

Comments on Jacob 7

As mentioned in the comments on 6:13, it is likely this chapter is an amendment after Jacob had intended to end his portion of the plates.

This chapter presents something of a face off between Jacob, the spiritual leader of the Nephites, and a man named Sherem who uses sophistry to argue the Law of Moses does not suggest anything Messianic whatsoever.

The text of the chapter, particularly Sherem's confession prior to his death, can be arranged in an inverted parallelism based upon subject, as follows:

A - 1 And now it came to pass after some years had passed away, there came a man among the people of Nephi, whose name was Sherem. 2 And it came to pass that he began to preach among the people, and to declare unto them that there should be no Christ. And he preached many things which were flattering unto the people; and this he did that he might overthrow the doctrine of Christ. 3 And he labored diligently that he might lead away the hearts of the people, insomuch that he did lead away many hearts;

B - and he knowing that I, Jacob, had faith in Christ who should come, he sought much opportunity that he might come unto me. 4 And he was learned, that he had a perfect knowledge of the language of the people; wherefore, he could use much flattery, and much power of speech, according to the power of the devil... 14 And I said unto him: What am I that I should tempt God to show unto thee a sign in the thing which thou knowest to be true? Yet thou wilt deny it, because thou art of the devil. Nevertheless, not my will be done; but if God shall smite thee, let that be a sign unto thee that he has power, both in heaven and in earth; and also, that Christ shall come. And thy will, O Lord, be done, and not mine.

C - 15 And it came to pass that when I, Jacob, had spoken these words, the power of the Lord came upon him, insomuch that he fell to the earth. And it came to pass that he was nourished for the space of many days.

D - 16 And it came to pass that he said unto the people: Gather together on the morrow, for I shall die; wherefore, I desire to speak unto the people before I shall die.

E - 17 And it came to pass that on the morrow the multitude were gathered together; and he spake plainly unto them and denied the things which he had taught them, and confessed the Christ, and the power of the Holy Ghost, and the ministering of angels.

F - 18 And he spake plainly unto them, that he had been deceived by the power of the devil.

F - And he spake of hell, and of eternity,
and of eternal punishment.

E - 19 And he said: I fear lest I have committed
the unpardonable sin, for I have lied unto God;
for I denied the Christ, and said that I
believed the scriptures; and they truly testify
of him.

D - And because I have thus lied unto God I greatly
fear lest my case shall be awful; but I confess unto
God. 20 And it came to pass that when he had said
these words he could say no more, and he gave up the
ghost.

C - 21 And when the multitude had witnessed that he spake
these things as he was about to give up the ghost, they were
astonished exceedingly; insomuch that the power of God came
down upon them, and they were overcome that they fell to the
earth.

B - 22 Now, this thing was pleasing unto me, Jacob, for I had
requested it of my Father who was in heaven; for he had heard my
cry and answered my prayer.

A - 23 And it came to pass that peace and the love of God was restored
again among the people; and they searched the scriptures, and hearkened
no more to the words of this wicked man.

The first B section is quite large (v. 3c-14), and that throws
off the balance of the text, but the center section is better
balanced.

Overall, the structure presents Jacob as quite pragmatic,
particularly in the length of the first B section contrasted with
the brevity of the second B section. The first B section details
a rather hostile and unpleasant confrontation, but in the second
B section all is well that ends well as Jacob is pleased with the
outcome.

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and much power of speech, according to the power of the devil. 5
And he had hope to shake me from the faith, notwithstanding the**

many revelations and the many things which I had seen concerning these things; for 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; wherefore, I could not be shaken.

v1-5 A man named Sherem comes among the Nephites (v. 1) and preaches against Messianism. He employs sophistry and flattering speech (v. 4) in an effort to persuade the people (v. 2). He preaches quite a lot among the people and leads many of them away after his doctrine. He then sets his sights on the spiritual leader of the Nephites (v. 3), who happens to be the author. His intent is to shake Jacob from his faith, the obvious implication being if the spiritual leader of the people is overthrown then the battle is won. However, Sherem is unaware of the strength of Jacob's faith as he has seen angels and received revelations from the voice of the Lord Himself (v. 5).

v1 "there came a man among the people of Nephi", this suggests Sherem was not a Nephite. The straightforward interpretation is Sherem was a Lamanite.

However, there are some who argue Sherem was in fact not a Lehite at all, but rather was part of some other population. Why do people argue this? Because they are attempting to reconcile the views of contemporary Anthropology with the writings of the BofM. As such, they are looking for proof texts supporting the hypothesis that there were others present in the New World besides just the Lehaites. The ambiguity of this text, as it fails to explicitly identify Sherem's origins, lends itself to such an argument.

Such a reading is problematic, as it is likely Sherem was a Lamanite. While there were hostilities between the Lamanites and Nephites, v. 24 indicates there was some degree of communication between them (also cp. Enos 1:20). Sherem also calls Jacob "brother" in v. 6, and as they certainly aren't religious "brothers", so they must be "brothers" in some other sense, being related is an obvious probability.

Also consider Sherem's argument. He forwards a non-Messianic version of the Law of Moses. If he wasn't of Lehite origin, where would his knowledge of the Law come from? The people of Zarahemla had no written record (cf. Omni 1:17), and the Jaredites certainly had no access to the Law of Moses.

Furthermore, when Sherem shows up, there is nothing noting his appearance as being remarkable as the later discovery of the Mulekite is (cf. Omni 1:15).

Then in v. 24, immediately after Sherem's demise, Jacob goes on to say that they were trying to proselyte the Lamanites, but it was largely unsuccessful given their hardness. Given the proximity of the comment to the account with Sherem it is likely

this is a comment on Sherem's behavior being representative of the Lamanites in general.

Thus, the evidence from the text points to Sherem being a Lamanite.

v3 "he sought much opportunity that he might come unto me", was Jacob avoiding him? Was Jacob too busy with other things? Was Sherem seeking a public debate, and Jacob refused to participate? We are left to speculate.

v4 When people use rhetoric and sophistry to persuade others then they are not appealing to truth or logic, they are merely using their facility with language as a means of winning the debate regardless of the substance or merit of their position. In this case, rhetoric and sophistry become a tool of the devil because it overthrows truth in favor of popular appeal and adulation.

6 And it came to pass that he came unto me, and on this wise did he speak unto me, saying: Brother Jacob, I have sought much opportunity that I might speak unto you; for I have heard and also know that thou goest about much, preaching that which ye call the gospel, or the doctrine of Christ. 7 And ye have led away much of this people that they pervert the right way of God, and keep not the law of Moses which is the right way; and convert the law of Moses into the worship of a being which ye say shall come many hundred years hence. And now behold, I, Sherem, declare unto you that this is blasphemy; for no man knoweth of such things; for he cannot tell of things to come. And after this manner did Sherem contend against me.

8 But behold, the Lord God poured in his Spirit into my soul, insomuch that I did confound him in all his words. 9 And I said unto him: Deniest thou the Christ who shall come? And he said: If there should be a Christ, I would not deny him; but I know that there is no Christ, neither has been, nor ever will be. 10 And I said unto him: Believest thou the scriptures? And he said, Yea. 11 And I said unto him: Then ye do not understand them; for they truly testify of Christ. Behold, I say unto you that none of the prophets have written, nor prophesied, save they have spoken concerning this Christ. 12 And this is not all--it has been made manifest unto me, for I have heard and seen; and it also has been made manifest unto me by the power of the Holy Ghost; wherefore, I know if there should be no atonement made all mankind must be lost.

13 And it came to pass that he said unto me: Show me a sign by this power of the Holy Ghost, in the which ye know so much. 14 And I said unto him: What am I that I should tempt God to show unto thee a sign in the thing which thou knowest to be true? Yet thou wilt deny it, because thou art of the devil. Nevertheless, not my will be done; but if God shall smite thee, let that be a

sign unto thee that he has power, both in heaven and in earth; and also, that Christ shall come. And thy will, O Lord, be done, and not mine. 15 And it came to pass that when I, Jacob, had spoken these words, the power of the Lord came upon him, insomuch that he fell to the earth. And it came to pass that he was nourished for the space of many days.

v6-15 The confrontation. Sherem questions Jacob's teachings about the Messiah (v. 6) insisting he is perverting the Law of Moses in doing so, because no man can know the future, and therefore offending God (v. 7). While Sherem is filled with the contention of the devil (v. 4), Jacob is filled with the Spirit of God and this enabled him to confound Sherem's sophistry (v. 8).

Jacob asks Sherem if he denies Christ who shall come. Sherem responds that he knows there will be no Christ (v. 9). Jacob asks him if he believes in the Scriptures, and Sherem answers affirmatively (v. 10). The Jacob states that Sherem does not understand them because all of the prophets testify of Christ (v. 11). Jacob then bears down on Sherem with his own personal revelations regarding Christ (v. 12).

Sherem, his sophistry having abandoned him in the face of Jacob's personal experience, responds by demanding proof in a sign (v. 13). Jacob rejects Sherem's demand for a sign saying he is in no position to tempt God, especially when Sherem would just deny any sign given to him. But, Jacob defers to God's judgement, and if God so chooses to strike Sherem, then that will be his sign (v. 14).

The Lord does end up providing the sign and Sherem is struck, such that he collapses to the earth, and has to be sustained by others for some time (v. 15).

v9 Sherem's sophistry fails him as he contradicts himself in stating he knows there will be no Christ. In v. 7 he insists no man can know the future. If this is the case, then how can he know that no Christ will come? He cannot.

v13 His demand for a sign by the Holy Spirit could easily been seen as mockery given the "in the which ye know so much". Sherem would be mocking him because, as far as he is concerned, Jacob cannot produce any sign by something he considers to be imaginary.

v15 "he was nourished for the space of many days", since his being struck down ultimately results in his physical death, the nourishing here is probably physical as well, as in he has to be spoon fed.

16 And it came to pass that he said unto the people: Gather

together on the morrow, for I shall die; wherefore, I desire to speak unto the people before I shall die. 17 And it came to pass that on the morrow the multitude were gathered together; and he spake plainly unto them and denied the things which he had taught them, and confessed the Christ, and the power of the Holy Ghost, and the ministering of angels. 18 And he spake plainly unto them, that he had been deceived by the power of the devil. And he spake of hell, and of eternity, and of eternal punishment. 19 And he said: I fear lest I have committed the unpardonable sin, for I have lied unto God; for I denied the Christ, and said that I believed the scriptures; and they truly testify of him. And because I have thus lied unto God I greatly fear lest my case shall be awful; but I confess unto God. 20 And it came to pass that when he had said these words he could say no more, and he gave up the ghost.

21 And when the multitude had witnessed that he spake these things as he was about to give up the ghost, they were astonished exceedingly; insomuch that the power of God came down upon them, and they were overcome that they fell to the earth. 22 Now, this thing was pleasing unto me, Jacob, for I had requested it of my Father who was in heaven; for he had heard my cry and answered my prayer. 23 And it came to pass that peace and the love of God was restored again among the people; and they searched the scriptures, and hearkened no more to the words of this wicked man.

v16-23 Sherem summons the people to him because he knows he is to die soon (v. 16). When they gather he denies his own teachings, confesses Christ (v. 17), and states plainly he was deceived by Satan and so may be punished eternally for his actions (v. 18). Sherem expresses his fears that he may have committed a sin that is unpardonable in rejected Christ (v. 19), and as he does so he dies (v. 20).

When the people witness Sherem's confessions and dying breath, they are stunned, overwhelmed by the power of God, and they collapse (v. 21). Jacob is pleased to see this happen (v. 22) because he had requested of God that peace and unity in worship be restored among the Nephites (v. 23).

v16 "the people", presumably those spoken of in v. 3 who had followed him.

v21 The people are stunned by Sherem's confession. This suggests the confrontation between him and Jacob occurred in private and not publicly. If it had occurred publicly the people would have known about Sherem being struck by a miracle and it wouldn't have been such a shock to have him confess in this manner.

24 And it came to pass that many means were devised to reclaim

and restore the Lamanites to the knowledge of the truth; but it all was vain, for they delighted in wars and bloodshed, and they had an eternal hatred against us, their brethren. And they sought by the power of their arms to destroy us continually. 25 Wherefore, the people of Nephi did fortify against them with their arms, and with all their might, trusting in the God and rock of their salvation; wherefore, they became as yet, conquerors of their enemies.

v24-25 Jacob then mentions they tried considerably to restore the Lamanites to the truth, but they were too hardened and too bent on war (v. 24), and so the Nephites ended up fortifying themselves against them and relying upon God to protect them (v. 25).

This following immediately after the Sherem account suggests Sherem's behavior was representative of the hardness of the Lamanites, and what it would take to get them to change.

26 And it came to pass that I, Jacob, began to be old; and the record of this people being kept on the other plates of Nephi, wherefore, I conclude this record, declaring that I have written according to the best of my knowledge, by saying that the time passed away with us, and also 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.

27 And I, Jacob, saw that I must soon go down to my grave; wherefore, I said unto my son Enos: Take these plates. And I told him the things which my brother Nephi had commanded me, and he promised obedience unto the commands. And I make an end of my writing upon these plates, which writing has been small; and to the reader I bid farewell, hoping that many of my brethren may read my words. Brethren, adieu.

v26-27 Jacob closes his portion of the small plates on a sad note with a lament over the situation they find themselves in (v. 26). He then recounts the command from Nephi to his own son and transfers possession of the plates to him, and bids the reader farewell.

v27 "adieu", critics of the Book of Mormon argue this French word is an anachronism, but in her article entitled Adieu: The Right Word After All, Angela M. Crowell shows plainly the translation of the Hebrew to this French word which was in common use among English speakers was appropriate. The article is online at:

<http://www.restoredcovenant.org/Document.asp?CAT=Hebrew+Nature&DOC=Adieu%3A+The+Right+Word+After+All>

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