

# JACOB 1-4

John W. Welch Notes



## Jacob 1

### **Jacob 1:1-4 — Keeping the Small Plates**

At the beginning of his book, Jacob states the essence of the commandment that Nephi gave to him pertaining to writing on the Small Plates. He was told to touch only lightly on the history, to record sacred preaching, to summarize great prophecies, and do this all for Christ's sake. Interestingly, Jacob does exactly that. We don't get much history in the book of Jacob. His preaching in Jacob 2-3 deals with sacred matters, including chastity and consecration. His summations in Jacob 4 and 6 of the prophecy of Zenos in chapter 5 help focus the allegory of the olive tree on Christ. And the episode with Sherem in Jacob 7 affirms, for the peace and benefit of the people, the legitimacy of prophesying about the coming Christ (doing this is not false prophecy), of teaching the people to worship Christ (doing this is not leading people into apostasy), and of calling Christ a divine being (doing that is not blasphemy), as Sherem had accused.

Furthermore, in verses 5-8, Jacob certifies that he and his people had received many revelations, and that they labored to bring people to Christ and not to offend God, which would disqualify them from remaining in their new land of promise. He specifically stated that he took it upon himself to fulfill the commandment of his brother Nephi. Some people wonder why the books on the Small Plates are so short. One reason is that these authors all follow Nephi's specific instructions very meticulously as their guiding instruction.

**Further Reading**

Book of Mormon Central, "[Why Do the Authors on the Small Plates Follow a Pattern? \(Jacob 7:27\)](#)," *KnoWhy* 74 (April 8, 2016).

John W. Welch, "[The Father's Command to Keep Records in the Small Plates of Nephi](#)," *FARMS Preliminary Report* (September 1984), 1–12.

**Jacob 1:10 — Nephi Was a Protector and Father Figure to Jacob**

In verse 10, anticipating Nephi's impending death, Jacob went out of his way to ensure that his loyalty and close relationship with Nephi was clearly understood. I'm sure Jacob felt a great loss, just like Nephi did, when his father Lehi died. It should be remembered that Jacob was a fairly young man when Lehi died, and so it is understandable that Nephi, who was probably at least twenty years his senior, naturally became a protector and a strong father figure to him, defending his people and laboring for their welfare. In many ways, Nephi was seen as modeling good kingship and leadership.

**Jacob 1:13 — Jacob Lists the Seven Tribes of Lehi**

Even though 2 Nephi 5:6 gives a good overview of the lineages who supported Nephi, as discussed above regarding that verse, this is the first time in the Book of Mormon where it is stated that Lehi's colony was in fact fully divided into seven distinct tribes. These tribal designations are repeated in 4 Nephi 1:36–37, Mormon 1:8, and even in D&C 3:16–18. Seven was a sacred number in ancient Israel, which may explain, at least in part, why these seven tribes lasted for approximately 1,000 years of Nephite and Lamanite history. Interestingly, seven was also a sacred number among ancient Mesoamerican societies, and various legends from that region of the world depict their peoples as having emerged from seven caves or lineages. While no definitive connection can be made between these legends and the Book of Mormon, the relationship is certainly intriguing and may point to a shared historical setting.

**Further Reading**

Book of Mormon Central, "[Why Did Lehi Divide His People into Seven Tribes? \(Jacob 1:13\)](#)," *KnoWhy* 319 (May 29, 2017).

Diane E. Wirth, "[Revisiting the Seven Lineages of the Book of Mormon and the Seven Tribes of Mesoamerica](#)," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 52, no. 4 (2013): 77–88.

**Jacob 1:15–16 — The Nephites Began to Commit Many Sins**

Jacob doesn't jump right out of the starting block and hit them over the head by saying, "You guys are all awful." Instead, he says, "I know you're *beginning* to ... ." There are lots of things we can do to help someone who is having problems, but one of them is to put them in a good mood, build a positive relationship with them to where they will

want to listen to inspired counsel. If they feel accused, if you make them feel defensive, if you come on too strong right away, then they will likely either disengage or push back. I think that Jacob isn't being condescending here. He is trying to help these people *want* to see their problems.

### **Jacob 1:17–19 — Jacob, the High Priest, Magnifies His Calling**

Without question, the high priest in ancient Israel had to be especially assiduous about his worthiness and purity. If the Lord was going to be able to bless his people and reveal his will, he had to be able to speak to a high priest who was worthy. We read in Jewish literature about the great lengths that the Jews anciently went to in order to be sure that that high priest was pure, and a lot of it had to do with the family of the high priest. He had to be married, and he had to be living in a righteous home. How can you lead the people if you can't lead your own family?

This requirement is reflected in Paul's writings in 1 Timothy 3:1–7, but it is also part of the long-standing Jewish, priestly tradition. They were so concerned about the high priest being righteously married that they had a stand-by bride ready to go, someone designated, that if the high priest's wife should all of a sudden keel over dead, she would be there and she would be married to him within minutes of the time she died, so he always had a home. Well, there are reasons for this—probably lots of them—and a similar attitude is reflected in Jacob's writings. He is likewise concerned about righteousness, purity, avoiding abominations, and having a righteous family and home. These themes come up throughout his writings.

It is also worth considering how fragile Jacob's people were at this time. After Lehi's death, they must have felt awfully concerned when the group split up into different factions. They likely worried that the Lamanites, Lemuelites, and Ishmaelites would either attack them militarily or weaken them morally through marriages or other social interactions. What happens if somehow Jacob drops the ball? Who is going to pick it up? Who will carry this on? Who will talk about where their people came from? Who will reveal the mind and will of the Lord?

Civilization is actually pretty fragile. Even in the modern day, we think "Oh, civilization will carry on. We have books, and we have a lot of buildings and things that really stabilize who we are." But society changes quickly, and we have seen it in the last 10–15 years. I think the shift was even more dramatic for Jacob's people. He clearly felt a great sense of responsibility, and I think we can learn a lesson from his diligent concern for his people at that crucial time in their existence.

Jacob and his brother Joseph were set apart by Nephi and consecrated as priests. They were given the responsibility of preaching the gospel to their people, and we see them doing that at the temple. We also see their understanding that if they didn't preach with all diligence, the sins of the people would be on their own heads. So they are extremely serious about that, and my guess is that when they were set apart they were given clear instructions about their responsibilities.

I think that when a leader knows that the people under his stewardship have a problem, he indeed has a responsibility to address it. Did Jacob know there was a problem? Yes. He makes this very clear. In essence, he says, "You're not fooling anybody you guys. The jig is up here." He knew exactly what was going on out there, even though he was spending so much time focusing on the temple. He was aware of the problem, and he couldn't ignore it.

D&C 121:43 speaks well of reproofing others "with sharpness, *when moved upon by the Spirit.*" And here in Jacob 1:17 it says that that before addressing the people, Jacob "first obtained [his] errand from the Lord." So he is speaking with sharpness because he has been moved by the spirit to do so. And then D&C 121 says that after we have been moved upon by the spirit and have spoken sharply, we still need to show an "an increase of love toward him whom thou hast reproofed, lest he esteem thee to be his enemy" (121:43). We can't just say, "God told me to say that, so I can get away with it." We have to show extra love in conjunction with any sharp words that we feel inspired to speak.

Often when people get bad news their reaction is, of course, to kill the messenger. Yet Jacob is so explicit about where he got his assignment that to reject his message would be to reject the Lord. When trying to help people, whether my grandchildren or those I was responsible for in my church assignments, I have never had someone react badly if I have honestly said, "I feel strongly that the Lord would like you to hear this message." No matter how hard the news is, they didn't blame me. Now they may not accept it, but it makes the message clearer and more understandable. It puts it in the right framework. I'm not telling them they ought to change, but if I in good conscience can say that I have felt inspired to say this, then they take it much better.

Sometimes the Spirit moves you to say things you wouldn't otherwise say, and maybe even that you would rather not say. In such cases, however, one must be confident that one's errand truly is from the Lord. The last thing the Lord needs is for members of his kingdom to go forth, without his errand, and unjustly, untactfully, or inappropriately reprove others, whether their faults are real or only perceived.

I think the right way to approach giving reproof is modeled very well here by Jacob. He may have never said anything like this before to these people. If he was just a younger brother to Nephi and kind of tucked away in the temple a lot of the time and all of a

sudden he comes out, this probably was really out of character for him. I suspect his people were really quite startled. We don't know what the outcome was. Jacob doesn't say, but at least he did his job. That seems to be the important message. He did his job and not only were his people warned, but we get the same warning today because Jacob recorded this important speech.

## Jacob 2

### **Jacob 2:1 — What Were the Circumstances of Jacob's Sermon?**

Three times a year under the Law of Moses, men, women, and children had to come to the temple. These were festival days, such as the Feast of Tabernacles, and they were filled with feasting, rejoicing, celebration, glorifying God, being grateful for the giving of the law, and the performing of sacrifices to atone for all sins. Even the Day of Atonement—which begins with fasting, prayer, and mourning—ends with a great time of jubilation as the people rejoice about how they have been blessed. It also may have been the coronation of the second Nephite king. So it was likely a big event with a big gathering, and may have had multiple sessions. Despite the many activities going on, Jacob's sermon was possibly the first order of business. And it seems to me that the people might have been a little surprised at what he told them.

According to Deuteronomy 31:9–13, the Levitical priests were required to read the law so that the people could hear the word of the Lord. They were to be taught the same thing over and over, much like we are today. But there is also here a sense that this is sort of General Conference, and that Jacob was inspired to deliver a particular message to the people, based on their needs. Jacob declared in the previous chapter that before giving his speech, he “first obtained [his] errand from the Lord” (Jacob 1:17). I can't imagine him having the courage to address such difficult topics without the Lord's mandate. King Benjamin essentially says the same thing in his speech, declaring that “the things which I shall tell you are made known unto me by an angel from God” (Mosiah 3:2). So, in both cases, these prophets emphasize that their message is indeed the word of the Lord, even though it may not have been a rote presentation of the law.

### **Jacob 2:4–5 — The Nephites Begin to Labor in Sin**

Jacob says, “For behold, as yet, ye have been obedient unto the word of the Lord, which I have given unto you” (Jacob 2:4). Apparently they were at least outwardly performing the ordinances of the temple, whatever those were. But then Jacob follows up this statement by declaring, “But behold, hearken ye unto me, and know that by the help of the all-powerful Creator of heaven and earth I can tell you concerning your thoughts,

how that ye are beginning to labor in sin, which sin appeareth very abominable unto me, yea, and abominable unto God" (Jacob 2:5).

Over and over again, the authors of these small plates tell us that the Nephites were strict in observing the Law of Moses, and several centuries later, at this same temple, King Noah will perform daily sacrifices. Yet, speaking to Noah and his priests, Abinadi basically said, "You do this, you go through the motions, but you're just doing it mechanically; you don't understand what it's all about, and you're not doing it righteously." It is possible that the people in Jacob's day had similarly misunderstood the meaning of the ordinances set forth in the Law of Moses. The daily sacrifices at the temple would have been the thank offerings of bread and of grain, and there are a number of those. There were also atonement sacrifices. If people had committed a sin of some kind, they needed to bring an atonement sacrifice and, of course, those are symbols of the Atonement of Jesus Christ. Nephite prophets understood that the Law of Moses just looks forward to the great sacrifice that will come (Mosiah 13:27–28). But the people generally were prone to obey the outward ordinances but fail to live up to the other commandments and standards of the Lord.

Jacob's language indicates that this is just a preliminary happening—the people are only now just "*beginning* to labor in sin" (Jacob 2:5). And he indicates that he only knows the extent of this problem because the Lord is revealing it to him. So there is an element of prophecy here. On several occasions in chapter 2, Jacob says that he is absolutely obligated to address this issue—he *must* tell them of their wickedness. He says:

- "I **must** testify unto you concerning the wickedness of your hearts" (v. 6).
- "And also it grieveth me that I **must** use so much boldness of speech concerning you" (v. 7)
- "Wherefore, I **must** tell you the truth according to the plainness of the word of God" (v. 11)
- "I **must** speak unto you concerning a grosser crime" (v. 22)

The first one is interesting because Jacob focuses on the wickedness of their "hearts." There are several other occasions during the speech where he similarly emphasizes thoughts and intentions. So it is clearly more than just their *doings*. I think most of us have experienced that nanosecond when we know something is not right, and we are left to choose what to think or how to act, knowing fairly clearly which path will lead away from God. In some cases, the warnings from the Spirit are much more than a nanosecond; they provide a very clear and sustained understanding that something is wrong. It is by entertaining sinful thoughts and desires in our hearts that the seeds of disobedient or rebellious actions are planted within us.

### **Jacob 2:7–9 — Jacob Preaches Repentance in a Temple and Family Setting**

We don't know at what point Jacob delivered his message on this apparently notable occasion, but we know that there was a lot of doctrine being taught. They are at the temple (Jacob 1:17). Families are present. The Spirit is present. It is the type of setting where someone's heart can be touched when the prophet stands up and lovingly but sternly testifies of the peoples' sins. Jacob no doubt expressed a lot of love to them prior to this. It is clear, from his anxiety for his people, that he was truly a caring person. I'm sure he was beloved by the people, and so their hearts were likely in the very best possible place to receive his instruction.

I understand that many women, when they have been in some way betrayed by their husbands, tend to place the blame themselves. They wrongly think they have done something wrong, and that it is all their fault. So to hear someone like Jacob saying "this is not your fault at all" must have been very consoling. Church leaders today say this same kind of thing all the time, and for good reason. Thus, while Jacob's message was painful to both husbands and wives and children, he did his best to console their wounded hearts.

#### **Further Reading**

Jeffrey R. Holland, "Place No More for the Enemy of My Soul," *Ensign*, May 2010, online at churchofjesuschrist.org.

### **Jacob 2:12–13 — The Search for Gold and Silver Hints at "Outsiders"**

How large can this community be? Not very big unless—as many people now believe—they had begun to interact and mix with indigenous peoples. After all, why else would you need gold and silver, unless you are trading with other people for commodities that are now precious and valuable? Similarly, the only reason that many early pioneers in Utah wanted to have gold is so they could buy things that they could import from people coming across the Oregon Trail.

#### **Further Reading**

Book of Mormon Central, "Did 'Others' Influence Book of Mormon Peoples? (Jacob 3:13)," *KnoWhy* 435 (May 22, 2018).

### **Jacob 2:17–19 — When Is It Appropriate to Seek for Money?**

In these verses, Jacob issues one of the most trenchant sayings in scripture about wealth. Remember back in 2 Nephi 9:29, Jacob had famously said, "To be learned is good if they hearken unto the counsels of God." And he followed that statement by placing a wo upon the rich who "despise the poor and persecute the meek" (2 Nephi 9:30). True to form, here in Jacob 2:18, he similarly said, "before ye seek for riches, seek ye for the

kingdom of God,” and in 2:19, “after ye have obtained a hope in Christ, ye shall obtain riches, if ye seek them; and ye will seek them for the intent to do good—to clothe the naked, to feed the hungry, to liberate the captive, and administer relief to the sick and the afflicted.” Placing God ahead of seeking worldly things, and using riches or knowledge to bless those in need, were consistent and persistent admonitions of Jacob.

Never in Jacob’s young life had he had opportunities to obtain either higher education or worldly fortunes. But he had seen the corrosive influence that these things can have on people if they seek them for the wrong reasons. He probably sensed this most acutely from his reading of the book of Deuteronomy on the plates of brass. Deuteronomy talks a lot about being blessed with prosperity in the land, and it raises the question, how can we become truly rich?

One of Hugh Nibley’s books, called *Approaching Zion*, talks at length about this very question. He was invited once to go down to St. George to speak to a very wealthy ward or stake. They wanted to bring him down and have him enlighten them about all kinds of esoteric things. But, after thinking the matter through, he said to them, “Advertise my talk this way—I will talk about ‘How to Get Rich.’” The title drew a large crowd, expecting something quite different than what they got.

But indeed, it is a profound talk on that very subject. It offers one of the best commentaries on the Book of Deuteronomy that I have ever read. It really captures the sense of fairness, goodness, and concern for humanity that you get in that inspired Old Testament document. You can’t even muzzle your ox under the Law of Deuteronomy. And if you have someone who has worked for you for seven years and then you let them go as you must, you don’t just turn this person out and say, “Thanks for the hard work.” You have to be liberal and set them up so they can have a place to live. Anyway, that is how you get rich, and that talk eventually found its way into Nibley’s book.

You must be free with your substance so that others may have what they need, “that they may be rich like unto you” (2:17). This kind of equality is important within a covenant community. In regard to what makes a society good and wealthy and just, Lindon Robison, an economist and a member of the Church, wrote an article several years ago about what maximizes wealth in a nation. His findings were that if you have got a top-heavy society (with a few very wealthy people at the top and lots of people who are very poor at the bottom), the total wealth is likely going to be less than if you have a society where there is nearly equal distribution among all people. Of course, the economy in Jacob’s day was very different from complex industrial and financial economies. But fundamentally, what Jacob is teaching is economically sound as well as



morally and religiously desirable. True riches come from having satisfaction of the heart, knowing that you have done what is good, righteous, and socially justifiable.

When we think about paying our tithing and making offerings, the Lord invites us to test him. He says, “prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open *you* the windows of heaven” (Malachi 3:10). The “you” in that verse is plural. It is a little hard to tell in English, but in the Hebrew it is clearly plural. So, anyone who pays tithing can expect to be blessed. But so will those nearby. The rains from heaven will fall on their backyards as much as their neighbors’, and that is a great principle of consecration and community.

### Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Does the Book of Mormon Warn Against Seeking after Riches?](#) (Jacob 2:18),” *KnoWhy* 518 (May 30, 2019).

Hugh Nibley, *Approaching Zion*, The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley, Volume 9 (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1989), 178–201.

Thane Robson, “[Attitudes Toward Wealth](#),” *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 4 vols., ed. Daniel H. Ludlow (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1992), 1551–1553.

Lindon J. Robison, “[Economic Insights from the Book of Mormon](#),” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, 1, no. 1 (1992): 35–53.

### Jacob 2:22–23 — The Nephites Begin to Commit Whoredoms

It seems to me that if there are big problems with prostitution, involving whores and whoredoms, this is not likely to be someone’s sister or niece within close family tribes. It might well be that these whoredoms involved foreign women, and that they were bringing them in and using them as domestic servants or slaves. Under the Law of Moses, you could not have a member of the house of Israel as a slave, but you could have foreigners as slaves. Remember that Lehi’s people are all closely related at this point. Except perhaps for Zoram, they are all blood relatives. Even finding someone they could marry that wouldn’t result in an incestuous relationship under the laws of Leviticus would likely have presented problems. The rise of whoredoms makes a lot more sense if they had begun to have interactions with outsiders.

I recently read an article in the *Deseret News* about a study done in Holland. It showed that there is a direct correlation between power and promiscuity. Typically, the more power an individual has of any kind—whether it be corporate, political, or economic—and the more that individual ascends into the higher ranks of power, the more likely he or she is to be involved in some form of sexual infidelity. Power tends to get to people’s

heads, and when they get power they think they are immune or can get away with things that are risky. Many of us could probably name celebrities or social elites who fit this pattern.

It is important that we warn people, especially our young people who have their whole lives ahead of them, about the temptations that come with power. On the other hand, children need to know we want them to succeed. We want them to be wealthy and prosperous. We want them to excel in business and so forth. But I think we need to talk more directly and say, "You're going to go out into this world and face a lot of temptations. You should know that there is a direct correlation between power and immorality."

In every case of divorce that I personally know, the divorce was preceded by some other issue, such as seeking wealth or worldly acclaim. It may start with smaller things and then you get to the bigger stuff, because all of a sudden the spouse and the children can seem like a detriment to your getting ahead or putting yourself first. One of the reasons Jacob spoke in the temple, where everyone was present, was so everyone could be on guard and help each other in strengthening family relations.

Jacob used the word *crime* three times in this discourse. This is interesting because Jacob is the high priest. I would expect the high priest to use the word *sin* and that maybe a king or another political official would be more likely to use the word *crime*. This can probably be explained by the fact that under the Law of Moses, religious sins as opposed to civil laws were not distinguished in the way that we might think they are today. There was no separation of church and state in the ancient world. When a law is established by God, then to break it is just as much a *crime* under the law as it is a *sin* against God, which accounts for Jacob's use of this word here.

### **Jacob 2:23 — The Nephites Seek to "Excuse Themselves"**

The fact that the people sought to "excuse themselves" suggests that they did not understand the scriptures. This is something that happens today just as much as it did then. One way that people often try to justify themselves is simply by interpreting the scriptures in a new way. Or it may just be easier for some people to say that a particular doctrine or standard isn't really for them. If people really want to hang onto something sinful, then they often feel a need to justify it. After all, who likes to think of themselves as being in the wrong? Unless such individuals truly repent, they will own the sins that they seek to justify.

### **Jacob 2:27–32 — The Lord Forbids the Nephites to Enter into Polygamy**

In verse 27 Jacob declares, “hear me, and hearken to the word of the Lord.” So this is apparently a law that they have not had before. Now, was it permissible or not under the Law of Moses to have more than one wife? It was permissible. Deuteronomy 21:15–17 says that a man cannot prefer the first son of his second wife over the first son of the first wife, so we know that there were plural marriages. Deuteronomy 17 says that the king, who may well have several wives, should not *multiply* wives or gold unto himself. So the problem was with excess, going to an extreme, having too much or too many. Deuteronomy 17 says that even the king cannot go too far.

Now what I think we may have going on here is a little bit of tension between the temple and the palace. It may have been the kings who followed Nephi who were modeling their conduct after David and Solomon: “for they seek to excuse themselves in committing whoredoms, because of the things which were written concerning David, and Solomon his son. Behold, David and Solomon truly had many wives and concubines” (Jacob 2:23–24). But Jacob, speaking on behalf of the Lord, tells them that such practices were “abominable” (v. 24). Why? Well, they had way too many wives, especially Solomon who had a thousand wives, most of whom were foreign women. In verse 26 Jacob proclaims, “Wherefore I the Lord will not suffer that this people shall do like unto them of old.”

So this is apparently a new law that Jacob is giving them. And what is the law? It is that “there shall not any man among you have save it be one wife; and concubines he shall have none” (Jacob 2:27). Concubines were secondary wives (not prostitutes, as some might assume). They just did not have inheritance rights and so on. But Jacob is saying that the people can’t engage in such practices at all. He explains why in the next verses: “For I, the Lord God, delight in the chastity of women. And whoredoms are an abomination before me; thus saith the Lord of Hosts. Wherefore, this people shall keep my commandments, saith the Lord of Hosts, or cursed be the land for their sakes” (vv. 28–29).

Then, in the next verse, the Lord clarifies the matter even further: “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 2:30). So there is an exception to this law. Polygamy can be permitted, but only when the Lord commands for the purpose of raising up a righteous people. That is what happened with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in order to fulfill the promises that they would have posterity that would be able to bless the entire earth. But Lehi’s family was not in that situation, in several ways.

Under ancient laws, fathers normally negotiated the prenuptial agreement with the bride for their sons. A lot of these marriage contracts are documented, and usually they contain a provision where the father of the bride has control over whether or not the groom can take a second wife or not. And if the bride's father doesn't want this to happen, we will see something in the contract that says in effect, "This marriage can go forward, but my daughter will not have a second wife in the home to deal with." On the other hand, sometimes the father of the bride didn't care. He may have thought, "Well sure, that might be a good thing. My daughter will be the primary wife, and if there is a second wife then my daughter will have someone to help her with the cooking and the household work and so on." Maybe it depended on what kind of a bargain the father could drive or what kind of a dowry the groom or father of the groom was offering in the deal. These things were negotiated.

There may well have been some kind of an agreement between Lehi and Ishmael when Ishmael's daughters married Lehi's sons. Notice that it says here that Lehi was the one who prohibited his sons to engage in plural marriage (Jacob 2:34). That was a right that he as a father had over his family. What I see going on here with Jacob is taking this matter one step further. Not only was this what their father Lehi did for their generation, but now this is the rule of the Lord for this people as a whole. Apparently, as they negotiated the terms of these marriage contracts, some of the fathers were saying, "Well, polygamous relationships would be okay with me." And Jacob is saying, "No, that's not going to work because it is against the commandments of the Lord for our people."

Also, sometimes there were conditions in these marriage documents about children as well. Not only could a second wife be taken if the first wife did not produce children, but sterility or infertility was, in the ancient world, an automatic ground for divorce. We see Abraham in that situation, where someone in Abraham's situation normally would have gotten rid of Sarah long ago, because he had been promised that he would have all these children and it wasn't working. But Abraham did not do that, no doubt realizing the eternal nature of his covenants and God's promises.

### **Further Reading**

Book of Mormon Central, "[What Does the Book of Mormon Say about Polygamy?](#) (Jacob 2:30)," *KnoWhy* 64 (March 28, 2016).

## Jacob 3

### Jacob 3:1–2 — Jacob Addresses the Pure in Heart

Jacob didn't neglect the pure in heart, who in many cases were hurt because of the bad choices of others, particularly of the husbands and fathers in this growing community. I appreciate here that Jacob leads the pure in heart to lean on Heavenly Father. It is so easy to get wrapped up in your hurt and want to react and be mean back. Yet, as Jesus repeatedly taught and demonstrated in the New Testament, that isn't the way to happiness. Jesus taught that we should love our enemies and that we must forgive to be forgiven. Put it in the Lord's hands and there will be justice.

It is noteworthy that in chapter 2, Jacob talks repeatedly about the thoughts and hearts of those who are setting out to do the wrong things, and then in chapter 3:1–2, Jacob follows up by addressing the hearts and minds of the righteous. I love the expression *firmness of mind*. It takes a lot of exertion to hang in there when no one around you is. Righteous resolve begins with firmness of mind. And the promises here are great. You can just feel the Lord's love and strengthening power that is available to the righteous. What does Jacob tell them to do?

- “Look unto God with firmness of mind” (v. 1)
- “pray unto him with exceeding faith” (v. 1)
- “lift up your heads” (v. 2)
- “receive the pleasing word of God” (v. 2)
- “feast upon his love” (v. 2)

Jacob mentions the pure in heart. Are we ever completely pure or not pure? Not until we stop being fallen people, right? Fortunately, the Lord will console you in your afflictions, including in those sins that you're trying to forsake, and he will plead your cause. What is “the pleasing word of God”? It is the Atonement of Christ, the message that you can be forgiven. So, “feast upon his love.” How do you think they felt, those of them who needed to change (as we all do, but some more than others)? There is love for every one of God's children, and the pleasing word of God “healeth the wounded soul” (Jacob 2:8). Is Jacob just talking about the people who are hurt or suffering from the sins of their husbands or fathers? No. Everyone is spiritually wounded to some extent, and therefore everyone needs divine healing. The Lord is merciful, the Lord is kind, and what better place to talk about these things than at the temple where we are taught more about the Atonement of Christ than any other place. So in essence, Jacob's message is that sin is real, and we should call it what it is. But his message is also that the Lord can heal those

wounds caused by sin and bring reconciliation between those who have caused or received harm.

I think that we sometimes unnecessarily separate the choices in our ordinary lives from our covenants. We sort of place our covenants on a shelf when in reality they apply to our choices throughout every day of our lives. I love temple recommend interviews for that reason. It gives us an opportunity to connect those dots. Every single one of those questions points toward a covenant. Live this way, keep these covenants, and blessings will naturally follow.

### **Jacob 3:5–7 — Jacob Uses the Lamanites as an Example of Righteousness**

In a way, the problem faced by Jacob’s people is similar to the plague of pornography in our day. Pornography denigrates women by treating them as a commodity or as a mere object of lust. How does that make women feel? Jacob uses the Lamanites as a righteous example, saying, “Behold, their husbands love their wives, and their wives love their husbands; and their husbands and their wives love their children” (v.7). We can learn a big lesson about how that can help us. Concerning pornography, you can’t just say to kids, “Don’t do it, don’t do it, don’t do it.” It helps when they understand why it is wrong. Fairly recently, the *Deseret News* published a number of articles on pornography, and how it is not a victimless crime. There are indeed victims, and we have to make people aware of the spiritual, emotional, and also mental injury and damage that can come from it.

This might be one of the first places in the Book of Mormon that demonstrates and clearly emphasizes that righteousness is not merely a matter of lineage. At least in this regard at this time in their history, the Lamanites were more righteous than the Nephites. This idea was likely somewhat of a very new concept for them. The Nephites apparently saw themselves as the *righteous* lineage, and because of this they probably were tempted to excuse their own sins. In fact, they may not have even recognized their own spiritual decline. We need to be careful that we don’t ever feel that personal righteousness can be inherited or that it is a product of culture or upbringing or any other factor besides personal agency.

#### **Further Reading**

Book of Mormon Central, “[How Can the Book of Mormon Strengthen Marriages and Families?](#) (Jacob 3:7),” *KnoWhy* 302 (April 19, 2017).

### **Jacob 3:11 — Jacob Invites the People to Repent**

A couple of years ago, I gave a devotional at BYU called “[Loving God with All Thy Mind](#).” And toward the end of that talk, I reminded the audience that “Jacob would

have known the commandment “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God.” from Deuteronomy 6:5. President Kimball once talked about the false gods we worship and how we can create things that we care about that crowd out our love for God. Wealth can be one of them, and sexual immorality can be another. President Kimball talked very bluntly about how idolatry takes us away from our ability to love God. If it is a commandment to love God, then it is certainly possible to break that commandment. So I proposed, in my devotional, that we should think about ways that we break it, so we can stop doing so.

Here is an excerpt from that talk,

Beware: Satan is the father of lies. And he’s a good liar. Take the lie of pornography. Satan tells us we will find satisfaction by staring at pornography. This is simply a lie. Can we love God with all our mind if even part of our mind is filled with this pollution? When I came to BYU in the sixties, we were just beginning to worry about environmental pollution. Previous generations had foolishly believed that the oceans could absorb an endless amount of garbage and waste. We learned that pollution doesn’t just go away.

I wonder if people aren’t just as naïve today. They foolishly think that the human mind can absorb an endless amount of filth and violence and that somehow we can just push a delete key in our brain and erase all that. You have been blessed with an amazing brain, with incredible retentive powers. Whether or not you can recall that information during a test, it’s all still there. Old folks often find that their brains retain things they haven’t thought of for decades. Mental pollution sticks; there are no teflon brains. Just as it is true that “whatever principle of intelligence we attain unto in this life, it will rise with us in the resurrection” (D&C 130:18), so, too, whatever degree of unrepented smut or cynicism we attain unto, it will rise with us as well.

Now I would hope that recognizing the amazing storage capacity of the brain may help us be careful about what we put into it. The things we choose to participate in and witness will be written deep into our countenances. I think that is what Jacob is saying when he tells them about the “awful consequences” of “fornication and lasciviousness” (v. 12). And he pleads with the people not to go down that path, which he warns will transform them into “angels of the devil” (v. 11). That is ultimately where all sin leads.

### Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[What Does It Mean to Love God with ‘All Thy Mind’?](#)” (Moroni 10:32), *KnoWhy* 517 (May 23, 2019).

## Jacob 4

### **Jacob 4:1 — What Does It Mean to Minister in Word?**

In chapter 4, Jacob writes a few words to introduce his long quotation of Zenos’s Allegory of the Olive Tree. He says that he has “ministered much unto my people in word,” realizing that verbal talk will be forgotten and can’t be remembered. And thus it is important for him, and all of us, to leave a written record. He admired the writings of Zenos, which set the example and had “remained.”

#### **Further Reading**

Book of Mormon Central, [“Why Did Book of Mormon Prophets Quote Long Passages of Scripture? \(1 Nephi 19:22\),”](#) *KnoWhy* 473 (October 4, 2018).

### **Jacob 4:2 — Jacob Can Write Only a Little**

Because he was most likely in a climate or situation where writing on anything but metal plates would perish, Jacob and his scribes had to take great steps to preserve a few choice things, especially for the benefit of their children. He was also probably right in thinking that his posterity would not take a lot of time reading what they wrote, and so he probably struggled to say only things that mattered most.

#### **Further Reading**

Book of Mormon Central, [“Is the Book of Mormon Like Other Ancient Metal Documents? \(Jacob 4:2\),”](#) *KnoWhy* 512 (April 25, 2019).

### **Jacob 4:3 — Jacob Hopes His Posterity Doesn’t View Their First Parents with Contempt**

Jacob hopes that the posterity of his people will read the words which he and others have written upon plates, and that they will “look upon them that they may learn with joy and not with sorrow, neither with contempt, concerning their first parents” (v. 3). Who are the first parents here? Possibly Lehi and Sariah. But why would Jacob worry that his grandchildren and great grandchildren would hold Lehi and Sariah in contempt? One possibility is that the Lamanites had a different version of history than the Nephites, and that the Lamanite version placed Lehi, Sariah, Nephi, Jacob and other righteous leaders in a less-than-favorable light.

It may also be possible that Jacob was concerned that his people wouldn’t understand the purpose of their mortal condition and that they would look unfavorably upon Adam and Eve—the *first parents* of the human family. As a temple priest, Jacob would have been keenly aware of the creation story, the Fall of Adam and Eve, and the introduction of the law of sacrifice. These are things that were essential to the temple in Israel, the



tabernacle in the wilderness, and the ordinances and rituals over which Jacob would have been responsible.

Moreover, Jacob probably knew a more accurate story of Adam and Eve than is found in Genesis. I say this because there is good evidence that some of the things in the Book of Mormon are also found in the Book of Moses but not in the Book of Genesis. For instance, Lehi's blessing upon Jacob includes information about the necessity of the Fall, stating that "Adam fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy (2 Nephi 2:25). This seems to echo Adam's words in Moses 5:10 ("Blessed be the name of God, for because of my transgression my eyes are opened, and in this life I shall have joy") and also Eve's words in Moses 5:11 ("Were it not for our transgression we never should have had seed, and never should have known good and evil, and the joy of our redemption").

It is thus possible that Jacob was trying to help his posterity better understand the purpose and necessity of mortality and that Lehi and Sariah, just like Adam and Eve, willingly chose to leave their comfortable home and embark on a journey through the wilderness—or, in other words, through a lone and dreary world. Jacob, who was Lehi's "firstborn in the days of [his] tribulation in the wilderness," knew very well that "afflictions" and "sorrow" were a necessary part of mortal life and that the Lord can ultimately "consecrate thine afflictions for thy gain" (2 Nephi 2:1–2). There is no need to condemn our first parents when the power of Christ can transform our sorrows and afflictions into joy and into opportunities for spiritual growth and understanding.

#### **Jacob 4:4–7 — The Prophets Knew of Christ and Prophesied of His Mission**

Most of all, Jacob wanted his posterity to know that they knew of the coming of Christ. So Jacob emphasized in Jacob 4:4 that his people indeed "knew of Christ" and that they "had a hope of his glory many hundred years before his coming; and not only we ourselves had a hope of his glory, but also all the holy prophets which were before us." He also says that they searched the prophets and had many revelations that witnessed of the powers of the name and grace and condescension of Jesus.

All this sets the stage for his quoting of Zenos in chapter 5. That is a detailed prophecy, one which Jacob's people could place confidence in because during their day it was already partially fulfilled. For example, it talks about the olive tree branches being scattered to the nethermost parts of the region and how one of those trees, planted on a "good spot of ground," was divided so that only some of its fruit was "tame" and the other fruit was "wild" (Jacob 5:25).

I think Jacob and his people could already see themselves as that tree that had been planted far away and how the Nephites and Lamanites had indeed separated. Well, if they knew it had been fulfilled that much, then they could trust that the rest of the prophecy was going to come true as well. They could also trust that the Lord of the vineyard will come and the harvesters and workers will come and all of the things that will occur as the Lord tries to restore Israel. They could trust that the Lord will do all he can to save the good fruit of the house of Israel and eventually restore the tree so that it can again bear the kind of fruit that he wants.

### Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[What Do We Learn About Ministering from the Account of Sherem?](#) (Jacob 7:15)," *KnoWhy* 534 (October 3, 2019).

Book of Mormon Central, "[How Abraham's Sacrifice of Isaac Illuminates the Atonement](#) (Jacob 4:5)," *KnoWhy* 412 (March 1, 2018).

### Jacob 4:8 — Jacob Warns the People to Not Despise the Revelations of God

But even at that, Jacob feels a strong need to admonish some of his people to "despise not the revelations of God." This tells us that there must have been people there who *were* despising the revelations. Jacob thinks the best way to get them to not do that anymore is to just lay out for them the entire text of Zenos' Allegory of the Olive Tree from the brass plates. They may not have read or heard this text recited very often in such complete detail.

Jacob even seems concerned that he might fail in his task: "I will unfold this mystery unto you; if I do not, by any means, get shaken from my firmness in the Spirit, and stumble because of my over anxiety for you" (v. 18). This makes me wonder if he was reciting Zenos' allegory from memory. Whatever the case, the people likely didn't have their own copy of the scriptures. So maybe the best thing Jacob could do to get them to not despise the scriptures was to just let them hear the whole thing and be impressed with the magnitude and the profundity of this elaborate allegory.

### Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[Why Did Jacob Share the Allegory of the Olive Tree?](#) (Jacob 4:17)," *KnoWhy* 66 (March 30, 2016).

### Jacob 4:10 — Jacob Teaches His People Not to Counsel the Lord

In verse 10, Jacob also wants his people to know that they should seek not to counsel the Lord, but to take counsel from him. There are some passages in the Allegory of the Olive

Tree where the master and servant of the vineyard debate about what to do. The servant pleads for God to be patient, and it works, but only because the Lord knows what to do and when to do it, in pruning and grafting the branches (Jacob 5:52). I think Jacob could have said to himself, “It is worth telling my people this whole story if my children will only learn from it to rely on the Lord and know that he knows what is ultimately best.” As Jacob and his people were living their days out, mourning and feeling bad for themselves, that might have been the most important thing he could have taught them.

### **Jacob 4:12 – Jacob Asks, “Why Not Speak of the Atonement of Christ?”**

Jacob’s people, who lived the law of Moses (Jacob 4:5), believed in the atoning sacrifice of the scapegoat on the Day of Atonement. So why not talk about the Atonement of Christ? It is just as logical. In fact, the symbolism of the scapegoat and many other aspects of the Law of Moses were indeed meant to point people to Christ.

The Hebrew word for *atonement* did not have the same meaning of *at-one-ment* that we see in its English form. Rather, the Hebrew has more the concept of “covering” sins so they cannot be seen. Only then can one appear before the Lord.

### **Jacob 4:13 – The Spirit Speaks the Truth and Does Not Lie**

Jacob prepares the people to receive the words of Zenos by assuring them that the Spirit of the Lord speaks plainly of things as they really are and as they really will be. Prophets often try to speak plainly, in a way that people can understand. Although the prophecy of Zenos will be long and detailed, it covers a lot of ground and does so in a plain manner that ordinary people, most of whom were small plot farmers, could relate to, agree with, and also obtain a testimony of this prophecy’s truth.

### **Jacob 4:14–18 – The Jews in Jerusalem Were a Stiffnecked People But in the End They Will Bear Good Fruit unto the Lord**

Verse 14 emphasizes that “the Jews were a stiffnecked people; and they despised the words of plainness, and killed the prophets, and sought for things that they could not understand.” Perhaps Jacob had children or grandchildren who were wondering why their family had left Jerusalem. Well, the wickedness of the Jews provides an understandable answer.

And how does this relate to Jacob’s rehearsal of the Allegory of the Olive Tree? Well, what happens to the branches of the main tree, which is the tree in Jerusalem? It begins, right off the bat, to grow rotten. And it seems that Jacob wants his people to know that this was prophesied of long before any of them came on the scene.

But the Lord knew that the house of Israel would become sinful, and so he provided a way for branches to be cut off, transplanted, grafted in, and eventually brought together again. He would even remember those branches—like Lehi’s family—that were grafted into trees in the most remote parts of the vineyard (i.e. the world). I think it would have been comforting to Jacob and his people to know that, despite their physical separation from the land of Israel, they were still important to the master of the vineyard. They weren’t forgotten.

And, most of all, these people would eventually play an important role in the restoration of the house of Israel. Indeed, somehow those Jews who had “looked beyond the mark” would again be able to build upon “the only sure foundation” (4:16). How that would happen was a great “mystery” which Jacob now proposes to unfold to his people.

I think Jacob now has their undivided attention, and he has prepared them to hear the Allegory of the Olive Tree. Nevertheless, he is fearful for his audience. He may well be extremely anxious because, if they aren’t careful, they might find themselves among the branches that will be cast away for not bearing good fruit. And with that, Jacob turns to Zenos.