

“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.¹ 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.² 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.³ 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.⁴ 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.”⁵ 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.⁶

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.⁷ 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.⁸ 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.⁹ 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.¹⁰ They have tried to snatch what is not theirs, what God has apportioned to another.¹¹

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.¹²

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.¹³ 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.”¹⁴ 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.¹⁵ 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.¹⁶

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.¹⁷ 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.¹⁸ 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.¹⁹

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.²⁰ 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.²¹ 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."²² 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.²³ 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