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Jacob's Protector

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JACOB'S PROTECTOR

Matthew L. Bowen

ABSTRACT: *The name Jacob (ya‘āqōb) means “may he [i.e., God] protect,” or “he has protected.” As a hypocoristic masculine volitive verbal form,¹ it is a kind of blessing upon, or prayer on behalf of the one so named that he will receive divine protection and safety (cf. Deuteronomy 33:28). Textual evidence from Nephi’s writings suggests that his brother Jacob’s protection was a primary concern of their parents, Lehi and Sariah. Lehi saw Nephi as the specific means of divine protection for Jacob, his “first born in the wilderness.” Moreover, the term “protector” is used twice in LDS scripture, in both instances by Jacob himself (2 Nephi 6:2; Jacob 1:10), this in reference to Nephi, who became the “great protector” of the Nephites in general and Jacob in particular. All of the foregoing is to be understood against the backdrop of the patriarch Jacob’s biography. Lehi, Nephi, Jacob, and Enos all expressed their redemption in terms reminiscent of their ancestor Jacob’s being “redeemed ... from all evil,” a process which included Jacob “wrestling” a divine “man” and preparing him to be reconciled to his estranged brother by an atoning “embrace.” Mormon employed the biblical literary etymology of the name Jacob, in the terms “supplant,” “usurp,” or “rob” as a basis for Lamanite accusations that Nephites had usurped them or “robbed” them of their birthright. Mormon, aware of the high irony, shows that the Gadianton [Gaddianton] robbers take up the same polemic. The faithful Lehiites, many of whom were descendants of two Jacobs, prayed “May the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, protect this people in righteousness, so long as they shall call on the name of their God for protection” (3 Nephi 4:30). By and large, they enjoyed the God of Jacob’s protection until they ceased to call upon their true protector for it.*

1. Paul Joüon and Takamitsu Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 2nd ed. (Rome: Gregorian & Biblical Press, 2011), §§40b, 48.

“May He Protect”

The name Jacob easily constitutes one of the most important personal names in the biblical corpus. It is equally important in the Book of Mormon. With the benefit of comparative Semitic linguistic evidence, scholars now generally accept that the name “Jacob” is a hypocoristic volitive (or jussive) form of a Semitic verb **‘qb* meaning “to protect” or “guard,”² rather than a derivation from a denominative verb formed on *‘eqēb* (“heel”),³ i.e., “to grab the heel” or “to supplant” as suggested by the onomastic etiological puns of Genesis 25:26 (“he took hold on Esau’s heel” [*ba’āqēb*]) and 27:36 (“he hath supplanted me” [*wayya’qēbēnī*]). The related text Hosea 12:3 [MT 12:4] states “He **took his brother by the heel** (*āqab*) in the womb” (Hosea 12:4). Phyllis Tribble describes it as a “folk etymology” which gives his name the meaning of “grasper, schemer, or conniver.”⁴ I dislike the term “folk etymology” since it is sometimes equated with “false” etymology. As Moshe Garsiel has rightly noted, “We are dealing here [in Genesis 25:26, 27:36, Hosea 12:3 (MT 12:4)] with a literary etymology (and not a ‘popular’ one).”⁵ From a scientific etymological perspective, “Jacob” (*ya’āqōb*) has the much more positive

2. Most still follow Martin Noth, *Die israelitischen Personennamen im Rahmen der Gemeinsemitischen Namengebung* (BWANT 3/10; Stuttgart: W. Kolhammer, 1928), 177-78, 197. See also Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2001), 422, 872. Hereafter cited as HALOT.

3. Ultimately, these **‘qb*-terms may have the same origin. Ugaritic *‘qb* suggests that this root may have originally meant to “follow closely,” which can be understood positively (“to follow closely in order to protect”) or negatively (“to follow closely in order to assail”). Cf. H.-J. Zobel, “יעקב / יעקוב; *ya’āqōb* / *ya’āqōb*” in the *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 6:189-90; Manfred Dietrich and Oswald Loretz, “Zur ugaritischen Lexikographie (I),” *Bibliotheca Orientalis* 23 (1966): 127-33. Victor P. Hamilton (*The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18-50* [NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995], 179) suggests that “‘follow closely’ may develop into ‘restrain, stop, hold back’ (i.e., ‘guard,’ ‘protect’), as in Job 37:4.” (“He does not restrain [or guard] them when his voice is heard” (cf. NRSV; what “them” refers to is never specified).

4. Phyllis Tribble, “Biblical Views: Wrestling with Faith,” *Biblical Archeology Review*, 40/5 (September–October 2014). Online at <https://www.baslibrary.org/biblical-archaeology-review/40/5/10>.

5. Moshe Garsiel, *Biblical Names: A Literary Study of Midrashic Derivations and Puns*, trans. Phyllis Hackett (Ramat Gan, Israel: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1991), 21.

meaning, “may he [i.e., God] protect,” or “he has protected.”⁶ That is, it is probably short (hypocoristic) for Jacob-El as *y'qb-'l* “may-El-protect (him),” as the original text of Deuteronomy 33:28 likely read.⁷

As a Semitic name, Jacob was not unusual. The similarly formed name of the 14th dynasty Semitic Hyksos ruler Yaqub-Har (*y'qb hr* “may Horus protect” or *y'qb-'r* “may the exalted one protect”) is attested in scarab seals.⁸



Photo 1: “Shiqmona” scarab. Photo 2: “Berlin” scarab with cartouche.⁹

6. Hamilton suggests that taking *ya'äqōb* as a past tense verb “would be particularly appropriate given the uncertain pregnancy Rebekah had to endure. Jacob has survived that ordeal” (*Genesis*, 179).

7. David Noel Freedman, “The Original Name of Jacob,” *Israel Exploration Journal*, 13 (1963):125-26; John Bright, *A History of Israel*, 3rd ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1981), 93; Moshe Garsiel also suggests that “Jacob” is “a shortened form of the common name *y'qb-'l* [יעקבאל] and its like.” Garsiel, *Biblical Names*, 21.

8. William A. Ward, “Royal-Name Scarabs,” in *Scarabs and their Contribution to History in the Early Second Millennium B.C.* Olga Tufnell and Geoffrey Thorndike Martin. 2 vols. (Warminster: Aris and Phillips, 1984), 2:168, fig. 29; K.S.B. Ryholt, *The Political Situation in Egypt During the Second Intermediate Period c. 1800-1550 B.C.* (Copenhagen: Carsten Niebuhr Institute of Near Eastern Studies/Museum Tusculanum Press, 1997), 44; Rolf Krauss, “An Examination of Khyan’s Place in W. A. Ward’s Seriation of Royal Hyksos Scarabs,” *Ägypten und Levante* 7 (1998), 41.

9. “Scarab Seals of Jacob-HR,” *Biblical Archaeological Review* 14/1 (Jan/Feb 1988). <http://members.bib-arch.org/publication.asp?PubID=BSBA&Volume=14&Issue=1&ArticleID=16>.

The etymological and semantic connection between the name “Jacob” and divine protection surfaces at several salient moments in the Book of Mormon. This paper will look at how Lehi, Sariah, and their family may have understood the name Jacob and why Lehi and Sariah likely bestowed this important name on their “firstborn in the wilderness” (2 Nephi 2:1-2, 11) not only to commemorate their ancestor, but in the express hope that their son Jacob would be the beneficiary of divine protection. I will also endeavor to show that Jacob’s references to his brother Nephi as a “protector” may also allude to Jacob’s own name and his father Lehi’s blessing. I will further attempt to show that Mormon uses the biblical literary etymology of the name Jacob in terms of “supplant,” “usurp,” or “rob” as an editorial theme around which the Lamanites’ Esau-like accusations that the Nephites had usurped them or “robbed” them of their birthright revolve (e.g., Mosiah 10:10; Alma 20:13; cf. Alma 54:24). Mormon demonstrated the irony of the Gadianton [Gaddianton] *robbers* using the age-old anti-Nephite polemic (e.g., 3 Nephi 3:10). After defeating the Gaddianton robbers in a battle for survival, the faithful Lehtes, many of whom were descendants of two Jacobs, prayed “May the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, protect this people in righteousness, so long as they shall call on the name of their God for protection” (3 Nephi 4:30). That God, Yahweh or Jesus Christ, was Jacob-Israel’s — and thus the Lehtes’ — true “protector.” For the greater part of Lehte history, the Nephites enjoyed the God of Jacob’s protection until they no longer “came unto Jesus Christ with broken hearts and contrite spirits, but ... did curse God, and wish to die” but still “would struggle with the sword for their lives” (Mormon 2:14).

“He Hath Protected”

The name “Jacob” first appears in the Book of Mormon at 1 Nephi 5:14 in connection with Lehi’s sons obtaining the brass plates and Lehi’s discovery of their contents:

And it came to pass that my father, Lehi, also found upon the plates of brass a genealogy of his fathers; wherefore he knew that he was a descendant of Joseph; yea, even that Joseph who was the son of **Jacob**, who was sold into Egypt, and **who was preserved by the hand of the Lord, that he might preserve his father, Jacob**, and all his household from perishing with famine. (1 Nephi 5:14)

Nephi here summarized Joseph's enslavement in Egypt and the eventual source of divine protection and preservation for Jacob and the rest of his family. This statement is more important than may appear at first glance. Here Nephi succinctly recounted the narrative of Genesis 37–50, a fuller form of which was preserved on the plates of brass.¹⁰

Nephi, probably as his father did, read the entire narrative of Genesis 37–50 (in the much fuller form that he had it) as a story of protection and “preservation.” Indeed, there appears to be an allusion to the meaning of Jacob's name (“may he protect”) in the verb translated “preserve” (cf. Genesis 32:20: “And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: for I have seen God face to face, **and my life [soul] is preserved** [*wattināṣēl napšī*]”; Genesis 45:5: “God did send me [Joseph] before you **to preserve life** [*lēmiḥyā*]”). It is worth noting here that the Semitic verb ‘*qb*’ as preserved in the Ethiopic verb ‘*aqaba*’ (“guard, watch, keep watch, safeguard, tend [flocks], preserve . . . protect”)¹¹ and substantive participle ‘*aqābbi*’ (“guardian, guard, keeper, watchman, protector, official” cf. KJV Akkub)¹² and South Arabic ‘*qbt(n)*’ (“watchtower”)¹³ and **m’qbt* (“guard, guardian”)¹⁴ convey this sense of protection.

Lehi and Sariah evidently named their youngest sons Jacob and Joseph — whose births are finally mentioned in 1 Nephi 18, though they were born years earlier — after their ancestors Jacob and Joseph, quite conceivably because of the (fuller) brass plates account of Genesis 37–50. However, they may have had additional purposes in the naming of their sons. Consider the powerful testimony that Sariah bears concerning the Lord's protection and preservation of her (then only) four sons after they had returned with the brass plates.

And she spake, saying: Now I know of a surety that the Lord hath commanded my husband to flee into the wilderness; yea, and I

10. See, e.g., 2 Nephi 3 and Alma 46:24: “Yea, let us preserve our liberty as a remnant of Joseph; yea, let us remember the words of Jacob, before his death, for behold, he saw that a part of the remnant of the coat of Joseph was preserved and had not decayed. And he said — Even as this remnant of garment of my son hath been preserved, so shall a remnant of the seed of my son be preserved by the hand of God, and be taken unto himself, while the remainder of the seed of Joseph shall perish, even as the remnant of his garment.”

11. Wolf Leslau, *Concise Dictionary of Ge'ez* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2010), 174.

12. Ibid. Hebrew ‘*aqqûb*’.

13. Joan Copeland Biella, *Dictionary of Old South Arabic: Sabaean Dialect* (Harvard Semitic Studies 25; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2004), 380.

14. Ibid. Attested as *m’qbthmw* (“[their] guards”).

also know of a surety that **the Lord hath protected** my sons, and delivered them out of the hands of Laban. (1 Nephi 5:8)

Sariah's statement, "the Lord hath protected," precedes Nephi's first mention of his brother Jacob by a mere six verses. Jacob would be born about one year later.¹⁵ Of all the names in the Hebrew onomasticon through which an Israelite parent might express hope for protection or gratitude for past protection, "Jacob" is by far the most prominent, suitable, and likely candidate. Jacob's name, in effect, becomes Sariah's "psalm" as preserved in 1 Nephi 5:8.

Thus, Jacob's naming plausibly memorialized not only their ancestor, the forefather of all Israel, whom the Lord had protected and preserved (from Esau, Laban, the famine in Canaan, etc.), but also commemorated the Lord's protection and preservation of Jacob's four older brothers when they travelled to obtain the brass plates so that the family might be spiritually protected and preserved — i.e., from "perish[ing] in unbelief" (1 Nephi 4:13). The plates taught them more about their ancestors, protecting many of their posterity from similarly "perish[ing] in unbelief" (1 Nephi 4:13). In fact, Jacob's name may have constituted a kind of prayer for the preservation of the family throughout their wilderness journey and beyond, expressing the added hope of "protection" for the special son who was their "firstborn in the wilderness" (2 Nephi 2:1-2, 11), born far away from their homeland.

"Thou Shalt Dwell Safely with Thy Brother"

Before discussing the connection between Jacob ("may he protect," "he has protected"), divine protection, and Jacob's use of the term "protector," it is necessary to note textual evidence of parental concern over divine protection for Jacob. 1 Nephi 18, the chapter that mentions the births of Jacob and Joseph (see 1 Nephi 18:7), mentions the threat that their abusive elder brothers and brothers-in-law (Laman, Lemuel, and the sons of Ishmael) posed to Lehi's young sons: "And Jacob and Joseph also,

15. The births of Jacob and Joseph are first mentioned in 1 Nephi 18:7, but they were certainly born much earlier, probably several years earlier. See S. Kent Brown, "A Case for Lehi's Bondage in Arabia," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 6/2 (1997): 206-207. The giving of these two specific names almost certainly coincides with what was "found" on the brass plates (1 Nephi 5:14). Jacob could have been born in the days, weeks, or months after this event (Sariah may have been pregnant with him at the time). Joseph would have been born sometime after the party turned east across the Arabian desert, in the days of Lehi's "greatest sorrow" (2 Nephi 3:1).

being young, having need of much nourishment, were grieved because of the afflictions of their mother” (1 Nephi 18:19).

It was this abusive situation (and probably many others) that Lehi referenced when he acknowledged that Jacob had suffered great “afflictions” and “much sorrow” as a boy (1 Nephi 2:1). Lehi, however, promised Jacob that he would eventually be beyond the grasp of his abusive brothers:

And now, Jacob, I speak unto you: Thou art my first-born in the days of my tribulation in the wilderness. And behold, in thy childhood thou hast suffered afflictions and much sorrow, because of the rudeness of thy brethren. Nevertheless, **Jacob** [may-he-protect], thou knowest the greatness of God; and he shall consecrate thy afflictions for thy gain. Wherefore, thy soul shall be blessed, and **thou shalt dwell safely with thy brother, Nephi**; and thy days shall be spent in the service of God. Wherefore, **I know that thou art redeemed**, because of the righteousness of thy Redeemer; for thou hast beheld that in the fulness of time he cometh to bring salvation unto men. (2 Nephi 2:1-3; cf. Deuteronomy 33:28)

And so the very blessing that Lehi bestowed on Jacob prior to his death was a blessing of divine protection through his brother Nephi: he would enjoy divine protection under his brother's care so that all of his time could “be spent in the service of God” — i.e., as a priest and a teacher in the Nephite temple.¹⁶ The blessing on Jacob-Israel in Deuteronomy 33:28 (“Israel shall then dwell in safety”) was also Jacob's personal and familial blessing.

In order to help Nephi to protect the faithful members of the Lehi/Ishmaelite family and perhaps “others”¹⁷ in the land of promise who had attached themselves to the clan, the Lord gave Nephi advanced warning of another attempt by his brothers upon his life and person:

And it came to pass that the Lord did warn me, that I, Nephi, should depart from them and flee into the wilderness, and all those who would go with me. Wherefore, it came to pass that I,

16. 2 Nephi 5:26 (cf. 2 Nephi 26:16); Jacob 1:16-18.

17. John Gee and Matthew Roper, “‘I Did Liken All Scriptures unto Us’: Early Nephite Understandings of Isaiah Implications for ‘Others’ in the Land,” in *The Fulness of the Gospel: Foundational Teachings from the Book of Mormon: The 32nd Annual Sidney B. Sperry Symposium* (ed. Camille Fronk Olson, Brian M. Hauglid, Patty Smith, and Thomas A. Wayment; Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, 2003), 51-65.

Nephi, did take my family, and also Zoram and his family, and Sam, mine elder brother and his family, and Jacob and Joseph, my younger brethren, and also my sisters, and all those who would go with me. And all those who would go with me were those who believed in the warnings and the revelations of God; wherefore, they did hearken unto my words. (2 Nephi 5:5-6)

Only separation from Laman and Lemuel et al. or “depart[ure] from them” permitted Jacob and any other member of the family to escape an increasingly abusive situation and to “dwell safely with . . . Nephi” (2 Nephi 2:3).

Nephi’s protective measures were not simply reactive, but proactive. He knew that departure from his older brothers would not be enough. Therefore, using the sword of Laban as a prototype, he fashioned numerous swords to protect his people:

And I, Nephi, did take the sword of Laban, and after the manner of it did make many swords, lest by any means the people who were now called Lamanites should come upon us and destroy us; for I knew their hatred towards me and my children and those who were called my people. (2 Nephi 5:14)

Nephi’s foresight proved accurate. He subsequently noted that “forty years had passed away, and we had already had wars and contentions with our brethren” (2 Nephi 5:34). These passages provide the backdrop for Jacob’s description of Nephi as “protector” in the introduction of his speech in 2 Nephi 6:2, a mere two verses after Nephi’s statement regarding “wars and contentions with our brethren” (2 Nephi 5:34).

“Unto Whom Ye Look as a King or a Protector”

The word “protector” is used twice in Latter-day Saint scripture¹⁸ and Jacob uses it in both instances (2 Nephi 6:2; Jacob 1:10). That fact, coupled with the fact that Jacob’s name means “may he [God] protect” or “he has protected,” bids us to consider the potential relationship of both these statements to Jacob’s name and biography. His first recorded words in

18. KJV Deuteronomy 32:38 uses the noun “protection” once. It would have been better translated hiding place. Deuteronomy 32:37-38: “And he shall say, Where are their gods, their rock in whom they trusted, Which [Who] did eat the fat of their sacrifices, and drank the wine of their drink offerings? let them [him] rise up and help you, and [let him] be your **protection** [*sitrâ* = place of hiding, covering].” Equally interesting, and more important, is the confluence of *yā’āqōb* and *’el’ēl* (in parallel with *yīsrā’ēl*) in Deuteronomy 33:28, which may have been the full original name, and is part of what appears to be an archaic zodiacal sequence, likewise a part of the blessing in Genesis 49.

the Book of Mormon are preserved in a speech given to the Nephites, probably shortly after Nephi's "coronation" or ascension as leader of the nascent Nephite nation.¹⁹ Jacob's introduction to the written version of this speech is an autobiographical note. It is here that Jacob uses the term "protector" for the first time, echoing the original, non-pejorative meaning of "Jacob" as a part of the following chiasmic structure:

- A Behold, my beloved brethren, I, **Jacob** [may-he-protect],
 B **having been called of God and ordained** after the
 manner of his holy order,
 B' and **having been consecrated by my brother Nephi**,
 A' unto whom ye look as a king or a **protector**, and **upon whom**
you depend for safety... (2 Nephi 6:2; cf. Deuteronomy 33:28)

By means of this structure, Jacob's speech highlights the connection between his name and divine protection, as further accentuated by close identification that he makes between his divine calling and ordination and Nephi's consecrating him. Jacob thus rearticulates his father's blessing of protection and safety upon him that was bound up with his future priestly, temple service: "thou shalt dwell safely with thy brother Nephi, and thy days shall be spent in the service of thy God" (2 Nephi 2:3).

It is difficult to surmise precisely what term for "protector" Jacob would have used here. The related Hebrew name Akkub may yield one possibility. Akkub (*'aqqûb*), itself a *qattûl/qattûl* noun formation from the verb *'qb* and cognate with the name Jacob, denotes "protector" or "protected"²⁰ (cf. Ethiopic *'aqqābi*). Other possibilities conceivably include substantive participial forms of *šmr* or *nšr*. Whatever the case, Jacob's use of a rare term rendered "protector" in connection with his own name Jacob ("may [God] protect") together with the phrase "depend upon for safety" as a possible allusion to Deuteronomy 33:28 ("Israel shall then dwell in safety"), this in juxtaposition with an allusion to

19. The first recorded words of Jacob, Nephi's brother, in the Book of Mormon are not those found in his personal account. Nephi includes a lengthy sermon that Jacob presented to the people of Nephi, possibly on the occasion of "Nephi's coronation." See John W. Welch, "The Temple in the Book of Mormon" in *Temples in the Ancient World*, ed. Donald W. Parry (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1994), 328. The structure of the sermon suggests that it was a prepared text read aloud.

20. Cf. the name Akkub, attested in Ezra 2:42, 45; Nehemiah 7:45; 11:19, 12:25; 1 Chronicles 3:24, 9:17. The name follows a *qattûl* pattern which suggests the active meaning "protector" or the passive meaning "the protected one." See HALOT, 847. In many of foregoing passages the name refers to a family of gatekeepers.

Lehi's blessing ("shalt dwell safely with thy brother, Nephi," 2 Nephi 2:3), merits special attention.

Nephi was not just the Nephites' "protector," he was Jacob's, too, in fulfillment of his father's final blessing and the wish expressed in his parents' naming him Jacob ("may-he [God]-protect"). Sariah recognized that "the Lord hath protected my sons" (1 Nephi 5:8); her youngest sons and that part of the family "who believed in the warnings and the revelations of God" (2 Nephi 5:6) continued to receive divine protection.

When Jacob added to "protector" the words "upon whom you depend for safety" (2 Nephi 6:2), he alluded to Deuteronomy 33:28 ("Israel shall then dwell in safety, untroubled²¹ is the fountain of Jacob [-El]") and back to the content of his father's dying blessing upon him personally: "**thou shalt dwell safely** with thy brother, Nephi; and thy days shall be spent in the service of thy God" (2 Nephi 2:3). Perhaps apart from his younger brother Joseph, nobody depended upon or benefited from Nephi's protection more than Jacob himself. Jacob's brother Nephi became the fulfillment of Lehi's and Sariah's eponymous hope for Jacob — "may he [the Lord] protect" him. Nephi himself constituted the Lord's means of protecting Jacob, Joseph, and the other faithful members of the Lehi-Ishmaelite clan.

"A Great Protector"

Years later, when Jacob received the small plates from Nephi, he alluded to the written version of his speech as preserved upon the small plates within Nephi's personal writings. The introductory portion of his personal record thus recalls the introduction of his written sermon:

Wherefore, I, **Jacob**, take it upon me to fulfill the commandment of my brother Nephi. Now Nephi began to be old and saw that he must soon die, wherefore, he anointed a man to be a king and ruler over his people ... The people having loved Nephi exceedingly, he having been a great **protector** for them, **having wielded the sword of Laban in their defense**, and having labored in all his days for their welfare. (Jacob 1:8-10)

Of all the details in Nephi's life that Jacob could have chosen to include in commenting on Nephi's death, he mentioned that the people

21. I follow KJV for the first colon or line, and then NRSV's rendering of *bdd* (*bādād*) as "untroubled" (or "alone").

“loved Nephi exceedingly,” in no small part because “he [had] been a great protector for them.”

Just as Nephi, whose name apparently derives from the Egyptian word *nfr*²² (“good,” “fair,” “goodly”),²³ suggests that his name was appropriately bestowed because he was one “having been born of **goodly** parents” and one “having a ... knowledge of the **goodness** and mysteries of God” (1 Nephi 1:1),²⁴ Jacob’s statements in 2 Nephi 6:2 and Jacob 1:10 suggest that his name was also fitting for one who whom the Lord had **protected** (along with the other “Nephites”) from the Lamanites, Nephi being the instrumentality of that divine protection and the fulfillment of Lehi’s final blessing upon Jacob.

“Redeemed ... from All Evil”:

Divine Wrestling and Protective Embraces

Over a decade ago, John Tvedtnes and Matthew Roper insightfully noted that Enos’s autobiographical description of his “wrestle ... before God” was a literary allusion to Jacob the patriarch’s “wrestling” with a “man” at Peniel.²⁵ In a previous more recent study,²⁶ I noted that the use of the verb noun “wrestle” [**hē’ābēq* from **’bq*, cf. *wayyē’ābēq/bēhē’ābēqô*] constituted a deliberate wordplay on Enos’s father’s name “Jacob” (*ya’āqōb*) in terms of the verbal root **bq* in Enos 1:2. I have further argued that this holds additional implications for Enos’s autobiographical wordplay on his own name in Enos 1:1, especially in view of the patriarch Jacob’s (subsequently Israel’s) having “ha[d] ... power [*śārītā*; or better,

22. John Gee, “A Note on the Name *Nephi*” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 1/1 (1992): 189-91; Gee, “Four Suggestions on the Origin of the Name *Nephi*,” in *Pressing Forward with the Book of Mormon*, ed. John W. Welch and Melvin J. Thorne (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999), 1-5.

23. Raymond O. Faulkner, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian* (Oxford: Griffith Institute, 1999), 131.

24. Matthew L. Bowen, “Internal Textual Evidence for the Egyptian Origin of Nephi’s Name,” *Insights* 22/11 (2002): 2; Bowen, “Nephi’s Good Inclusion” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 17 (2016): 181-95.

25. John A. Tvedtnes and Matthew Roper, “Jacob and Enos: Wrestling before God,” *Insights* 21/5 (2001): 2-3.

26. Matthew L. Bowen, “‘And There Wrestled a Man with Him’ (Genesis 32:24): Enos’s Adaptations of the Onomastic Wordplay of Genesis,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 10 (2014): 151-160.

struggled]²⁷ with God and with **men** [*ʾānāšīm*, cf. *ʾēnôš* = “man”; cf. also *ʾiš*] and hast prevailed” (Genesis 32:28).

Genesis 33 completes the arc of Jacob’s divine “wrestle” in Genesis 32, with his reconciliatory “embrace” by Esau. I wish here to suggest that several divine protection and divine embrace passages in 2 Nephi and Enos should be understood against the backdrop of Jacob’s “wrestle” and “embrace” in Genesis 32–33. When Lehi, Nephi, Jacob, and Enos used the terms “redeem” and “redeemer,” they bring to mind Jacob’s biography:

In Genesis 48, Jacob’s blessing of Joseph’s sons was recorded thus:

And he [Jacob] blessed Joseph, and said,
[The] God [*hāʾēlōhīm*], before whom [*lēpānāw*] my fathers
Abraham and Isaac did walk,

The God [*hāʾēlōhīm*] which fed me all my life long unto this
day,

The Angel which redeemed me [*hammalʾāk haggōʾēl ʾōtī*]
from all evil, bless the lads;

and let my name [i.e., Jacob/Israel] be named on them,

and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac;

and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth.

(Genesis 48:15-16)

The juxtaposition of “before whom” [*(ʾāšer...) lēpānāw*] and “God” [*hāʾēlōhīm*] recalls Jacob’s “wrestling” experience at Peniel (*pēnīʾēl*) wherein he had “seen **God face to face** [*ʾēlōhīm pānīm ʾel- pānīm*]” (Genesis 32:30), and the subsequent reconciliatory “embrace” of his brother and his “see[ing] [Esau’s] **face** [*pānēkā*], as though [he] had seen the **face of God** [*pēnē ʾēlōhīm*]” (Genesis 33:10). Jacob’s mention of “the Angel [who] redeemed me” in parallel with “the God” alludes back to the divine man/angel/God with whom he “struggled” (becoming “Israel”) and “prevailed.”

The biblical narrator in Genesis 32, by means of a paronomasia on *yaʾāqōb* (Jacob) and *wayyēʾābēq* (“and there wrestled”) and *bēhēʾābēqō* (“in his wrestling”) inextricably linked the name Jacob (“may he [God] protect”) with the idea of being locked in the arms of divinity. Hugh Nibley writes:

27. Enos refers to the verb *šārītā* and the name Israel when he states that he speaks of “struggling in the spirit” on behalf of his fellow Nephites (Enos 1:10), “pray[ing] unto [the Lord] with many long strugglings for [his] brethren, the Lamanites” (Enos 1:11), and “strugglings” to restore the Lamanites “to the true faith” (Enos 1:14).

One of the most puzzling episodes in the Bible has always been the story of Jacob's wrestling with the Lord. When one considers that the word conventionally translated as wrestled (*yē'āvēq*) can just as well mean 'embrace' and that it was in this ritual embrace that Jacob received a new name and the bestowal of priestly and kingly power at sunrise (Genesis 32:24-30), the parallel to the Egyptian coronation embrace becomes at once apparent.²⁸

The paronomastic lexical association between "wrestling" and "embracing" in terms of the name Jacob is confirmed in the subsequent reconciliation or (at-one-ment) of Jacob with his brother Esau: "And Esau ran to meet him, **and embraced him** [*wayḥabbēqēhû*], and fell on his neck, and kissed him: and they wept" (Genesis 33:4). Our English word "embrace" ultimately derives from Latin *in* + *bracchium* ("arm"; cf. Spanish *brazos*, "arms") — i.e., "in arms." The German verb *umarmen* (*um*, "around" + *Arme* "arms"), "embrace," "enfold," to "lock in ... one's arms," concretely expresses the image.

As Stephen Geller observes, "the story becomes the account of a gracious, if not guarded, reconciliation. So the linking of *wayḥabbēqēhû* and *wayyē'ābēq* is no casual ornament but a device deeply meaningful to the logic of the story: the surest sign of literary intention."²⁹ In fact, the somewhat homonymous Hebrew verbs *'bq* ("wrestle") and *ḥbq* ("embrace") that feature so prominently in Genesis 32–33 may ultimately derive from the same Semitic root. In Ugaritic *ḥbq* means "to embrace, take in one's arms, cover."³⁰ Both appear to be cognate with the Akkadian verb *epēqu* (or earlier, *epēqum*) = "to embrace; grow over, round" and "embrace (in affection),"³¹ which was *ḥabāqum* in Eblaite.³²

28. Hugh W. Nibley, *The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri: An Egyptian Endowment*, 2nd ed. (CWHN 16; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 2005), 434.

29. Stephen A. Geller, "The Struggle at Jabbok: the Uses of Enigma in a Biblical Narrative," *Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society* 14 (1982): 42–43.

30. Gregorio Del Olmo Lete and Joaquín Sanmartín, *A Dictionary of the Ugaritic Language in the Alphabetic Tradition* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2003), 352–53.

31. *A Concise Dictionary of Akkadian*, ed. Jeremy Black, Andrew George, and Nicholas Postgate (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2000), 74. Cf., Del Olmo Lete and Sanmartín, *Dictionary of the Ugaritic Language*, 352.

32. Written LÁ.LA = 'à -ba-gu-um. (Ibid.).

Mark Smith suggests that “**hbq* means to hold someone by wrapping one’s arms around the person.”³³ This appears to be the exact sense of Lehi’s words in 2 Nephi 1:15, a passage which Nibley further cites as an example of the “ritual embrace” or divine embrace “that consummates the final escape from death”³⁴: “But behold, **the Lord hath redeemed my soul from hell; I have beheld his glory, and I am encircled about eternally in the arms of his love**” (2 Nephi 1:15).³⁵

Tremper Longman writes, “the verb *hbq* (embrace) refers to a gesture or action that denotes affection for another ... especially in the context of greetings or welcomes, particularly for the first time or after separation (Gen. 29:13; 2 Kings 4:16).”³⁶ The patriarch Jacob is the object of this verb in Genesis 29:13 (“then Laban heard the tidings of Jacob [*ya’āqōb*] his sister’s son, that he ran to meet him, **and embraced him** [*wayḥabbeq-lô*], and kissed him, and brought him to his house”) and Genesis 33:4 (“And Esau ran to meet him, **and embraced him** [*wayḥabbēqēhû*], and fell on his neck, and kissed him: and they wept”). He is the subject of the verb in Genesis 48:10: “And he brought them near unto him; and he kissed them, **and embraced them** [*wayḥabbēq lāhem*]” In each instance, the *hbq-ya’āqōb* paronomasia serves to strengthen the cognitive link between Jacob’s name and the affectionate, protective embrace. The Lord’s embrace of Lehi speaks to a kind of realized eschatology that his ancestor Jacob had attained to through the events of Genesis 32–33. Recognizing the paronomasia on *ya’āqōb-wayyē’ābēq-wayḥabbēqēhû* is key to not only understanding the entire cycle that deals with Jacob’s life and redemption, but also to understanding how Lehi, Nephi, Jacob, Enos, and their successors may have read and understood that cycle. For example, Mormon describes Alma’s experience that recalls the Jacob–Esau cycle and Enos’s autobiography: “Nevertheless **Alma labored much in the spirit, wrestling with God in mighty prayer**, that he would pour

33. Mark S. Smith, *The Rituals and Myths of the Feast of the Goodly Gods of KTU/CAT 1.23: Royal Constructions of Opposition, Intersection, Integration, and Domination* (SBL Resources for Biblical Study 51; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006), 96.

34. Hugh W. Nibley, *Approaching Zion* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1989), 559.

35. See Alan Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar*, 3rd rev. ed. (Oxford: Griffith Institute, 1957), “Sign List,” 453, D32.

36. Tremper Longman (*The Book of Ecclesiastes* [New International Commentary on the Old Testament; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998], 116) commenting on Ecclesiastes 3:5 “a time to embrace [*‘ēt laḥābōq*], and a time to refrain from embracing [*wē’ēt lirḥōq mēḥabbēq*].”

out his Spirit upon the people who were in the city; that he would also grant that he might baptize them unto repentance" (Alma 8:10). The new name Israel had been bestowed or put upon Jacob as part of his requested blessing while enfolded in the arms of—"wrestling" with—this God/Angel, just as Lehi was "encircled about eternally in the arms of [the Lord's] love" (2 Nephi 1:15).

It might be easy here to overlook additional language that firmly links Lehi's experience back to that of his ancestor Jacob. Lehi moreover declared that "the Lord hath redeemed my soul from hell" just as Jacob invoked "the God" or "the Angel which redeemed me from all evil" to put the name Jacob-Israel on them. Both Jacob and Lehi had "seen" their Redeemer's face (Genesis 32:30 [MT 32:31]) or "glory" (2 Nephi 1:15) and had been in the arms of Divinity as the *summa res* of their redemption.

It is against the biblical Jacob-wrestle-embrace-redemption backdrop that we should examine Lehi's earlier promise to his son Jacob:

Wherefore, **thy soul shall be blessed**, and **thou shalt dwell safely with thy brother, Nephi**; and thy days shall be spent in the service of thy God [i.e., in the temple]. Wherefore, **I know that thou art redeemed, because of the righteousness of thy Redeemer** [cf. Jacob's *gō'ēl*]; for **thou hast beheld** that in the fulness of time **he cometh to bring salvation unto men**. And **thou hast beheld** in thy youth **his glory**; wherefore, **thou art blessed** even as they unto whom he shall minister in the flesh. (2 Nephi 2:3-4; cf. Deuteronomy 33:28)

Jacob had seen his divine protector, the Lord — the protector implied in his hypocoristic, theophoric name. Nevertheless, we note that Lehi gave Jacob a blessing ("thy soul shall be blessed"; "wherefore thou art blessed") of divine protection bestowed through his brother Nephi ("thou shalt dwell safely with thy brother"), the promise of "redemption" (i.e., atonement, "I know that thou art redeemed"), and declared Jacob's earlier theophany as a young man ("thou hast beheld that ... he cometh to bring salvation unto men. And thou hast beheld in thy youth his glory"; Nephi later asserted, "My brother, Jacob, also has seen him").³⁷ All of this recalls, and appears

37. 2 Nephi 11:2-3:"And now I, Nephi, write more of the words of Isaiah, for my soul delighteth in his words. For I will liken his words unto my people, and I will send them forth unto all my children, for he verily saw my Redeemer, even as I have seen him. And my brother, Jacob, also has seen him as I have seen him; wherefore, I will send their words forth unto my children to prove unto them that my words are true."

to be meant to recall, their ancestor Jacob's esoteric "temple" experience at Peniel, and his subsequent reconciliation with Esau.

Shortly thereafter, Nephi and his younger brothers fled from their older brothers in much the same way that Jacob fled from the anger and hatred of his brother, Esau. The charge in both cases was "supplanting" or "robbery" (see Genesis 27:35-36; Mosiah 10:16; Alma 20:13; 54:17, see further below). Genesis 27:41 states, "Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing wherewith his father blessed him: and Esau said in his heart, The days of mourning for my father are at hand; then will I slay my brother Jacob." In 2 Nephi 4:13, Nephi recorded, "And it came to pass that not many days after his death, Laman and Lemuel and the sons of Ishmael were angry with me because of the admonitions of the Lord."

Rebekah warned Jacob to "flee" ("flee thou to Laban my brother to Haran," Genesis 27:43) from his brother Esau. Similarly, the Lord warned Nephi to flee from older brothers, "the Lord did warn me, that I, Nephi, should depart from them and **flee into the wilderness**, and all those who would go with me" (2 Nephi 5:5; cf. 4:33). In both instances, the warning to flee constitutes a part of the divine protection being afforded the two Jacobs.

Years later, when Esau went out to meet his brother Jacob, the latter's "terror is almost palpable"³⁸ as evident in his arrangement of his family in two camps, the children of the concubines (or wives of lesser status) in the front, etc. Jacob's distress is evident in his prayer:

And Jacob said, **O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac, the Lord** which saidst unto me, Return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee: I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan; and now I am become two bands. **Deliver me**, I pray thee, **from the hand of my brother**, from the hand of Esau: for I fear him, lest he will come and smite me, and the mother with the children. And thou saidst, I will surely do thee good, and make thy seed as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude. (Genesis 32:9-12)

Jacob's prayer finds its analog in Nephi's Psalm (which clearly has other antecedents in the Psalms of the Hebrew Bible). Like Jacob's prayer,

38. Geller, "The Struggle at Jabbok," 43; Stephen Geller, *Sacred Enigmas: Literary Religion in the Hebrew Bible* (London: Routledge, 1996), 13.

Nephi's Psalm is both a plea for protection and cry for redemption, which are themselves not mutually exclusive. The "wrestle" with the divine "man" ('îš, 'ēlōhîm, or *mal'āk*, Genesis 32:24, 28; 48:16) that follows Jacob's prayer is matched by a similarly envisioned divine encounter that Nephi anticipated:

O Lord, wilt thou redeem my soul? Wilt thou deliver me out of the hands of mine enemies? Wilt thou make me that I may shake at the appearance of sin? May the gates of hell be shut continually before me, because that my heart is broken and my spirit is contrite! O Lord, wilt thou not shut the gates of thy righteousness before me, that I may walk in the path of the low valley, that I may be strict in the plain road! O Lord, **wilt thou encircle me around in the robe of thy righteousness!** O Lord, wilt thou make a way for mine escape before mine enemies! Wilt thou make my path straight before me! Wilt thou not place a stumbling block in my way — but that thou wouldst clear my way before me, and hedge not up my way, but the ways of mine enemy. (2 Nephi 4:31-33)

Nibley cites Nephi's petition as an example of a ritual embrace and "a dramatic situation" (cf. temple drama): "It was the custom for one fleeing for his life in the desert to seek protection in the tent of a great sheik, crying out, '*Ana dakhîluka*', meaning 'I am thy suppliant,' whereupon the Lord would place the hem of his robe over the guest's shoulder and declare him under his protection."³⁹ Nephi's plea, "O Lord, wilt thou redeem my soul," was a plea for protection and atonement. As Nibley puts it, "to be redeemed is to be atoned."⁴⁰ Nephi's subsequent plea, "O Lord, wilt thou encircle me in the robe of thy righteousness!" constitutes a more intense plea for the same outcome. Nephi desired the same redemptive embrace(s) that Jacob his ancestor (Genesis 32–33) and his father Lehi had experienced.

A temple situation is presupposed by the imagery of "gates" — "the gates of [thy] righteousness [*šā'ārê šedeq*]" (Psalm 118:19-20)⁴¹ or "gate

39. Nibley, *Approaching Zion*, 559.

40. Ibid, 567. He continues, "From this it should be clear what kind of oneness is meant by the Atonement — it is being received in a close embrace of the prodigal son, expressing not only forgiveness, but oneness of heart and mind that amounts to identity, like a literal family identity as John sets it forth so vividly through chapters 14 through 17 of his Gospel."

41. Psalm 118:19-20: "Open to me the gates of righteousness [*šā'ārê -šedeq*]: I will go into them, and I will praise the Lord: This gate of the Lord [*haššā'ar lyhwh*],

of heaven [ša'ar haššāmayîm]⁴² (of the “house of God[s] [bêt 'ēlōhîm, cf. Bethel]” in Genesis 28:17) opposite “the gates of hell.” Nibley clearly recognized the “temple” nature of Nephi’s Psalm:

He [Nephi] comes to the tent of the Lord and enters as a suppliant; and in reply, the Master, as was the ancient custom, puts the hem of the robe protectively over the kneeling man’s shoulder (*katafa*). This puts him under the Lord’s protection from all enemies. They embrace in a close hug, as Arab chiefs still do; the Lord makes a place for him and invites him to sit down beside him — they are at-one. (2 Nephi 4:33; Alma 5:24)⁴³

Patriarch Jacob’s triumph consisted in his being reconciled to the Lord and to his inimical brother Esau and thus being “redeemed ... from all evil.” Lehi, Nephi, Jacob, and Enos experienced reconciliation and at-one-ment with the Lord, too. They longed to experience the reconciliation that Jacob experienced with Esau with their own family members who “would not come unto [Lehi] and partake of the fruit” of the tree of life (1 Nephi 8:18) — i.e., were not willing to come.⁴⁴

Subsequently and appropriately, Jacob, son of Lehi, is the one who established the image of divine embrace as a primary means of teaching about the protective aspects of the atonement and divine mercy. Jacob’s use of divine embrace imagery in the context of Psalm 95:7-11, which

into which the righteous shall enter”; cf. Isaiah 26:2: “Open ye the gates, that the righteous nation which keepeth the truth may enter in.” 2 Nephi 9:41: “O then, my beloved brethren, come unto the Lord, the Holy One. Remember that **his paths are righteous**. Behold, the way for man is narrow, but it lieth in a straight course before him, and **the keeper of the gate is the Holy One of Israel**; and he employeth no servant there; and there is none other way save it be by the gate; for he cannot be deceived, for the Lord God is his name.” Note the typical Egyptian temple as “the doors of heaven” (Edward F. Wente, “Egyptian Religion,” in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992) 2:409). See also John Gee, “The Keeper of the Gate,” in *The Temple in Time and Eternity*, ed. Donald W. Parry and Stephen Ricks (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999), 233-74.

42. Helaman 3:28: “Yea, thus we see that the gate of heaven is open unto all, even to those who will believe on the name of Jesus Christ, who is the Son of God.”

43. Nibley, *Approaching Zion*, 559.

44. Jennifer C. Lane, “The Presence of the Lord,” in *The Things Which My Father Saw: Approaches to Lehi’s Dream and Nephi’s Vision: The 40th Annual Brigham Young University Sidney B. Sperry Symposium* (ed. Daniel L. Belnap, Gaye Strathearn, and Stanley A. Johnson; Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2011), 130.

he quoted, portrayed the worshipper at the veil or the threshold of “enter[ing] into” the Lord’s “rest”:

Wherefore, my beloved brethren, I beseech of you in words of soberness that ye would repent, and come with full purpose of heart, and **cleave unto God as he cleaveth unto you** [cf. Hebrew *dbq* = “cleave”]. **And while his arm of mercy is extended towards you in the light of the day**, harden not your hearts. (Jacob 6:5; cf. 2 Nephi 32:4)

Jacob’s influential image of the Lord’s “arm of mercy” being “extended” appears throughout the remainder of the Book of Mormon (see, e.g., Mosiah 16:12; 29:20; Alma 5:33; 19:36; 29:10; 3 Nephi 9:14; Mormon 6:17). Certainly, the exodus image of Yahweh’s redeeming “outstretched arm” (e.g., Deuteronomy 26:8; Jeremiah 27:5) influenced Jacob’s development of this idea (see especially the Lord’s “arm” in 2 Nephi 8:5,9 as quoted from Isaiah 51:5, 9-11). However, the “arms of [the Lord’s] love” (2 Nephi 1:15) must have also influenced Jacob, as did Zenos’s and Isaiah’s image of the Lord’s “stretched forth” or “spread out” hands (Jacob 5:47; Isaiah 65:2; see especially Jacob 6:4). But it is the reconciliatory wrestling and embrace of Genesis 32–33 (“repent”) that evidently became, for Lehi, Nephi, Jacob, and their successors, a specific source for preaching the atonement of Jesus Christ and its effects.

The impact of ancestral stories about Jacob and his divine protection are perhaps no more evident than in the writing of Jacob’s son, Enos, whose autobiographical introduction contains wordplay both on his name and the name of his father, Jacob:⁴⁵

Behold, it came to pass that I, **Enos** [*’ēnôš*, Hebrew “man”], knowing my father [i.e., *ya’āqōb*] that he was a just **man** [*’iš/’ēnôš*]—for he taught me in his language and in the nurture and admonition of the Lord — and blessed be the name of my God for it — And I will tell you of the **wrestle** [**hē’ābēq*, pun on *ya’āqōb*] which I had **before God** [*līpnē ’ēlōhîm*, cf. Peniel],⁴⁶ before I received a remission of my sins. (Enos 1:1-2)

Enos’s autobiography evidences a notable parallelistic feature — Enos (man), “father” (Jacob) – “man” (*’iš/’ēnôš*), “wrestle” (echoing Jacob)—wherein the terms flip: first, Enos (man) flips from the name itself to emphasize its meaning — i.e., to “man” (*’iš-’ēnôš*) and second,

45. Bowen, “And There Wrestled a Man with Him,” 151-60.

46. Tvedtnes and Roper, “Jacob and Enos,” 2-3.

“father” as identifying Jacob (the son of Lehi) to the term “wrestle” which functions as a paronomastic identifier of Jacob (the son of Isaac, and patriarchal ancestor of Israel).

In this way, Enos’s introduction cunningly recalls both Nephi’s autobiographical wordplay and the paronomasia on “Jacob” found throughout the Genesis narratives, especially the scene in Genesis 32, in which Jacob (*ya’āqōb*) “passed over the ford **Jabbok**” (*yabbōq*) and “there **wrestled** [*wayyē’ābēq*] **a man** [*’iš*, cf. *’ēnōš*]” (32:22, 24 [MT 23, 25]).⁴⁷ Jacob refused to break his hold on the “man” unless the “man” blessed him, whereupon the “man” pronounced a new name on Jacob: “Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but **Israel** [*yisrā’ēl*] for **as a prince hast thou power** [*śārītā*, or, **thou hast struggled**]⁴⁸ with **God** [*’ēlōhīm*] and **men** [*’ānāšīm*, plural of “Enos”]” (32:26-29). The patriarch Jacob gave the place the new name “Peniel” (*pēnī’ēl*, “face of God”) because he had “seen **God face to face** [*’ēlōhīm pānīm ’el-pānīm*],” a name to which Enos alluded when describing his “wrestle ... **before God** [**lipnē ’ēlōhīm*],” as Tvedtnes and Roper note.⁴⁹ This is the pivotal event in the life story of him who went from being a grabber of his brother’s “heel” and a “supplanter” to one whom his once-estranged brother “embraced” (*wayḥabbēqēhū*, Genesis 33:4; cf. *wayyē’ābēq*, Genesis 32:24 [MT 25]), another sublime pun on “Jacob” (*ya’āqōb*).

Moreover, it is significant that Enos — unlike the Genesis narrator who specified that a “man” wrestled with Jacob — never explicitly mentioned the individual with whom he “wrestled.” That is because the “wrestle that [he] had before God” was also with a “man,” namely himself — Enos (Heb. *’ēnōš* “man”)! Enos also seemed to allude to Jacob’s new name “Israel” when he described his and his people’s later “strugglings” on behalf of, and with the Lamanites (Enos 1:10, 11, 14). Amid these struggles Enos obtained a promise that the Nephite records would be protected or “preserved” (1:15-18).

47. *’ēnōš* is a poetic synonym of *’iš* (“man”) and both share the same (usual) plural form: *’ānāšīm*. Jacob “struggled” (or “had power”) with divine beings and “Enoses.”

48. There are two **sry* roots in Hebrew: one is a biform of **śrr* (“rule, reign”; see HALOT, 1362), the other means to “strive, contend with” (see HALOT, 1354), i.e., to “struggle with.” The latter seems to best fit the context (cf. “wrestling”). The author’s use of wordplay, however, allows for both: a “new name” is not infrequently a throne name.

49. Tvedtnes and Roper, “Jacob and Enos,” 2-3.

“May ... the God of Jacob Protect this People”

In addition to the writings of Nephi, Jacob, and Enos, another part of Nephite sacred history that revolves around the Jacob-Esau story is the traditional Lamanite grievance that Nephi had “robbed” their fathers. As Zenos reported, “they said that he **robbed** them” (Mosiah 10:16) — i.e., he had taken the plates of brass, and “supplanted” them in their right to rule. In the words of Lamoni’s father: “Behold, he **robbed** our fathers” (Alma 20:13). As noted above, Nephite writers — e.g., Enos and his successors — recognized that Nephi and his successors fit the biblical type of Jacob and the Lamanites fit the type of Esau in terms of fraternal relationship dynamics and their underlying grievances.

Moreover, that the Nephites themselves were likely aware⁵⁰ of the prophet Jeremiah’s pejorative wordplay on the name Jacob is well-known: “Take ye heed every one of his neighbour, and trust ye not in any brother: for every brother will **utterly supplant** [*‘āqôb ya‘qôb*], and every neighbour will walk with slanders” (Jeremiah 9:4). Malachi, perhaps cognizant of Jeremiah’s earlier wordplay, used a similar wordplay in his well-known declaration on tithing and “robbing” God (see immediately below). Importantly, Malachi 3-4 became “Lehite” texts when Jesus himself quoted them in full to the Nephites and Lamanites.

Thus, when Jesus quoted Malachi in 3 Nephi 24-25, Malachi’s declaration on tithing and “robbing” God took on additional significance for the Lamanite and Nephites in light of two historical issues that had existed among them: Lamanite charges of “robbery” against the Nephites and the more recent, but related issue of the Gaddianton “robbers.” It should be remembered here Jesus’s audience were “the house of Jacob,” “the seed of Jacob,” “the remnant of Jacob” or “the sons of Jacob”:

For I am the Lord, I change not; therefore **ye sons of Jacob** [*běně ya‘āqôb*] are not consumed. Even from the days of your fathers ye are gone away from mine ordinances, and have not kept them. Return unto me and I will return unto you, saith the Lord of Hosts. But ye say: Wherein shall we return? **Will**

50. Nephi states that the brass plates contained “many prophecies which have been spoken by the mouth of Jeremiah” (1 Nephi 5:13). Nephi himself quotes Jeremiah 17:5 (“Thus saith the Lord; Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord,” 2 Nephi 4:34, see also 2 Nephi 28:31). Similarly, Nephi’s use of the phrase “fountain of living waters” (1 Nephi 11:25) appears to derive from Jeremiah’s twofold use of the same phrase (Jeremiah 2:13; 17:13). Jeremiah’s prophecies remained important among the Nephites even in later years as evident in Helaman 8:20 (cf. 3 Nephi 19:4).

a man **rob** [hăyiqbaʿ] God? Yet ye have **robbed** [qōbēʿim] me. But ye say: **Wherein have we robbed** [qēbaʿānūkā] **thee**? In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse, for **ye have robbed me** [qōbēʿim], **even this whole nation**. (3 Nephi 24:6-9; quoting Malachi 3:6-9)

As Luis Alonso-Schökel and Moshe Garsiel have individually noted,⁵¹ Malachi played on the name Jacob (*yaʿāqōb*) in terms of verb *qbʿ*, to “rob.” The wordplay takes the form of paronomasia exploiting the homophony of Jacob and the verb *qbʿ*. The use of *qbʿ* in connection with the name Jacob emphasizes that “Jacob” or the “sons of Jacob” (i.e., Israel as a nation) stands guilty of “robbing” the Lord. This is considered such an important point that the verb is repeated four times in closed proximity for emphasis.

Jesus declared that he was “commanded” to “give” this particular text to his Lamanite and Nephite audience. Citing this scripture to the “sons of Jacob” not only suggested but *ensured* that they would be included in “this whole nation” (or, “the nation — all of it”). In other words, they would be brought under the same condemnation as their brethren in the eastern hemisphere. This wordplay also recalls the Genesis narrative with its paronomasia on “Jacob,” “heel,” and the denominative verb *qb*, to “supplant,” “usurp” (Genesis 25:26; 27:36). The verbs *qbʿ* and *qb* are formed from the same three root letters, homophonous (similar in sound), and as LXX Greek Malachi 3 suggests, can be treated as virtually synonymous.⁵² In other words, “supplanting” was tantamount to “robbing.”

This very issue — “supplanting” or “robbery” — had long been one of the traditional grievances of the Lamanites against the Nephites. According to this tradition, Nephi “robbed” the birthright of Laman (Mosiah 10:16; Alma 45:17).⁵³ Nephi not only “robbed,” but *supplanted* Laman and Lemuel’s “right” to rule, just as Jacob “supplanted” Esau: “he

51. See Luis Alonso-Schökel, *A Manual of Biblical Poetics* (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1988), 31; Moshe Garsiel, *Biblical Names: A Literary Study of Midrashic Derivations and Puns*, trans. Phyllis Hackett (Ramat Gan, Israel: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1991), 21.

52. Cf. the rendering of the verb *qbʿ* with the verb *pternizein* “to betray” (literally, to strike at or trip up by the heel) in LXX Greek suggests that the Hellenistic Jewish translator recognized the wordplay and its connection to the Jacob-Esau cycle (Genesis 25:26; 27:36; Hosea 12:3).

53. See Noel B. Reynolds, “The Political Dimension in Nephi’s Small Plates,” *BYU Studies* 27/4 (Fall 1987): 15-16.

had taken the ruling out of their hands" (Mosiah 10:15). Nephite writers like Enos and Zeniff manifested awareness of this biblical parallel. They understood that this perceived "robbery," "supplanting" or "usurpation" constituted the basis for Lamanites' longstanding "hatred" and treatment of the Nephites — i.e., robbery, plunder, and murder (Mosiah 10:17).

When it came to the issue of systematic "robbery," however, the Nephites were by no means faultless. According to Mormon's abridgment of Helaman's record, secret combinations began among the Nephites as a political dispute (see Helaman 1). Bearing in mind the original meaning of "Jacob" ("may he protect") and the pejorative associations ascribed to the name by the Genesis text (Genesis 25:26; 27:36) and prophetic texts (Jeremiah 9:4 and Malachi 3:6-9), it is interesting to consider Mormon's description of the Gaddianton robbers' (hereafter Gaddianton robbers', see below) program of systematic "protect[ion] and preserv[ation]":

But behold, Satan did stir up the hearts of the more part of the Nephites, insomuch that they did unite with those *bands of robbers*, and did enter into their covenants and their oaths, that they would **protect and preserve** one another in whatsoever difficult circumstances they should be placed, that they should not suffer for their murders, and their plunderings, and their **stealings**. (Helaman 6:21)

Mormon further informs us that during this same period the Nephites were in "a state of such awful wickedness" in part because "those *Gaddianton robbers* [were] filling the judgment-seats — having **usurped** [cf. the negative, denominative meaning of *qb*, "supplant," or "usurp"] the power and authority of the land; laying aside the commandments of God, and not in the least aright before him; doing no justice unto the children of men" (Helaman 7:4). Not insignificantly, Mormon indicated that the *Gaddianton robbers* themselves eventually adopted the old traditional anti-Nephite Lamanite polemic that the Nephites had "robbed" or "retained" from the Lamanites their "right[s] to the government"⁵⁴ (see especially 3 Nephi 3:10 in view of Alma 54:17-18, 24)⁵⁵

54. See, e.g., 2 Nephi 5:3; Mosiah 10:16; and Alma 54:17-18, 24.

55. From *Giddianhi's* epistle to Lachoneus: "And I write this epistle unto you, Lachoneus, and I hope that ye will deliver up your lands and your possessions, without the shedding of blood, that this my people may recover their rights and government, who have dissented away from you because of your wickedness in retaining from them their rights of government, and except ye do this, I will avenge their wrongs. *I am Giddianhi.*"

in order to justify their own practices of robbery, plunder, and murder (3 Nephi 4:5).

In Helaman 2:11-12, Gaddianton is spelled with the double-*d* in the Original Book of Mormon Manuscript, and is allowed by the O MS spacing at Helaman 2:4. As pointed out by John W. Welch and Kelly Ward in 1985, the Hebrew word for “band; bandits,” *gēdūd*, is spelled with the double-*d*.⁵⁶ In fact, the Hebrew phrase *’iš gēdūdīm* “band of robbers” is even used in Hosea 6:9 (cf. Hosea 7:1 “bandits” NRSV; Genesis 30:11 “troop”⁵⁷ KJV), and this matches the plural Neo-Babylonian *gudūdānu*, and Phoenician *b’l gddm* “gang of robbers” (cf. Psalm 56:7 *yāgōddū* “they form a gang,” as emended).⁵⁸

By the time the Savior appeared to the Lamanites and Nephites in 3 Nephi 11, both politico-ethnic groups had been heavily involved in the practices of the *Gaddianton robbers* (Helaman 6:17-18, 30-31, 37-38). They had been guilty of “robbing” God in their ceaseless attempts to “get gain”⁵⁹ and their concomitant oppression of the poor (Helaman 6:39).

Just one generation after the time of Nephi the son of Helaman and just two generations after the rise of the Gaddianton robbers, they threatened the very survival of the Nephites and Lamanites. Like many of the “robbers” themselves, the Lamanites and Nephites were “Jacob” or “the seed of Jacob” (3 Nephi 5:24; Mormon 5:24; 7:10; cf. Alma 46:23). 3 Nephi 4:10 states that they “did not fear [the robbers]; but they did

56. “Gadianton”, Book of Mormon Onomasticon, last modified on 14 November 2015, <https://onoma.lib.byu.edu/index.php/GADIANTON>; citing John W. Welch and Kelly Ward, “Thieves and Robbers,” July 1985 *FARMS Update* (reprinted in John W. Welch, ed., *Reexploring the Book of Mormon: A Decade of New Research* [Provo, UT: FARMS; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992], 248-49).

57. LDS *Holy Bible* (1979), 45 n, play on Hebrew words *gedud* “troop” and *gad* “good fortune.”

58. Hayim ben Yosef Tawil, *An Akkadian Lexical Companion for Biblical Hebrew: Etymological, Semantic and Idiomatic Equivalence with Supplement on Biblical Aramaic* (Jersey City, NJ: KTAV Publishing House, 2009) 64; citing Genesis 49:19, Psalm 94:21 *yāgōddū* (“band together against”) from *The Chicago Assyrian Dictionary, Volume 5*, “G.” Ed. Leo Oppenheim (Chicago: Oriental Institute, 1956), 120a; Wolfram von Soden, *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch*. 3 vols. (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1965-1981), 1:295b; Herbert Donner and Wolfgang. Röllig, *Kanaanäische und aramäische Inschriften*. 3 vols. (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1968), 26A I:13:13-15.

59. On the wordplay on the name Cain in terms of “get gain” (Helaman 6:17, 27; Mormon 8:40; Ether 8:15-16, 22-23; cf. Moses 5:31), see Matthew L. Bowen, “Getting Cain and Gain,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 15 (2015): 115-41.

fear **their God** and did supplicate him for **protection**.” Miraculously, the robbers were defeated and the faithful preserved. The jubilation that followed (4:29-31) took on a ceremonial nature where the text quotes three liturgical exclamations thanking the Lord and invoking his continual “preservation” or “protection.” The second, in particular, seems to play on the meaning of “Jacob”:

And they did rejoice and cry again with one voice, saying:
May the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and **the God of Jacob, protect** [cf. *ya'āqōb*] this people in righteousness so long as they call on the name of their God for **protection** (3 Nephi 4:30; cf. Deuteronomy 33:28).

The Lord did protect Lehi's family and descendants, including Jacob's descendants, “so long as they call[ed] on their God for protection,” protection that also came as an extended fulfillment of the ancient blessing of Jacob-Israel in Deuteronomy 33:28 and Lehi's son, Jacob, in 2 Nephi 3:2

When they ceased to “call upon God for protection” (a few generations later), swift destruction ensued. The “robbers” from which the descendants of Jacob had been protected would play a decisive role in the destruction of the Nephites: “And they did not come unto Jesus with broken hearts and contrite spirits, but they did curse God, and wish to die. Nevertheless they would **struggle** with the sword for their lives” (Mormon 2:14). Mormon promised his readers, “in the end of this book [i.e., the entire Book of Mormon] ye shall see that this Gaddianton did prove, yea, almost the entire destruction of the people of Nephi” (Helaman 2:13).

Accordingly, Mormon marked the presence and influence of the Gaddianton robbers at each stage of his people's destruction. When he was “forbidden to preach” to the people as a whole “because of the hardness of their hearts” (Mormon 1:17), Mormon wrote that concomitantly, the “*Gaddianton robbers*, who were among the Lamanites, did infest the land” (Mormon 1:18). Increasingly, “the land was filled with robbers and with Lamanites” (Mormon 2:8; cf. 10) until, Mormon tells us,

My heart did sorrow because of this the great calamity of my people, because of their wickedness and their abominations. But behold, we did go forth against the Lamanites and the **robbers of Gaddianton**, until we had again taken possession of the lands of our inheritance. And the three hundred and forty and ninth year had passed away. And in the three hundred and fiftieth year we made a treaty with the Lamanites

and the **robbers of Gaddianton**, in which we did get the lands of our inheritance divided. (Mormon 2:27-28)

Mormon notes that it was not just the “unbelieving”⁶⁰ Lamanites that destroyed the Nephites, but also the Gaddianton robbers from whom he had once saved and “protected” the Nephites and Lamanites (3 Nephi 4) — the seed of Jacob (“may he protect”).

In the end, however, the Lord removed that protection, and the Nephites, once so favored of the Lord, were destroyed. But the Lord removed his divine protection from the Lamanites too. Moroni states, “And behold, it is the hand of the Lord which hath done it. And behold also, **the Lamanites are at war one with another; and the whole face of this land is one continual round of murder and bloodshed**; and no one knoweth the end of the war” (Mormon 8:8). The *Gaddianton* problem remained a danger for them: “And now, behold, I say no more concerning them, for **there are none save it be the Lamanites and robbers** that do exist upon the face of the land” (Mormon 8:8-9).

“The God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob,” had ceased to “protect” the Nephites and Lamanites “in righteousness” because they no longer “call on the name of their God for **protection**” (see again 3 Nephi 4:31; cf. Deuteronomy 33:28). The Lord did, however, protect Nephite records (including the “plates of Jacob”) in accordance with the promise secured by Enos and his fathers, including his father Jacob.

Conclusion

The last thing that Mormon wrote before his death informed his latter-day audience that they are descendants of Jacob and that this identity is critical to their eternal welfare: “And ye will also know that ye are a **remnant of the seed of Jacob**; therefore ye are numbered among the people of the first covenant; and if it so be that ye believe in Christ, and are baptized, first with water, then with fire and with the Holy Ghost, following the example of our Savior, according to that which he hath commanded us, it shall be well with you in the day of judgment. Amen”

60. See, e.g., Mormon’s and Moroni’s descriptions of the Lamanites in Mormon 5:15; 9:6; Ether 4:3. For more on the Nephite polemical use of “unbelief” (cf. Hebrew *lō’-’ēmun*, Deuteronomy 32:20) as means of characterizing the Lamanites, see Matthew L. Bowen, “Not Partaking of the Fruit: Its Generational Consequences and Its Remedy,” in *The Things Which My Father Saw: Approaches to Lehi’s Dream and Nephi’s Vision (2011 Sperry Symposium)*, ed. Daniel L. Belnap, Gaye Strathearn, and Stanley A. Johnson (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2011), 240-63.

(Mormon 7:10). His son wrote, similarly, "But behold, I will show unto you a God of miracles, even the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob; and it is that same God who created the heavens and the earth, and all things that in them are" (Mormon 9:11).

Amulek appealed to his ancestors' and forebears' (Lehi, Nephi, Jacob, and Enos's) use of the image of Jacob's "wrestle" and atoning "embrace" to teach about how the atonement of Jesus Christ *protects* the truly penitent from the demands of divine justice: "And thus mercy can satisfy the demands of justice, and **encircles them in the arms of safety**, while he that exercises no faith unto repentance **is exposed** to the whole law of the demands of justice; therefore only unto him that has faith unto repentance is brought about the great and eternal plan of redemption" (Alma 34:16; cf. 2 Nephi 1:15; 4:33; Enos 1:2; cf. "mercy, which overpowereth justice," Alma 34:15).

Although mercy through the atonement protects the repentant, it cannot and will not save a man or a woman "in" his or her sins. Perhaps, then, we can again detect an allusion to "Jacob" in Alma's explanation of this doctrine to Corianton: "What, do ye suppose that mercy can **rob** justice? I say unto you, Nay; not one whit. If so, God would cease to be God" (Alma 42:25).

In the end, the Nephites, whom "the Lord would not always suffer ... to take happiness in sin" (Mormon 2:13), were overtaken by divine justice and the consequences of their unrighteousness. It might have been otherwise, as Mormon laments: "For I know that such will sorrow for the calamity of the house of Israel; yea, they will sorrow for the destruction of this people; they will sorrow that this people had not repented that they might have been **clasped in the arms of Jesus**." (Mormon 5:11)

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