

# ENCYCLOPEDIA OF MORMONISM

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## JACKSON COUNTY

See: Missouri; LDS Communities in Jackson and Clay Counties

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## JACOB, SON OF LEHI

Jacob was the fifth son of LEHI and Sariah and the elder of the two sons born during the days of his parents' wilderness tribulation. His birth apparently occurred soon after the family left JERUSALEM (c. 599 B.C.). Jacob's life demonstrated him to be a spiritual leader: He was a defender of the faith, keeper of the sacred records, visionary, doctrinal teacher, expressive writer, and plainspoken servant of Christ.

From birth, Jacob was a child of affliction. As Lehi's firstborn in the wilderness, he never knew the family's earlier life in Jerusalem or indeed any period of sustained family harmony. Rather, he grew up knowing only the hardships of a nomadic life, coupled with deepening dissensions between his two oldest brothers and the rest of the family—conflicts that would erupt into open violence before Jacob was forty years old (2 Ne. 5:34). This bitter family strife, which nearly killed his parents from grief on the sea voyage from the Near East to the Western Hemisphere, deeply distressed young

Jacob as well. Nephi records that Jacob and his younger brother, Joseph, "grieved because of the afflictions of their mother" while on the ship (1 Ne. 18:19). Lehi told young Jacob in a farewell blessing, "Thou hast suffered afflictions and much sorrow, because of the rudeness of thy brethren" (2 Ne. 2:1). Nevertheless, Lehi assured him that God "shall consecrate thine afflictions for thy gain" (2 Ne. 2:2).

Long affliction seems to have rendered Jacob all the more spiritually sensitive, and he became one of the most profound doctrinal teachers in the Book of Mormon. Near the time of his death, he summarized the harsh, melancholic conditions of his life in words of haunting beauty and deep humanity: "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).

Lehi blessed Jacob to spend his days in the service of God and to live safely with NEPHI<sub>1</sub> (2 Ne. 2:3). From his youth to his death, Jacob indeed labored in the Lord's service (2 Ne. 5:26; Jacob 1:18), working closely with Nephi for many years. Nephi consecrated him a priest and a teacher (Jacob 1:18; 2 Ne. 5:26; 6:2), recorded one of his sermons (2 Ne. 6–10), and gave him a stewardship

over the records on the small PLATES and other sacred objects (Jacob 1:2). This latter fact had notable consequences for the Book of Mormon, for all subsequent authors of the small plates were direct descendants of Jacob (*see* BOOK OF MORMON: BOOK OF ENOS; BOOK OF JAROM; BOOK OF OMNI).

Jacob was a powerful personal witness of the anticipated Redeemer, which was his most prominent theme. Nephi noted that “Jacob also has seen him [the premortal Christ] as I have seen him” (2 Ne. 11:3), and Lehi indicated that it was in his youth that Jacob had beheld the glory of the Lord (2 Ne. 2:4). So firm was Jacob’s faith in Christ that Sherem, an anti-Christ, could not shake him by subtle argument, for, declared Jacob, “I truly had seen angels, and they had ministered unto me. And also, I had heard the voice of the Lord speaking unto me in very word, from time to time” (Jacob 7:5; cf. 7:12). Jacob was the first Nephite prophet to reveal that the Savior would be called Christ, having received that information from an angel (2 Ne. 10:3). He characterized his ministry as persuading his people to come unto Christ (Jacob 1:7). Likewise, he explained that he wrote on the plates so that future generations “may know that we knew of Christ, and we had a hope of his glory many hundred years before his coming” (Jacob 4:1–4). (Note: “Christ” is a Greek-English title, equivalent to Hebrew “Messiah,” and it means “anointed,” that is, divinely appointed as the Savior of mankind.)

A second prominent theme in the book of Jacob is the scattering and subsequent gathering of ISRAEL. Jacob spoke often and longingly of the Lord’s promises to scattered Israel. In his first sermon in the Book of Mormon, Jacob quoted and commented extensively on Isaiah 50 about Israel’s restoration (2 Ne. 6–8), assuring his people that “the Lord remembereth all them who have been broken off, wherefore he remembereth us also” (2 Ne. 10:22). Likewise, Jacob quoted the words of a prophet named ZENOS, in which God’s love for the scattered branches of Israel was depicted through an allegory of the olive trees. “How merciful is our God unto us,” exclaimed Jacob as he explained the allegory to his people, “for he remembereth the house of Israel, both roots and branches” (Jacob 6:4).

Jacob employed a unique style, the distinctive features of which are conspicuous in an exhortation in which he condemned the pride, materialism,

and unchastity of his people. He began his sermon by confessing his “anxiety” over his people and over his painful duty to rebuke them for their sins (Jacob 2:3). In like fashion, Jacob prefaced his two other discourses by alluding to his “anxiety” (2 Ne. 6:3; Jacob 4:18). No other Book of Mormon prophet so begins a sermon; indeed, half the references to “anxiety” in the Book of Mormon occur in his writing.

Jacob’s stylistic stamp is also evident in other features throughout his writings, which are replete with a vivid, intimate vocabulary either unique to him or disproportionately present. Two-thirds of the uses of “grieve” and “tender” (or their derivatives) are attributable to Jacob. Likewise, he is the only Book of Mormon author to use “delicate,” “contempt,” “lonesome,” “sobbing,” “dread,” and “daggers.” He deploys this last term in a metaphor about spiritual anguish: “daggers placed to pierce their souls and wound their delicate minds” (Jacob 2:9). Similarly, Jacob alone uses “wound” in reference to emotions, and never uses it (as do many others) to describe a physical injury. Jacob uses “pierce” or its variants four of nine instances in the Book of Mormon, and he alone uses it in a spiritual sense.

Such stylistic evidence suggests that Jacob lived close to his feelings and was gifted in expressing them. Moreover, the complex consistency of his style, linking as it does widely separated passages from two different books (2 Nephi and Jacob), bears out the portrait of the man that emerges from the narrative. Story, style, and subject matter all reveal Jacob, Lehi’s child of tribulation, to have become a sensitive and effective poet-prophet, preacher, writer, and powerful witness of Jesus Christ.

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