him, and lay aside our sins, and not hang down our heads, for we are not cast off.” While we associate the bowed head with humility, in the ancient Near East it was commonly used to demonstrate the utter power over another. Depictions of successful battles often presented captives with bowed heads, bound together. The act of lifting the head was associated with release from captivity and deliverance.

Elsewhere this image is related to the actions of the Divine Warrior. Psalm 3 includes it, along with a host of others that should now be familiar to the reader:

Lord, how are they increased that trouble me!  
many are they that rise up against me.  
. . . But thou O Lord are a shield for me;  
my glory, and the lifter up of mine head.  
. . . Arise, O Lord,  
Save me, O my God:  
for thou hast smitten all mine enemies upon the cheek bone;  
thou hast broken the teeth of the ungodly.  
(vv. 1, 3, 7)

Here, the lifter of the head is the same who smites the enemy. In Mosiah 7:18–19, King Limhi says:

O ye, my people, lift up your heads and be comforted; for behold, the time is at hand . . . when we shall no longer be in subjection to our enemies. . . . Therefore, lift up your heads, and rejoice, and put your trust in God . . . who brought the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt.

Later, in Mosiah 24:13, the Lord speaking to Alma the Elder concerning their captivity, commanded: “Lift up your heads and be of good comfort, for I know of the covenant which ye have made unto me; and I will covenant with my people and deliver them out of bondage.”

In each of these cases, God as the warrior-deliverer will free his people from the oppression of their captors, therefore they are to “lift up their heads.” Yet the term also refers to release from the depression and sorrow that may bind one as well. Earlier, in 2 Nephi 8:11, we are told that the Divine Warrior will place joy and holiness upon the heads

When God’s people are freed from captivity, they may choose to “rejoice, and lift up [their] heads.” Illustration by Glen S. Hopkinson.
of his people, replacing sorrow and mourning. Jacob is also combating a sorrow among his people, thus his message of the Divine Warrior who will deliver them allows them to lift up their heads and not hang them down.

But, as before, this is wholly dependent upon the individual who must choose to lift his head, and thus the theme of the imagery is the same as that of 9:10. Just as God prepared the way, so he has made it possible to lift their heads, but whether they enter into the way, or lift their heads is entirely up to them. Like the Isaiah passages earlier, God as Divine Warrior ultimately demonstrates his power by making it possible for others to become such as well. It is no wonder, in light of this theme, that the bulk of chapter 9 is concerned with the personal worthiness of the Nephites. Having demonstrated that God as warrior has made it possible for them to have such power, Jacob now exhorts his people to be righteous, to be worthy of attending, and actually accept the invitation to the victory feast.

“Come . . . and Feast”

Not as explicit as the imagery of God waging battle, the victory feast of God is an important part of the overall divine warrior imagery. The victory feast of the Divine Warrior manifests itself in two forms: the feast of good things for the victor and his people, and the feast for the animals made up of the flesh of the defeated enemy. Though gruesome, the last form is found in the Old and New Testaments. Ezekiel 39:17–20 describes the feast consisting of the enemy following their battle with the Divine Warrior:

Speak unto every feathered fowl, and to every beast of the field, Assemble yourselves and come; gather yourselves on every side to my sacrifice that I sacrifice for you, even a great sacrifice upon the mountains of Israel. that ye may eat flesh, and drink blood. Ye shall eat the flesh of the mighty,

In the New Testament, Jesus teaches about the bread and water of life, part of a spiritual feast celebrating the victory of the Savior over death and hell. Left: Jesus and the Woman of Samaria, by Gustave Doré. Right: Photography by Christina Smith, © IRI.
and drink the blood of the princes of the earth
. . . and ye shall eat fat till ye be full
and drink blood till ye be drunken.
. . . thus ye shall be filled at my table
with horses and chariots,
with mighty men,
and with all men of war.

Revelation 19:17–21 gives a similar invitation
and subsequent feast:

And I saw an angel standing in the sun; and
he cried with a loud voice saying to all the
fowls that fly in the midst of heaven, Come
and gather yourselves together unto the supper

This type of the feast is mentioned in Isaiah
25:6–9, where, following the battle in which God
would trod on the enemy, spreading forth his hands
to bring down their pride, and “swallow[ing] up
death in victory,” he would “wipe away tears from
off all faces” and prepare a feast:

The Lord of Hosts make unto all people a feast of fat
things,
a feast of wines on the lees,
of fat things full of marrow,
of wines on the lees well refined. (v. 6)

A similar feast was provided following Israel’s
emergence from the chaotic wilderness:

He [Jehovah] made him [Israel] ride on the
high places of the earth, that he might eat the
increase of the fields; . . . Butter of kine, and
milk of sheep, with fat of lambs, and rams of
the breed of Bashan, and goats, with the fat of
kidneys of wheat; and thou didst drink the pure
blood of the grape. (Deuteronomy 32:13–14)

While everything offered is of good quality,
two items are noteworthy: the “fat of the kidneys
of wheat” and the “pure blood of the grape.” Both
of these expressions are metaphorical of course,
but the metaphor relies on the imagery of the sacrifice
to have meaning since both fat of the kidneys and
blood were specifically mentioned in the peace
offering to be made to God, while the rest of the
carcass was to be eaten by the person making the
offering and his guests. Leviticus 3:16 records that
all fat was the Lord’s and in Ezekiel 44:7, 15, blood
and fat are the “bread” of God, the altar being his table. Thus, even though wheat does not have kidneys, and grape juice is not blood, the metaphor suggests that this divinely offered meal should be associated with ritual of sacrifice. That the imagery reflects the elements of the peace offering is significant in that it was this particular form of sacrifice that was associated with gratitude for God’s deliverance, which in turn, renewed the person making the offering’s fellowship with God. Jacob’s invitation to come and partake, then, fits a pattern of divine warrior imagery found in the Old Testament. But, as elsewhere in 2 Nephi 9, the invitation emphasizes the participation of the guest. Though God has defeated the monster and now provides a feast to celebrate his deliverance, it is up to the guest to accept and come unto God.

**The Divine Warrior in 2 Nephi 10**

Unlike chapter 9, there is no mention of a monster or even deliverance in 2 Nephi 10. Instead chapter 10 is concerned with the reclamation of the lands of inheritance by the scattered covenant people. Yet the Divine Warrior does make an appearance:

> Wherefore, for this cause, that my covenants may be fulfilled . . . I must needs destroy the secret works of darkness, and of murders, and of abominations. Wherefore, he that fighteth against Zion, both Jew and Gentile, both bond and free, both male and female, shall perish; for they are they who are the whore of all the earth; for they who are not for me are against me, saith our God. (vv. 15–16)

While it is true that the chapter delineates some wonderful blessings to the Gentiles, these blessings are contingent upon the Gentiles softening their hearts and turning to the Lord; if they do not, then they remain the enemy. This was the exact same teaching delivered earlier in 2 Nephi 6:12–13 where the Divine Warrior first made his appearance in this discourse:

> And blessed are the Gentiles; . . . for behold, if it so be that they shall repent and fight not against Zion, and do not unite themselves to that great and abominable church, they shall be saved; for the Lord God will fulfil his covenants which he has made unto his children. . . . They that fight against Zion and the covenant people of the Lord shall lick up the dust of their feet.

Thus the Gentile, the outsider, now becomes the enemy that fights against God. Yet Jacob also suggests that the Jew can be an enemy. Though an Israelite would be by genetics of the house of Israel, it is not genetics alone that determines whether or not one is Israel. In fact, it is the individual’s personal righteousness that defines one in the covenantal relationship with God. Equating one who fights against Zion with one who does works of darkness, murder, and abominations places these on the same

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In Nephi’s abbreviated version of the apocalypse, the great whore of the earth is: “the church of the devil . . . the mother of abominations . . . and she sat upon many waters” (1 Nephi 14:10–11). The same imagery is described in Revelation 17–19, where some have suggested she represents elements
of the chaos monster.\textsuperscript{34} According to Nephi, she will wage war against the righteous by bringing to pass a gathering of her own:

> And it came to pass that I beheld that the great mother of abominations did gather together multitudes upon the face of all the earth, among all the nations of the Gentiles, to fight against the Lamb of God. And it came to pass that I, Nephi, beheld the power of the Lamb of God, that it descended upon the saints of the church of the Lamb, and upon the covenant people of the Lord, who were scattered upon all the face of the earth; and they were armed with righteousness, and with the power of God in great glory. \ldots And when the day cometh that the wrath of God is poured out upon the mother of harlots \ldots then, at that day, the work of the Father shall commence, in preparing the way for the fulfilling of his covenants, which he hath made to his people who are of the house of Israel. (1 Nephi 14:14, 17)

Nephi’s vision allows us to catch sight of the true meaning of Jacob’s passage. The language used by Nephi that the work of the Father “prepareth a way” is reminiscent of Jacob’s later words to describe the work of the Savior who “provideth a way.” This way, described in both the Isaianic passages and Jacob’s commentary, includes giving God’s people power themselves to battle the enemy, in whatever form it manifests itself. Nephi’s vision of a people armed with righteousness and the power of God is what Jacob suggests can be his own people: individuals empowered by God who can thus smite the enemy by the word of God.

Finally, chapter 10 ends with the promise of a land of inheritance, the sign of the covenant, much as chapter 9 ends with the invitation to the victory feast. Thus, the Nephite concerns of loss of identity with the loss of the lands of inheritance are placed into an eternal perspective. It is in this perspective that the true power of the Divine Warrior is witnessed. By delivering them from the monster, he gives them the power to act, to become warriors of the earth; and they were armed with righteousness, and with the power of God in great glory. \ldots And when the day cometh that the wrath of God is poured out upon the mother of harlots \ldots then, at that day, the work of the Father shall commence, in preparing the way for the fulfilling of his covenants, which he hath made to his people who are of the house of Israel. (1 Nephi 14:14, 17)

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CONCLUSION

While we may never know the exact circumstances that led to Jacob’s delivering this discourse, his use of the divine warrior imagery not only gives us a glimpse into the manner in which this community of scattered Israelites found hope and assurances in their new environments, but when we recognize the meaning behind this imagery it also becomes a source of assurance for us today. While we may never have to experience the trauma of losing a land of inheritance, the feelings of loss, of being driven out, or of helplessness experienced by the Nephiates are all too real experiences today. Our hope, too, lies in the promises made by the Divine Warrior. Like the Nephiates, we too can trust in his delivering power; like the Nephiates we must participate and become divine warriors ourselves. At the beginning of his discourse, Jacob stated that he read to his people the words of Isaiah that “they may be likened unto you, for ye are the house of Israel” (2 Nephi 6:5). Today, the same advice could be given of Jacob’s speech. Though separated by 2,600 years, we can liken his words to us and in so doing “cheer up” our hearts, remembering that, thanks to the Divine Warrior, we too “are free to act for ourselves.”

Notes

1. While this discourse is one of the longer discourses in the Book of Mormon and is as complex as King Benjamin’s speech or Alma’s discourse to the Zoramites, it has received much less attention by scholarship. Outside of John S. Thompson’s study, “Isaiah 50–51, the Israelite Autumnal Festivals, and the Covenant Speech of Jacob in 2 Nephi 6–10,” in Isaiah in the Book of Mormon, ed. Donald W. Parry and John W. Welch (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 123–50, no one has devoted an entire study to the speech. Others have discussed the text within larger contexts, such as John W. Welch who mentioned the speech in his study, “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: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1994), 297–387; Garold N. Davis, “Pattern and Purpose of the Isaiah Commentaries in the Book of Mormon,” in Mormons, Scripture, and the Ancient World: Studies in Honor of John L. Sorenson, ed. Davis Bitton (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 277–303, discusses the Isaiahic passages of the discourse briefly, as does Victor L. Ludlow, Unlocking Isaiah in the Book of Mormon (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003), and Hoyt W. Brewster Jr., Isaiah Plain and Simple: The Message of Isaiah in the Book of Mormon (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1995). But because of their focus on the Isaiahic texts, they do not provide a good analysis of Jacob’s own words, nor do they develop the manner in which the Isaiahic texts and Jacob’s commentary work together for thematic continuity.

2. Martin Klingbeil, Yahweh Fighting from Heaven: God as Warrior and as God of Heaven in the Hebrew Psalter and Ancient Near Eastern Iconography (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999), 309: “God as the warrior fighting from heaven remains one of the less comfortable Gottesbilder regarded from a modern theological perspective. Nevertheless, it appears to constitute an important part of the imagery associated with Yahweh throughout the Hebrew psalter. Even more so, because it reappears in the literature of the New Testament as part of the apocalyptic vision given to John in Rev 19:11–15.”

3. In the Babylonian creation literature, the Enuma Elish, it was Tiamat, the “sweet waters” that had to be defeated for creation to continue, see Richard J. Clifford, Creation Accounts in the Ancient Near East and in the Bible (Washington DC: Catholic Biblical Association, 1994), 82–93. A similar battle is described in the Ugaritic Baal cycle, though there is a question whether this text reflects a true cosmogony or is a physical creation narrative, see ibid, 119–26. See also Richard J. Clifford, “Cosmogonies in the Ugaritic Texts and in the Bible,” Orientalia 53/2 (1984): 183–201. Whether or not a physical cosmogony is described, certainly the social cosmology of the divine realm is. As will be shown later, the creation of society is as much a part of the creative process as the physical creation.

4. See Psalms 24:2; 29:10; 74:12–16; 77:16–19; 89:9–11; 93:3; 95:3–5; 104:6–7; Job 7:12; 26:10–13; Isaiah 51:9–10; 59:19; Jeremiah 5:22; Habakkuk 3:8. See also Norman Cohn, Cosmos, Chaos and the World to Come: The Ancient Roots of Apocalyptic Faith (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 131–39; C. L. Seow, Myth, Drama, and the Politics of David’s Dance (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 112–16; Frank Moore Cross, Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), 112–44. See also N. Wyatt, Myths of Power: A Study of Royal Myth and Ideology in Ugaritic and Biblical Tradition (Munster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1996), 89–95. There is also an interesting connection between the practice of the sacrificial system and the creation. The Hebrew verb used both in Genesis 1, describing the separating of water from water, and in Leviticus, describe the cutting and separating of the different body parts of the animal sacrifice, is the same, suggesting that the two acts were to be viewed as different in scale not in type; both were acts of cosmos-making.

5. Richard S. Hess, Israelite Religions: An Archaeological and Biblical Survey (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2007), 155: “The story of the exodus, repeated again and again in Israel’s Scriptures, represents the key historic act of redemption that formed a unique contribution to the religious identity of this people. Although Ugaritic and other ancient Near Eastern sources contain a triumph of the chief god over the divine sea, there is no parallel to this anywhere in the ancient Near Eastern sources.”

6. Bernard F. Batto, Slaying the Dragon: Mythmaking in the Biblical Tradition (Louisville, KY: Westminster, 1992), 113, 119: “In a series of spectacular battles Yahweh overpowers his enemies and kills Pharaoh-Egypt in the midst of the sea. Through this same battle Israel emerges from out of the midst of the defeated enemy as God’s newly fashioned people, the final ‘work’ of the Creator who brings forth life out of the midst of the unruly sea.” In the second act of creation Yahweh went on to find his people Israel as his covenanted people and establish his ‘resting place’—the place from which he rules the cosmos—in their midst. . . . The exodus, no less than the creation in Genesis, is an ‘event’ of cosmic proportions, a story of origins through which the cosmic order is established and actualized.” The relationship between the creation account and the deliverance of Israel is also explored in Cross, Canaanite Myth, 87–88: “The overthrow of the Egyptian host in the sea is singled out to symbolize Israel’s deliverance, Yahweh’s victory. Later, an equation is fully drawn between the ‘drying up of the sea’ and the Creator’s defeat of Rahab or Yamm (Isaiah 51:9–11); the historical event is thereby given cosmic or primordial meaning. . . . It is highly likely that the role of the sea in the Exodus story was singled out and stressed precisely because of the ubiquitous motif of the cosmogonic battle between the creator god and the Sea.” See also Bernard W. Anderson, From Creation to New Creation: Old Testament Perspectives (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 37, 80–81: “The theme of the new creation dominates the message of Second
Isaiah, who grasps profoundly the interrelation of creation and history. . . . It is the exodus tradition that especially fires this prophet’s imagination, prompting a poetic identification of the passage through the Sea of Reeds with the Divine Warrior’s triumph over the powers of chaos. Isa. 51:9–11. In this respect, the prophet stands in a tradition that accords with Israel’s earliest poetry, wherein cosmological language functions to portray the creation (or re-creation) of a people. Creation and redemption belong together, as the obverse and reverse of the same theological coin.”


8. The creation account in Genesis is very much a covenant experience as creation was not complete until the creation of a social cosmos as well. The language used to describe Adam and Eve’s relationship “bone of my bones, flesh of my flesh” (Genesis 2:23) is similar to language found in 2 Samuel to describe the creation and ongoing covenantal relationship between David as king and Israel (2 Samuel 5:1; 19:2). The Exodus experience was understood as a covenantal experience throughout the Old Testament and is often referred back to in the seven recognized communal laments of the psalter (Psalms 44, 60, 74, 79, 80, 83, 89).

9. Theodore Hiebert, God of My Victory: The Ancient Hymn in Habakkuk 3 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986), 118–19: “The form of Habakkuk 3 may best be identified as a song of victory, a song celebrating an Israelite military victory as a triumph of Yahweh, the divine warrior. . . . His armies are made up of cosmic and human forces, his enemy is at once the primeval enemy of God, River/Sea, and the primeval enemies of his people, the Egyptians at the Reed Sea and the Canaanites at the Jordan River.” Also Miller, Divine Warrior, 164: “In Israel the creator god was the war god who marched forth to save his people. . . . At the center of Israel’s faith . . . lay the battle for Israel’s deliverance, a conflict involving the theophany of Yahweh and his mighty armies to fight with and for Israel. This encounter took place on a defintly historical level, but the forces of the cosmos were involved.”


11. Jon D. Levenson, Sinai & Zion: An Entry into the Jewish Bible (New York: HarperCollins, 1985), 55. Also, Stephen L. Cook, The Social Roots of Biblical Yahwism (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004), 39: “The ultimate consequence of defiling the land is that God will stop protecting it and allow the people’s removal from the land. When the Canaanites had previously defiled the land, God expelled them. If Israel follows suit, their fate could well be the same: eviction.”

12. Though no specific enemy is mentioned, the traditional enemy of the Nephites was the Lamanites. Conflict broke out soon after the separation of the two groups and journeyed into the wilderness (Jacob 1:10). The Lord himself explains that the Lamanites, “shall be a scourge to thy seed . . . even unto destruction.” Jacob’s son, Enos, describes the Lamanites as “wild, and ferocious, and a blood-thirsty people . . . feeding upon beasts of prey . . . wandering about in the wilderness with . . . their heads shaven.” And many of them did eat nothing save it was raw meat; and they were continually seeking to destroy us” (Enos 1:20). These descriptions depict the Lamanites as a chaotic force, at home in the wilderness, and continually seeking to tear apart the “cosmos” the Nephites attempt to establish. Interestingly, later in the Book of Mormon, when the Lamanites are converted to the gospel and become part of the covenant people, this description is then applied to the Gadianton Robbers: “And the Gadianton Robbers had a lamb-skin about their loins, and they were dyed in blood, and their heads were shorn, and they had headplates upon them; and great and terrible was the appearance of the armies of Giddiahni, because of their armor, and because of their being dyed in blood” (3 Nephi 4:7). Not surprisingly, this description is followed by a Nephite plea to the Divine Warrior: “And it came to pass that the armies of the Nephites, when they saw the appearance of the army . . . did lift their cries to the Lord their God, that he would spare them and deliver them out of the hands of their enemies” (v. 8). See Hugh W. Nibley, Teachings of the Book of Mormon Semester 3 (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1988–1990), 301–2.

13. It is possible that the last clause of this line also suggests the Divine Warrior. The Hebrew term for “god” is el, most likely from the root meaning “to be strong, to be powerful.” Thus the declaration that the Lord is God, would be emphasizing the attribute of his power. See W. Herrmann, s.v. “EL,” Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible, ed. Karel van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter W. van der Horst, 2nd rev. ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 274–80.

14. Nephi also adds text to the Isaiah passages he quotes to emphasize the reason for the specific Isaiah passage. The first half of 1 Nephi 21:1, mentioned earlier, does not appear in the biblical Isaiah.

And again, Hearken, O ye house of Israel, All ye who are broken off And are driven out because of the wickedness of the pastors of your people; Yea, all ye that are that are broken off, That are scattered abroad, Who are of my people, O house of Israel. Listen, O isles, unto me. And hearken ye people from far; The Lord hath called me from the womb; From the bowels of my mother hath he made mention of my name.

The additional material is either original Isaiahic material missing from the biblical version or Nephi’s own words, emphasizing the scattered and broken off nature of the subject. Either way, the additional material applies directly to the Nephite situation at the time.

15. It is possible that the first clause of line two, “have I put thee away?” is originally Isaiahic since the rest of the verse uses this verb repeatedly: “To whom have I put thee away? . . . for . . . for your transgressions is your mother put away.” Yet the second clause of the line, “or have I cast thee off forever” appears to be Jacob’s words since the verb never shows up again in the chapter. If this is so, we again have Jacob clarifying and highlighting the meaning of the Isaiahic passage to fit his specific usage.

16. Exodus 15:6: “Thy right hand, O Lord, is become glorious in power: thy right hand, O Lord, hath dashed in pieces the enemy.” See also Deuteronomy 33:2; Psalms 21:8; 44:3; 60:5; 74:11; 77:10; 78:54; 89:13; 91:7; 108:6; 118:15–16; Isaiah 62:12, Lamentations 2:3. A raised right arm holding a weapon of some kind was often depicted in ancient Near Eastern statuary to represent the deity’s martial aspect. Interestingly, it is also associated with Moses, see Isaiah 63:12: “That led them by the right hand of Moses with his glorious arm, dividing the water before them.” Moses was given divine warrior power in Moses 1:25: “I, the Almighty, have chosen thee, and thou shalt be made stronger than many waters; for they shall obey thy command as if thou wert God.”


18. Elements of 2 Nephi 7 remind us of the psalm of Nephi in 2 Nephi 4:15–35, especially the plea for the Lord to deliver the sufferer from chaotic forces. There are three references to chaos within that pericope. The first is mentioned in 2 Nephi 4:20 with the Lord supporting Nephi through “the wilderness” and “the
waters.” In verse 22, Nephi survived his “enemies” and finally in verse 26 he is confronted with death, “why should my heart weep and my soul linger in the valley of sorrow, and my flesh waste away and my strength slacken?” This same pattern of confrontation is found in Psalm 89. In fact, much of the language of Nephi’s psalm is similar to, if not exactly the same as, that found in the Psalms.

19. Textually, this addition adds to the poetic nature of the chapter, as the creation of new warrior, reflects the same power of God as found in the earlier imagery. Thus, Jacob has made Isaiah even more poetic, even more chiasmic in theme, than the biblical version.

20. Though not as explicit as other passages, this question may also reflect divine warrior imagery as the stretching out the heavens may have referred to the concept of Jehovah making a tent or a creation out of the skin of the chaos monster. See Wyatt, Myths of Power, 215: “In Job 26:7 we saw that the allusion is specifically related to the Chaoskampf motif. The same is true of the couplet in Job 9:8: (Yahweh) stretching out (the) heavens by himself and striding on the back of Sea. This more fully expounded version of the tradition provides the real clue to understanding the tent-pitching allusions. Here we can imagine Yahweh striding back and forth triumphantly on the cadaver of the dead Yam, pulling his skin into shape. It is Yam’s skin that forms the fabric of the tent.” Norman C. Habel connects this motif to the cultic tent of Israel in his article, “He Who Stretches Out the Heavens,” Catholic Biblical Quarterly 34/4 (1972): 417–30. See also Peter J. Kearney, “Creation and Liturgy: The P Redaction of Ex 25–40,” Zeitschrift für Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 89/3 (1977): 375–87.

Frank Cross saw a similar connection in the tabernacle covering of Moses’ tabernacle. “The outermost curtain is made of tāhās skins. . . . It [tāhā] has a perfectly simple etymology, being cognate with Arabic tālūs, a word applied to small cetaceans, notably the dolphin.” Cross, “The Priestly Tabernacle in the Light of Recent Research.” in The Temple in Antiquity: Ancient Records and Modern Perspectives, ed. Truman G. Madsen (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1984), 95–96. Though he differs slightly in his analysis (Cross explains the skin, not in terms of the skin of the chaos monster, but in terms of El’s tent abiding at the “fountains of the double-deep” and in the “midst of the sea”), he too places the establishment of the tabernacle at the triumph over the waters.

21. Nicholas Wyatt, Religious Texts from Ugarit: The Words of Ilumiktu and His Colleagues (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 116–17: “Message of divine Mot, word of the Beloved of El, the hero. My appetite is the appetite of the lion in the wasteland, as the desire of the shark is in the sea.”


24. For biblical parallels see Habakkuk 1:12; Isaiah 25:8. See also, Tromp, Primitive Conceptions of Death, 202–5.

25. Satan as the enemy monster is the primary meaning of the serpent/dragon imagery found throughout the Book of Revelation, see Rev. 12:9: “And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan,” also 20:2; 2 Nephi 2:18; Mosiah 16:3; Doctrine and Covenants 76:28; 88:110. The early conflict between the serpent and God at the creation may be a reflection of this elemental conflict.


27. For textual examples, see Judges 8:28; see also Job 10:15.

28. In the story of Joseph, the butler who is imprisoned with Joseph is promised that in three days: “shall Pharaoh lift up thine head, and restore thee unto thy place” (Genesis 40:13). Some dark humor follows as the baker, who also has a dream and is imprisoned, is told: “within three days shall Pharaoh lift up thy head from off thee” (v. 19).

29. In Alma 8:14–15, Alma is told to “lift up thy head and rejoice” having been, “weighed down with sorrow, wading through much tribulation and anguish of soul.” Use of the verb wading carries with it reflexes of chaos imagery as it is often used to describe traversing through a watery, marshy place, thus the image of the Divine Warrior making it possible to lift one’s head is used. See “wade,” OED–online version (www.oed.com), def. 3a: “to walk through water or any liquid or soft substance that impedes motion.” Earlier in the entry it is pointed out that: “The mod. Eng. specific sense, ‘to walk in water’, though prominent in the other Teut. lang., is not recorded in OE.”


31. See also Ezekiel 29:3–5; 32:2–8, where the meal is made up of the corpse of the chaos monster. See J. Priest, “A Note,” in The Messiah, 235: “The first two passages in Ezekiel contain an element which requires attention (29:3–5; 32:2–8). In them the food of the sacrificial feast is the flesh of the dragon (tannin). Ps 74:13–14 reflects this motif: The dragons (tanninin = Leviathan), crushed by YHWH, are the food which will be eaten by the creatures in the wilderness.”

32. Richard D. Nelson, Raising Up a Faithful Priest: Community and Priesthood in Biblical Theology (Louisville, KY: Westminster/ John Knox, 1993), 67–68: “Those sharing the sacrificial meal would have seen it as a way of strengthening family and group associations, but also as a way of making personal contact with Yahweh.”


34. J. Massyngberde Ford, Revelation (New York: Doubleday, 1975), 277 n. 17:1: “The picture is well known from ancient iconography: a city represented as a goddess, enthroned on the shore of the river which suggests its richness and power. . . . They may also be reminiscent of the primeval watery chaos.”