

THE BOOK OF JACOB, THE BROTHER OF NEPHI

FAITH: Mormonism | TEXT: Book of Jacob | VOLUME: 1830 | AUTHOR: Joseph Smith

OVERVIEW

The Book of Jacob serves as a spiritual sequel to the writings of Nephi. Jacob, consecrated as a priest and teacher by his brother, writes on the 'small plates' to preserve the sacred preaching and revelation of his people. The text opens with a transition of leadership from Nephi to a succession of kings, while Jacob assumes spiritual stewardship. He delivers a scathing temple sermon addressing two primary sins emerging among the Nephites: the accumulation of wealth leading to pride, and the practice of polygamy (justified by the examples of David and Solomon), which Jacob condemns as abominable unless specifically commanded by God to raise up seed. The centerpiece of the book is the Allegory of the Olive Tree (Jacob 5), a lengthy and complex narrative attributed to a non-biblical prophet named Zenos. This allegory depicts the House of Israel as a tame olive tree that decays, is scattered (grafted) into wild parts of the vineyard, and is eventually gathered in the last days through the diligent labor of servants. The text concludes with the account of Sherem, an 'Anti-Christ' who demands a sign and is struck down by God, and Jacob's final farewell, where he passes the plates to his son Enos, using the French term 'adieu.'

KEY FIGURES

Jacob (Brother of Nephi), The Lord of the Vineyard (Allegorical representation of God/Christ), The Servant (Allegorical representation of prophets/Christ), Sherem (The Anti-Christ), Zenos (Prophet quoted by Jacob), Enos (Son of Jacob)

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. MINISTERIAL BLOOD GUILT

Assertion: Religious leaders are spiritually liable for the sins of their congregation if they fail to teach with all diligence.

"answering the sins of the people upon our own heads, if we did not teach them the word of God with all diligence; wherefore, by laboring with our mights, their blood might not come upon our garments (Jacob 1:19)"

Evangelical Comparison: In Evangelical theology, while leaders are held to a high standard (James 3:1), the sins of the people are atoned for by Christ alone, not prevented by the 'labor' of the priest. Ezekiel 33:6 does warn watchmen, but the New Testament focus is on the imputed righteousness of Christ (Romans 4:5). Jacob 1:19 places a heavy burden of 'answering the sins of the people' on the leader's head, suggesting that the leader's own salvation ('found spotless') is contingent on their performance in warning others. This creates a 'works-righteousness' dynamic for leadership that obscures the sufficiency of Christ's atonement for the leader's own standing.

2. CONDITIONAL POLYGAMY

Assertion: Polygamy is generally an abomination, specifically citing David and Solomon as negative examples, unless God commands it to 'raise up seed.'

"David and Solomon truly had many wives and concubines, which thing was abominable before me... For if I will, saith the Lord of Hosts, raise up seed unto me, I will command my people: otherwise, they shall hearken unto these things. (Jacob 2:24, 30)"

Evangelical Comparison: Jacob 2 presents a complex theological stance. It strongly condemns the polygamy of David and Solomon, calling it 'abominable.' This directly contradicts later Mormon revelation (D&C 132:38-39), which states David and Solomon were justified in their wives given by the Lord. From an Evangelical baseline, the 'loophole' in verse 30 ('if I will... raise up seed') introduces a utilitarian view of marriage (procreation volume) that differs from the biblical model of marriage as a picture of Christ and the Church (Ephesians 5).

3. RACIAL/SPIRITUAL CURSING

Assertion: Dark skin is a curse resulting from iniquity, but those with the curse can be more righteous than those without it.

"unless ye shall repent of your sins, that their skins will be whiter than yours... revile no more against them, because of the darkness of their skins (Jacob 3:8-9)"

Evangelical Comparison: The text explicitly links skin color ('darkness of their skins') to a curse and 'filthiness,' while simultaneously using the Lamanites' family fidelity to shame the 'white' Nephites. It threatens that the Lamanites' skins will become 'whiter' than the Nephites' at the judgment if the Nephites do not repent. This conflates spiritual standing with physical pigmentation, a concept alien to the New Testament gospel where ethnicity and appearance are non-factors in spiritual identity (Colossians 3:11).

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: Jacob presents a fully formed Christology (knowledge of Jesus, the Atonement, and the Cross) roughly 500 years before the Incarnation. This contradicts the biblical narrative of progressive revelation (Hebrews 1:1-2, 1 Peter 1:10-12), where prophets searched to understand the glory that was to follow. Furthermore, the text introduces the 'Prophet Zenos' and his allegory as essential scripture, violating the closed canon of the Bible. The soteriology is mixed with a heavy burden of priestly responsibility ('answering the sins of the people'), which diminishes the role of Christ as the sole Mediator and High Priest who bears the sins of the world.

Shared Values:

Condemnation of pride and materialism; Importance of chastity and family fidelity; Belief in the Atonement of Christ; Reality of Hell and judgment

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – Cites 'Zenos' as an authoritative prophet and claims the Bible is insufficient/missing plainness.
2. [Major] Sola Fide – Implies salvation/cleanness is contingent on 'laboring with mights' to avoid the blood of others.
3. [Major] Universal Priesthood – Establishes a specific, non-Levitical hierarchy with authority to 'answer for sins.'
4. [Critical] Theology Proper (God's Immutability) – God condemns polygamy here but commands it elsewhere (D&C 132), suggesting moral fluidity.
5. [Major] Imago Dei – Associates dark skin with a divine curse and spiritual filthiness.

Semantic Warnings:

"The Gospel / Doctrine of Christ"

In Text: Includes the specific Nephite ordinances and the rejection of polygamy (at this time), coupled with the Law of Moses as a pointer.

Evangelical: The death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins (1 Corinthians 15:1-4).

Example: Jacob 7:6 refers to the 'doctrine of Christ' as something Sherem claims is a perversion of the Law of Moses.

"Priest"

In Text: An office consecrated by Nephi (from the tribe of Manasseh/Joseph) to teach and answer for sins.

Evangelical: Old Testament: Levites/Aaronites only. New Testament: The priesthood of all believers (1 Peter 2:9) or Christ as High Priest (Hebrews 7).

Example: Jacob 1:18 'consecrated priests and teachers of this people, by the hand of Nephi.'

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Entering into God's rest, obtaining a resurrection, and not being cast into the lake of fire.

How Attained: Through the atonement of Christ, but contingent on 'laboring with mights,' keeping commandments, and for leaders, clearing themselves of the people's blood.

Basis of Assurance: Low assurance; based on 'anxiety,' 'labor,' and the fear that 'blood would come upon our garments.'

Comparison to Sola Fide: Jacob 1:19's requirement to labor to avoid blood-guilt contradicts the rest found in Sola Fide (Romans 5:1). Salvation is viewed as a cooperative effort between the 'Lord of the Vineyard' and the servants who must dig, prune, and dung.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. One wife only (unless commanded otherwise)
2. No concubines
3. Seek the Kingdom of God before riches
4. Do not revile against Lamanites because of their dark skin
5. Labor with might in the vineyard

Implicit Obligations:

1. Leaders must clear their garments of the people's blood through diligent teaching
2. Accept the writings of Zenos as scripture
3. Look to the temple for instruction

Ritual Requirements:

1. Temple attendance (Jacob teaches in the temple)
2. Keeping the Law of Moses (as a pointer to Christ)

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. Jacob 1:19 says Jacob had to labor so the people's blood wouldn't be on his garments. How does that compare to Hebrews 9, which says Christ's blood cleanses us from dead works?
2. In Jacob 2, God calls David and Solomon's polygamy 'abominable.' How do you reconcile that with D&C 132, where God says He gave them those wives?
3. Who was the prophet Zenos mentioned in Jacob 5, and why don't we have his writings in the Bible if his allegory is so central to Israel's history?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Weeping God – This depicts a God who deeply desires the salvation of His people and grieves over their loss. It bridges to Jesus weeping over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41) and God's desire that none should perish. [Luke 19:41, 2 Peter 3:9]
2. The Pleasing Word – The Gospel is meant to heal the wounded, not just burden the sinner. This longing for a healing word is satisfied in the Gospel of Grace. [Matthew 11:28-30]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Performance/Blood Guilt [Severe] – The teaching that a leader is responsible for the sins of their flock ('blood on garments') creates immense anxiety and a hyper-vigilant, legalistic approach to ministry. It removes the peace of knowing Christ is the only Savior.
2. Cognitive Dissonance [Moderate] – The contradiction between Jacob 2 (polygamy is abominable) and D&C 132 (polygamy is divine) creates deep confusion regarding God's moral nature.
3. Shame/Identity [Severe] – For adherents with dark skin, the text explicitly associates their complexion with a curse and ancestral iniquity, creating internalized shame.

PISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Personal revelation, the 'power of the Holy Ghost,' and the 'Spirit which speaketh the truth and lieth not.'

Verification Method: Adherents are expected to believe based on the 'plainness' of the word and the emotional/spiritual witness, as well as the confounding of enemies (Sherem).

Evangelical Contrast: While Evangelicals believe in the illumination of the Spirit, Jacob asserts a 'perfect knowledge' of Christ centuries before His birth (Jacob 4:12), bypassing the progressive revelation seen in the Old Testament (Hebrews 1:1-2).

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: Internal date: c. 544-421 B.C. Published: 1830 A.D.

Authorship: Attributed to Jacob; dictated by Joseph Smith.

Textual Issues: The use of 'adieu' (French) in Jacob 7:27 is a famous anachronism. The extensive quoting of 'Zenos' (Jacob 5) has no manuscript evidence in any ancient tradition (Dead Sea Scrolls, Septuagint, etc.).