

JAROM

FAITH: Mormonism | TEXT: Book of Mormon | VOLUME: The Small Plates of Nephi | AUTHOR: Jarom (son of Enos)

OVERVIEW

The Book of Jarom is a brief entry in the Small Plates of Nephi, covering approximately 40 years (399–361 B.C.). Jarom, the son of Enos, writes primarily to preserve the genealogy and satisfy the commandment of his father. He explicitly declines to write new prophecies or revelations, arguing that the 'plan of salvation' has already been sufficiently revealed by his fathers. The text portrays a stark dichotomy between the Nephites and Lamanites: the Nephites are portrayed as industrious, wealthy, and observant of the Law of Moses, while the Lamanites are described as blood-drinking savages who love murder. Theologically, the book reinforces the 'Nephite Cycle': prosperity and land retention are contingent upon strict obedience to God's commandments. Jarom notes that prophets, priests, and teachers labored diligently, 'threatening' the people with destruction to keep them in line. A unique theological claim here is the observance of the Law of Moses combined with a belief in the Messiah 'as though he already was,' suggesting a fully developed Christian theology centuries before the Incarnation. The text also contains significant anachronisms regarding metallurgy and machinery.

KEY FIGURES

Jarom, Enos, Omni, The Messiah (prophesied), Lamanites (collective adversary)

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. THE NEPHITE COVENANT (CONDITIONAL PROSPERITY)

Assertion: Material prosperity and national survival are directly contingent upon strict obedience to commandments.

"Inasmuch as ye will keep my commandments ye shall prosper in the land. (Jarom 1:9)"

Evangelical Comparison: Evangelical theology teaches that while obedience honors God, the New Covenant does not guarantee material wealth or national security as a reward for behavior. The 'prosperity gospel' found in Jarom 1:9 links spiritual obedience directly to material outcomes ('rich in gold... and in silver' v8). In contrast, the New Testament emphasizes suffering for the sake of Christ and looking toward a heavenly city (Hebrews 11:13-16), rather than an earthly inheritance secured by works.

2. PROLEPTIC CHRISTIAN SOTERIOLOGY

Assertion: Ancient Nephites believed in and understood the specific person and work of Jesus Christ centuries before his birth.

"Persuading them to look forward unto the Messiah, and believe in him to come as though he already was. (Jarom 1:11)"

Evangelical Comparison: Biblically, the Old Testament saints had types, shadows, and prophecies, but the 'mystery' of Christ was 'kept secret for long ages' (Romans 16:25) and not fully revealed until the apostles (Ephesians 3:4-5). Jarom claims the Nephites understood the Messiah so clearly they could believe 'as though he already was' in 400 B.C., effectively flattening the distinction between the Old and New Testaments and rendering the Incarnation's revelatory uniqueness redundant.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The theological gap is threefold. First, Soteriology: Jarom teaches a 'survival by works' theology where God's mercy is a temporary stay of execution pending obedience (v3, v10). Second, Christology: The text claims a fullness of Christian knowledge (believing in him 'as though he already was') that bypasses the historical economy of salvation described in the Bible. Third, History: The text relies on material proofs (steel, machinery) that do not exist in the historical record, unlike the verifiable geography and culture of the Bible.

Shared Values:

Belief in a Messiah; Importance of repentance; Moral living (Law of Moses); Sabbath observance

Friction Points:

1. [Major] Sola Scriptura / Progressive Revelation – Claims full revelation of Christ and the plan of salvation centuries before the New Testament era.
2. [Critical] Sola Gratia (Grace Alone) – God's mercy is portrayed as a temporary holding pattern while prophets 'threaten' people into obedience to avoid destruction.
3. [Major] Theology of the Cross – Replaces the theology of the cross (suffering/weakness) with a theology of glory (wealth/machinery/military might).

Semantic Warnings:

"Plan of Salvation"

In Text: A system of ordinances and obedience revealed to Nephite fathers (v2).

Evangelical: The eternal purpose of God to redeem mankind through the finished work of Christ (Ephesians 1:4-7).

Example: *Jarom claims the plan was already revealed (v2), implying a static system rather than the unfolding biblical drama of redemption.*

"Prosper"

In Text: To become rich in gold, silver, and military strength (v8-9).

Evangelical: Often refers to spiritual maturity or the success of the soul (3 John 1:2), not necessarily material wealth.

Example: *In Jarom, prosperity is 'gold and silver' (v8). In the NT, the apostles were 'poor, yet making many rich' (2 Cor 6:10).*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Primarily defined in this text as preservation from physical destruction and Lamanite conquest.

How Attained: Through strict obedience to the Law of Moses and heeding the 'threats' of the prophets.

Basis of Assurance: Material prosperity is the visible evidence of divine favor.

Comparison to Sola Fide: Jarom 1:9 ('Inasmuch as ye will keep my commandments ye shall prosper') is a conditional covenant of works, contrasting with Romans 3:28 ('justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law').

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Keep the commandments to prosper (v9)
2. Keep the Law of Moses (v5)
3. Keep the Sabbath holy (v5)
4. Keep genealogy (v1)

Implicit Obligations:

1. Fortify cities against enemies (v7)
2. Labor diligently to warn others (v11)
3. Look forward to the Messiah (v11)

Ritual Requirements:

1. Observance of the Law of Moses (v5)
2. Sabbath observance (v5)

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. Jarom 1:2 mentions that the 'plan of salvation' was already revealed. How does this fit with the biblical idea that the mystery of Christ was not fully made known until the apostles (Ephesians 3:5)?

2. In verse 10, the prophets 'threaten' the people to keep them from transgression. How does this compare to the motivation of grace described in Romans 2:4 ('God's kindness leads you to repentance')?
3. Verse 8 mentions the Nephites had machinery, steel, and tools. Why do you think archaeologists haven't found evidence of these technologies in the Americas from 400 B.C.?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Longing for a Mediator – The text shows a people needing more than just the Law; they needed a Person. This longing is fulfilled in Jesus. [Galatians 4:4-5 ('But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son...')]
2. Mercy amidst Hardness – Even in a text focused on works, there is an admission that the people deserve judgment but receive patience. This points to God's character. [Romans 2:4 ('Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience?')]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Fear of Destruction [Severe] – The believer is motivated by 'threats' of destruction (v10). This creates a relationship with God based on fear of annihilation rather than assurance of adoption.
2. Performance-Based Prosperity [Moderate] – If a believer suffers financial or physical setbacks, the theology of Jarom 1:9 implies it is due to a lack of obedience ('Inasmuch as ye will keep my commandments ye shall prosper'). This adds guilt to suffering.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Revelation, Tradition (Fathers' writings), and Conditional Spiritual Communion

Verification Method: Communion with the Holy Spirit is granted based on not being 'stiffnecked' and having faith (v4).

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical knowledge is anchored in the objective Word of God (2 Timothy 3:16), accessible to all believers. Jarom implies a subjective spiritual experience contingent on moral performance ('as many as are not stiffnecked').

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: Internal date: ~399-361 B.C. Published: 1830.

Authorship: Attributed to Jarom; Critical consensus posits Joseph Smith.

Textual Issues: The phrase 'machinery' (v8) is linguistically anachronistic for a translation of an ancient text, reflecting 19th-century industrial terminology.