

JACOB

FAITH: Mormonism | TEXT: Book of Mormon | VOLUME: 2013 | AUTHOR: Joseph Smith

OVERVIEW

The Book of Jacob covers the ministry of Nephi's younger brother, Jacob, roughly between 544 and 421 B.C. Following Nephi's death, Jacob assumes responsibility for the 'small plates' and the spiritual leadership of the Nephites. The text is characterized by a tone of intense pastoral anxiety and strict moral exhortation. Jacob delivers a temple sermon condemning the rising materialism (pride) among the Nephites and specifically denouncing the practice of unauthorized polygamy, citing the negative examples of David and Solomon—a point of significant theological tension within later Mormon scripture. The centerpiece of the book is Chapter 5, which recites the 'Allegory of the Olive Tree' attributed to a non-biblical prophet named Zenos, detailing the scattering and gathering of Israel through the metaphor of grafting wild and tame branches. The narrative concludes with Jacob's confrontation with Sherem, an 'anti-Christ' who demands a sign and is subsequently struck down by God, confessing his error before dying. The book ends with Jacob passing the records to his son Enos.

KEY FIGURES

Jacob, Nephi, Zenos, Sherem, Enos, The Lord of the Vineyard

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. VICARIOUS RESPONSIBILITY OF LEADERS

Assertion: Spiritual leaders carry the guilt of their people's sins if they fail to teach with sufficient diligence.

"answering the sins of the people upon our own heads if we did not teach them the word of God with all diligence (Jacob 1:19)"

Evangelical Comparison: In Evangelical theology, while leaders are accountable for their stewardship (Hebrews 13:17), they do not atone for or absorb the guilt of their flock's sins. Ezekiel 33 warns the watchman, but the New Testament emphasizes that each person gives an account of themselves to God (Romans 14:12). Jacob 1:19 places a crushing burden on the leader to 'rid their garments' of others' blood through their own performance, suggesting a transfer of guilt that diminishes the unique role of Christ as the sole sin-bearer.

2. MONOGAMY AS DIVINE STANDARD

Assertion: God commands one wife; polygamy is an abomination, specifically citing David and Solomon as negative examples.

"David and Solomon truly had many wives and concubines, which thing was abominable before me, saith the Lord. (Jacob 2:24)"

Evangelical Comparison: This text aligns with the Evangelical understanding of marriage (Genesis 2:24, Matthew 19:4-6). However, it creates a massive internal contradiction within Mormonism. Jacob 2:24 calls David's polygamy 'abominable,' whereas Doctrine and Covenants 132:38-39 claims David's wives were given 'of me, saith the Lord' and that he did not sin in this, except in the case of Uriah. For the Evangelical apologist, this is a key evidence of evolving/contradictory theology within the Mormon canon.

3. FULL CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE IN OT ERA

Assertion: Prophets and people knew the name of 'Christ' and the details of His life/atonement fully in 500 B.C.

"we knew of Christ and his kingdom, which should come. (Jacob 1:6)"

Evangelical Comparison: Evangelical scholarship holds to Progressive Revelation—that God revealed His plan gradually. While OT saints had types, shadows, and messianic prophecies (Hebrews 1:1-2, 1 Peter 1:10-12), they did not possess the explicit knowledge of Jesus' name, the specific mechanics of the cross, or the full New Testament theology as Jacob claims the Nephites did. Jacob presents a fully formed Christianity centuries before the Incarnation, rendering the actual coming of Christ a confirmation rather than a revelation of mystery (Ephesians 3:4-5).

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: While Jacob shares moral values with Evangelicalism, the theological framework is fundamentally different. The 'Allegory of the Olive Tree' (Jacob 5) depicts salvation history as a complex labor of grafting and pruning where the 'Lord of the Vineyard' is constantly reacting to decay, and the servants must labor mightily to preserve the trees. This contrasts with the Sovereign God of the Bible who accomplishes His purposes through the finished work of Christ. Furthermore, the text's insistence that OT saints knew 'Jesus' by name and practiced Christian ordinances destroys the biblical distinction between the Old and New Covenants (Hebrews 8:6-13).

Shared Values:

Condemnation of pride and materialism; Importance of sexual chastity; Belief in the necessity of Christ's atonement; Compassion for the poor

Friction Points:

- 1. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – Introduction of lost prophets (Zenos) and new scriptures (Plates of Jacob) as equal/superior to the Bible.
- 2. [Major] Sola Fide / Sola Gratia – Leaders must 'labor' to remove blood from their garments; salvation is linked to the success of the 'pruning'.
- 3. [Major] Christology / Progressive Revelation – Claims full knowledge of Jesus' name and office in 500 BC, flattening the biblical narrative arc.

Semantic Warnings:

"The Law of Moses"

In Text: A symbolic ritual system kept strictly to point to a fully known Christ.
Evangelical: A schoolmaster/guardian to lead to Christ, involving specific civil and ceremonial codes that were fulfilled (and ended) in Christ (Galatians 3:24).
Example: *Jacob 4:5 claims they keep the Law of Moses because it points to Christ, yet they seem to practice it alongside full Christian knowledge, blurring the dispensational lines.*

"Reconcile"

In Text: An act of the will to align with God through obedience and atonement.
Evangelical: The act of God removing the hostility between Himself and man through the cross (2 Corinthians 5:18-19).
Example: *Jacob 4:11 'reconcile yourselves to the will of God' places the onus on the human agent.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Entering into God's rest; avoiding the lake of fire; resurrection.
How Attained: Faith in Christ, keeping commandments, laboring in the vineyard, and reconciling oneself to God.
Basis of Assurance: Low assurance; dependent on 'laboring with might' and the leader's diligence.
Comparison to Sola Fide: Jacob 6:12 ('O be wise; what can I say more?') and the desperate labor of Jacob 5 contrast with the rest found in Hebrews 4 or the assurance in Romans 8:1. Salvation is a 'project' to be managed rather than a gift received.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

- 1. One wife only; no concubines (Jacob 2:27)
- 2. Do not revile against Lamanites because of their skin color (Jacob 3:9)
- 3. Labor diligently to persuade men to come unto Christ (Jacob 1:7)
- 4. Be familiar with all and free with substance (Jacob 2:17)

Implicit Obligations:

- 1. Keep detailed records on metal plates

2. Leaders must 'magnify their office' to avoid spiritual guilt
3. Seek riches only for the intent to do good

Ritual Requirements:

1. Teaching in the temple (Jacob 2:2)
2. Keeping the Law of Moses as a symbolic pointer to Christ (Jacob 4:5)

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In Jacob 2:24, God calls David's practice of having many wives 'abominable.' How does this fit with D&C 132:39, where God says David did not sin in that, but was given them by God?
2. Jacob 1:19 says leaders carry the sins of the people if they don't teach diligently. How do you handle that pressure, and how does that relate to Jesus bearing all sin on the cross?
3. Why does Jacob quote a prophet named Zenos (Jacob 5) who isn't in the Bible? If Zenos was so important that he knew the whole history of the world, why did the Jews lose his writings entirely?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Lord of the Vineyard weeping – This shows God's heart for the lost, similar to Jesus weeping over Jerusalem. It bridges to the Gospel by showing that God has indeed done 'more'—He sent His Son to die, not just to prune. [Luke 19:41, Romans 5:8]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Performance/Responsibility [Severe] – The 'Blood on Garments' doctrine (Jacob 1:19) creates immense anxiety for LDS missionaries and leaders, suggesting their own salvation is tied to their diligence in converting/teaching others.
2. Fear of Deception [Moderate] – The story of Sherem (Jacob 7) teaches that questioning the standard doctrine or asking for evidence is a sign of being 'of the devil' and can lead to divine judgment/death. This suppresses honest questions.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Direct revelation, 'Spirit of prophecy,' and physical plates.

Verification Method: Adherents are expected to believe the testimony of the writer; skeptics (like Sherem) are silenced by divine punishment.

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology encourages testing spirits (1 John 4:1) and searching scriptures (Acts 17:11). Jacob 7 presents a 'power encounter' where questioning the established doctrine results in death, discouraging intellectual inquiry or bereavement.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: Internal date: 544–421 B.C. Published: 1830.

Authorship: Attributed to Jacob (ancient); Critical view: Joseph Smith (19th century).

Textual Issues: Use of the word 'Adieu' (Jacob 7:27) in a text purporting to be ancient Reformed Egyptian/Hebrew origin is a famous anachronism, likely reflecting Smith's 19th-century vocabulary.