

# Book of Moses Essays #26: Enoch's Grand Vision: The Complaining Voice of the Earth (Moses 7:48–49, 54, 61, 64)

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*René Jacobs, 1969–: Meisje met gasmasker (Girl with Gas Mask). This painting was inspired by Johannes Vermeer's (1632–1765) well-known work, Meisje met de parel (Girl with a Pearl Earring), ca. 1669–1670. The gas mask is green rather than black, in ironic harmony with the beauty of nature and the attractive colors of her head scarf.<sup>[1]</sup>*

In a previous *Essay*,<sup>[2]</sup> we observed that three distinct parties weep for the wickedness of mankind: God,<sup>[3]</sup> the heavens,<sup>[4]</sup> and Enoch himself.<sup>[5]</sup> In addition, a fourth party, the earth, complains and mourns—though she doesn't specifically “weep”—for her children.<sup>[6]</sup> In the present article, we discuss affinities in the ancient Enoch literature and in the laments of Jeremiah to the complaint of the earth in Moses 7:48–49.

Valuable articles by Andrew Skinner<sup>[7]</sup> and Daniel Peterson,<sup>[8]</sup> following Hugh Nibley's lead,<sup>[9]</sup> discuss interesting parallels to these verses in ancient sources. Peterson follows J. J. M. Roberts in citing examples of Sumerian laments of the mother goddess and showing how a similar motif appears in Jeremiah in the guise of the personified city as the mother of her people<sup>[10]</sup> by way of analogy to the role of the mourning earth as “the mother of men”<sup>[11]</sup> in the Book of Moses. Roberts illustrates this by citing Jeremiah 10:19–21:<sup>[12]</sup>

Woe is me because my hurt!  
My wound is grievous.  
But I said, “Truly this is my punishment,  
and I must bear it.  
My tent is plundered and all my cords are broken;  
my children have gone out from me, and they are no more;  
there is no one to spread my tent again,  
and to set up my curtains.  
For the shepherds were stupid,  
And did not inquire of Yahweh;  
Therefore they did not prosper,  
And all their flock is scattered.”

Emphasizing the appropriateness of a Sumerian-Akkadian milieu for this concept in Moses 7, Skinner<sup>[13]</sup> cites S. H. Langdon as follows:<sup>[14]</sup>

The Sumerian Earth-mother is repeatedly referred to in Sumerian and Babylonian names as the mother of mankind ... This mythological doctrine is thoroughly accepted in Babylonian religion. ... In early Akkadian, this mythology is already firmly established among the Semites.

Although the motif of a complaining earth is not found anywhere in the Bible, it does turn up in *1 Enoch* and in the Qumran *Book of Giants*.<sup>[15]</sup> In *1 Enoch* we find the following references:

- *1 Enoch* 7:4–6; 8:4:<sup>[16]</sup> And the giants began to kill men and to devour them. And they began to sin against the birds and beasts and creeping things and the fish, and to devour one another's flesh. And they drank the blood. Then *the earth brought accusation* against the lawless ones .... (And) as men were perishing, the cry went up to heaven.
- *1 Enoch* 9:2, 10:<sup>[17]</sup> And entering in, they said to one another, "*The earth, devoid (of inhabitants), raises*<sup>[18]</sup> *the voice of their cries* to the gates of heaven ... And now behold, the spirits of the souls of the men who have died make suit; and their groan has come up to the gates of heaven; and it does not cease to come forth from before the iniquities that have come upon the earth.
- *1 Enoch* 87:1:<sup>[19]</sup> And again I saw them, and they began to gore one another and devour one another, and *the earth began to cry out*.

In the *Book of the Giants* 4Q203, Frag. 8:6–12 we read:<sup>[20]</sup>

6. 'Let it be known to you th[at ] [
7. your activity and (that) of [your] wive[s ]
8. those (giants) [and their] son[s and] the [w]ives o[f ]
9. through your fornication on the earth, *and it (the earth) has [risen up ag]ainst y[ou and is crying out]*
10. *and raising accusation against you [and ag]ainst the activity of your sons[*
11. *the corruption which you have committed on it (the earth) vacat [*
12. has reached Raphael. ...

Consistent with other comparisons that have been made between the accounts of Enoch in the Book of Moses, the Qumran *Book of Giants*, and *1 Enoch*, Skinner finds that resemblances to the Qumran Enoch text are more compelling than those found in *1 Enoch*. First, he notes that the nature of the wickedness in the *Book of Giants* is described as "fornication,"<sup>[21]</sup> which corresponds semantically to the term "filthiness" used in the Book of Moses.<sup>[22]</sup> By way of contrast, the wickedness being complained of in *1 Enoch* is the crimes of murder and violence.

Second, Skinner notes that in both the Qumran *Book of Giants* fragment and "Moses 7 the earth *itself* complains of and decries the wickedness of the people, while the [first two] *1 Enoch* texts emphasize the cries of *men* ascending to heaven"<sup>[23]</sup> by means of the earth.<sup>[24]</sup>

Skinner also notes that in the *Book of Giants* and the Book of Moses, "the ultimate motivation behind the earth's cry for redress against the intense wickedness on her surface" is a plea "for a cleansing of and sanctification from the pervasive wickedness by means of a

heavenly personage and heavenly powers. In the Book of Moses the earth importunes,<sup>[25]</sup> ‘When shall I rest, and be cleansed from the filthiness which has gone forth out of me? When will my Creator sanctify me, that I may rest, and righteousness for a season abide upon my face?’”<sup>[26]</sup> Likewise, in the *Book of Giants*, the earth complains about how the wicked have corrupted it through licentiousness and anticipates a destruction that will cleanse it from wickedness.<sup>[27]</sup>

## Conclusions

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From a literary standpoint, the complaint of the earth is moving poetry. O. Glade Hunsaker gives two examples:<sup>[28]</sup>

Enoch hears and describes the personified soul of the earth alliteratively as the “mother of men” agonizing from the bowels of the earth<sup>[29]</sup> that she is “weary” of “wickedness.” [When the earth began her speech, she commenced with “Wo, wo,” prefiguring the latter echo.] The tension of the drama resolves itself as the voice uses assonance in pleading for “righteousness” to “abide” for a season.

But it is more than poetry, of course. It is also history—and prophecy. Moses 7:61, 64 happily proclaim that “the day shall come that the earth shall rest ... for the space of a thousand years” and then woefully inform us that before that relief finally is given, the earth will again suffer great filthiness just before the Lord returns:

The heavens shall be darkened, and a veil of darkness shall cover the earth;<sup>[30]</sup> and the heavens shall shake, and also the earth; and great tribulations shall be among the children of men, but my people will I preserve.<sup>[31]</sup>

This article is adapted and expanded from Bradshaw, Jeffrey M., and David J. Larsen. *Enoch, Noah, and the Tower of Babel. In God’s Image and Likeness 2*. Salt Lake City, UT: The Interpreter Foundation and Eborn Books, 2014, pp. 107–108, 154, 157–158, 188–189.

## Further Reading

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Bradshaw, Jeffrey M., and David J. Larsen. *Enoch, Noah, and the Tower of Babel. In God’s Image and Likeness 2*. Salt Lake City, UT: The Interpreter Foundation and Eborn Books, 2014, pp. 107–108, 154, 157–158, 188–189. <https://interpreterfoundation.org/books/in-gods-image-and-likeness-2-enoch-noah-and-the-tower-of-babel/>.

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## Endnotes

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[1] With the kind permission of René Jacobs, Galerie de Kunstkop, Delft, Holland. Working in a studio that is in the very spot once occupied by Vermeer in Delft, Jacobs, a self-described artist of "tragic, emotionally-deformed realism," has produced many variants of Vermeer's portrait, each one highlighting what he calls the "vulnerabilities" of the young girl. His works tell the stories of "small people in their desperate attempt to become larger than life."

[2] See *Essay #25*.

[3] Moses 7:28–29.

[4] Moses 7:28, 37, 40.

[5] Moses 7:41, 49.

[6] Moses 7:48–49.

[7] A. C. Skinner, Vindicated.

- [8] D. C. Peterson, Weeping God.
- [9] H. W. Nibley, Enoch, pp. 11–14, 74–75, 205–206.
- [10] J. J. M. Roberts, Motif of the Weeping God, p. 133.
- [11] Moses 7:48.
- [12] J. J. M. Roberts, Motif of the Weeping God, p. 133.
- [13] A. C. Skinner, Vindicated, p. 376.
- [14] S. H. Langdon, Semitic.
- [15] It also turns up in later texts, e.g., B. Mika’el, Mysteries, p. 29: “[e]ven the earth complained and uttered lamentations.”
- [16] G. W. E. Nickelsburg, 1 Enoch 1, 7:4–6, 8:4, pp. 182, 188, emphasis added.
- [17] Ibid., 9:2, 10, p. 202, emphasis added.
- [18] Or, more literally, “cries the voice of their cries” (A. C. Skinner, Vindicated, p. 375).
- [19] G. W. E. Nickelsburg, 1 Enoch 1, 87:1, p. 364, emphasis added.
- [20] D. W. Parry *et al.*, DSSR (2013), p. 945.
- [21] Or “licentiousness” in the translation of M. Wise *et al.*, DSS, 4Q203 Frag. 8:9, p. 294. Aramaic *znwtkwn*.
- [22] A. C. Skinner, Vindicated, p. 377 argues that “filthiness, immorality, and idolatry are closely associated with each other in Semitic-based biblical culture. See, for example, Ezra 6:21; 9:11; Ezekiel 16:36; 24:13; Revelation 17:4.”
- [23] Ibid., p. 377.
- [24] Nickelsburg relates this accusation to Genesis 4:10–11, and cites “an Aramaic technical term for bringing suit in court” (G. W. E. Nickelsburg, 1 Enoch 1, p. 187 n. 6), recalling the context of Isaiah 1 discussed in *Essay #25*.
- [25] Moses 7:48.
- [26] A. C. Skinner, Vindicated, pp. 377–378.
- [27] Cf., e.g., Job 21:17, 30; Proverbs 10:29; Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:4.
- [28] O. G. Hunsaker, Literature.
- [29] Compare Jeremiah 4:19.
- [30] Compare Moses 7:56 (“the heavens were veiled”) and D&C 38:8 (“the veil of darkness shall soon be rent”), which imply that this veil will cut off direct communication from heaven. Cf. D&C 110:1: “The veil was taken from our minds.” See also a phrase added to the end of Genesis 9:26 in the JST: “and a veil of darkness shall cover him” (S. H. Faulring *et al.*, Original Manuscripts, pp. 118, 632. See also J. M. Bradshaw *et al.*, God’s Image 2, Commentary Genesis 9:26, p. 323).
- [31] Elder Neal A. Maxwell commented (N. A. Maxwell, One Heart, p. v): “God preserved and prepared Enoch’s people in the midst of awful and enveloping evil, and, reassuringly, he has promised his people in our own time that though ‘great tribulations shall be among the children of men, ... my people will I preserve.’”