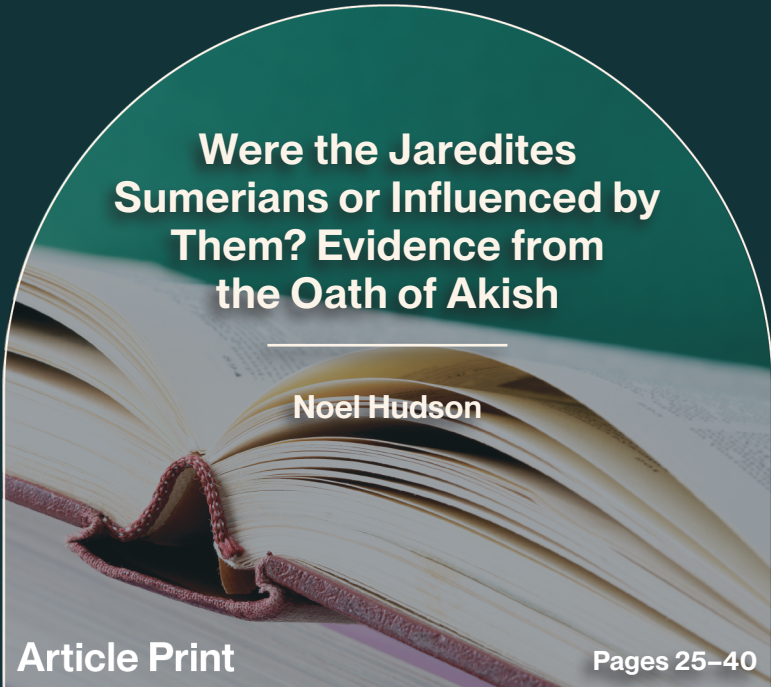


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Them? Evidence from
the Oath of Akish**

Noel Hudson

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Were the Jaredites Sumerians or Influenced by Them? Evidence from the Oath of Akish

Noel Hudson

Abstract: *This paper explores the oath sworn by Akish and his followers in Ether 8:13–15 as a possible remnant of ancient Sumerian legal and religious tradition. It draws on comparative evidence from early Mesopotamian oath formulae, including the Vulture Stele of Lagash and other Sumerian contractual texts. The study proposes that the structure of the oath sworn “by the God of heaven, and also by the heavens, and also by the earth” reflects a triadic invocation pattern consistent with Sumerian invocations of An, Enlil, and Ki. Modern commentators have noted Moroni’s interpretive Christianization of the Jaredite record. This analysis suggests that, beneath that redaction, the oath preserves linguistic and theological elements traceable to a Mesopotamian origin. The comparison illuminates both the antiquity of Jaredite culture and the deep continuity between Near Eastern oath traditions and Book of Mormon narrative patterns visible in the first recorded formation of a secret combination.*

In Ether 8, a forlorn Jared, who was once the conquering king of the land of Moron, laments the loss of his throne. His enterprising daughter proposed a bold and sinister plan to regain power. She reminded her father of an ancient “account concerning them of old, that they by their secret plans did obtain kingdoms and great glory” (Ether 8:9). This scheme involved forming a secret oath-bound society dedicated to overthrowing the government. She further suggested recruiting Akish, the son of Kimnor, to lead the conspiracy.

To give a bit of context at this point in the narrative, just four

generations had gone by from the time that Jared₁ and his brother came out from the Tower of Babel. Jared₁'s youngest son, Orihah, had accepted the throne and then passed it to his son, Kib. Rival kings such as Corihor, who rebelled against their fathers, were omitted from the official lineage, so the rightful king was Shule, who redeemed his father Kib from captivity. Shule passed the kingdom to Omer, and Omer's son, Jared₂, followed in the footsteps of his great uncle, Corihor, and took his father captive. Again, as with Corihor, Jared₂ was overthrown by the rightful king and was about to be put to death, but he successfully persuaded his brothers to spare him.

Despite his fair promises to his brothers, Jared₂ had his heart set on being king. He was willing to go to almost any length to get the kingdom back. This was where his daughter stepped in with her idea about creating a secret society. Jared₂'s daughter reckoned she could capture the interest of Akish with her dancing skills. So, she persuaded her father to outsource the dirty work of the creation of the secret society to Akish. Likely, Akish was selected because he was Omer's friend (Ether 8:11) and perhaps because he came across as the sort who would not mind spilling a bit of blood — especially if it meant he would be marrying into the royal family. Recognizing the peril of exposure, Akish began recruitment among his own family members — a prudent measure for secret societies vulnerable to betrayal.¹ What followed was unexpected: Akish required his followers to swear a solemn oath of loyalty and secrecy that explicitly called upon divine witnesses. The record states the following:

And it came to pass that they all sware unto him, by the God of heaven, and also by the heavens, and also by the earth, and by their heads, that whoso should vary from the assistance which Akish desired should lose his head; and whoso should divulge whatsoever thing Akish made known unto them, the same should lose his life. (Ether 8:14)

This passage raises intriguing questions about Jaredite culture and religious practice. Why would an oath sworn for nefarious purposes invoke the “God of heaven”? Is it possible that the form of this oath reflects Ancient Near Eastern models perhaps derived from early Mesopotamian conventions? Evidence from Sumerian, Akkadian, and Babylonian texts suggests that it might.

1. Bonnie H. Erickson, “Secret Societies and Social Structure,” *Social Forces* 60, no. 1 (1981): 194–96.

Oaths and Contracts in Sumeria

In Sumeria, writing evolved from basic economic records into formal legal documents marked by standardized contractual language. Such language soon became standard across the Sumerian world.² This structural development later influenced Akkadian, Babylonian, and Assyrian practice. Sumerian legal and diplomatic life relied heavily on oaths to bind individuals and city-states under divine sanctions.

Sumerian oath tradition exhibits a recurring three-part pattern: divine invocation, sworn obligation or assertion, and conditional sanction.³ These three elements are found in the Oath of Akish, as shown in table 1.

Table 1. Example of Sumerian oath structure and the Oath of Akish.

Sumerian Oath Structure	A Sumerian Example (the Stele of Lagash)	The Oath of Akish in Ether 8:14
Invocation of divine witnesses	He swore to him [Eannatum]: By the life of Enlil, the king of heaven and earth!	And it came to pass that they all swore unto him, by the God of heaven, and also by the heavens, and also by the earth,
Statement of the pledged obligation	Promise to never violate boundaries; nor infringe upon their dikes, not rip out stelae	whoso should vary from the assistance which Akish desired... and whoso should divulge whatsoever thing Akish made known unto them
Conditional curses	The net of Enlil [will] be hurled down on Umma	should lose his head...the same should lose his life

Invocation of divine witnesses

Function One of the earliest extant examples of Sumerian oath structure comes from the Vulture Stele of Lagash, dating to around 2,500 BC. This inscription records the victory of Eannatum, king of Lagash, a city-state in southern Iraq, over the rival city of Umma. It sets forth the obligations of the defeated people. The text reads as follows:

2. Massimo Maiocchi, "Writing in Early Mesopotamia: The Historical Interplay of Technology, Cognition, and Environment," in *Beyond the Meme: Development and Structure in Cultural Evolution*, ed. Alan C. Love and William C. Wimsatt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019), 399–402.

3. Anne Marie Kitz, *Cursed Are You!: The Phenomenology of Cursing in Cuneiform and Hebrew Texts* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2014), 53–55, archive.org/details/cursedareyouphen0000kitz/page/52/mode/2up.

[The Ummaite] swore to him [Eannatum]: “By the life of Enlil, the king of heaven and earth! The fields of Ningirsu I will eat [only] up to one karu, [and only] up to the old dike will I claim; but never unto wide eternity will I violate the boundaries of Ningirsu, nor will I infringe upon their dikes [and] canals; nor will I rip out their stelae. If I violate [this treaty], then may the susgal-net of Enlil, by which I have sworn, be hurled down on Umma from heaven.”⁴

This treaty agreement is repeated with six different divine names (*Enlil, Ninhursaga, Enki, Suen, Utu, Ninki*), all of whom are divine agents associated with either earth or sky.⁵ Swearing oaths by the deities of earth and heaven was part of the practice that spread from Sumeria to the Mesopotamian world and beyond.⁶ Calling upon divine witnesses was considered a reliable means for guaranteeing that the terms of an oath would be adhered to. Donald Magnetti observes,

Only an appeal to the gods could be an effective means to guarantee observance of the treaty — other than a resort to military force. The solemn appeal to the gods to bear witness to the promises made and to punish nonrealization of those promises was subscribed under oath. As such, the oath by the gods was the constitutive element — that which provided the sanction — in the ancient Near Eastern international treaty.⁷

The giving of a pledge

The oath-taker usually pledged specific obligations, often concerning boundaries, tribute, loyalty, or other duties. If violated, the same gods who were invoked in the opening lines of the oath were called upon

4. Donald L. Magnetti, “The Function of the Oath in the Ancient Near Eastern International Treaty,” *The American Journal of International Law* 72, no. 4 (1978): 816.

5. Bendt Alster, “Images and Text on the ‘Stele of the Vultures,’” *Archiv Für Orientforschung*, Bd 50 (2003): 1–10.

6. Alberto Bernabé, “To Swear to Heaven and Earth, from Mesopotamia to Greece,” in *Mesopotamia in the Ancient World: Impact, Continuities, Parallels. Proceedings of the Seventh Symposium of the Melammu Project Held in Oberurg, Austria, 4–8 November 2013*, ed. Robert Rollinger and Erik van Dongen (Munich, DE: Ugarit Verlag, 2015), 7:125–34.

7. Magnetti, “Function of the Oath,” 815.

to enforce punishment. Mercer gives an example from an adoption document that includes an extensive pledge:

A certain woman had no daughter and adopted the daughter of another. The woman agrees to pay an initial fee, and promises that she will not make the girl a servant. If she does so the child will return to her father's house. In case the woman dies, the adopted girl will inherit her property. Should the woman say to the girl, "Thou art not my daughter," she forfeits her fee, and should the girl say, "Thou art not my mother," she becomes a servant.⁸

The pledge witnessed by deities was seen as taking on a sacred obligation that the gods would require at the hands of the one swearing the oath.

The conditional curse

Mercer gives several examples of curses that would fall on anyone who broke an oath sworn to the gods. These curses typically ran from death to disease and famine. Bruce Wells notes,

The [main clause] identifies an authority figure (usually one or more gods) who is called upon to inflict harm on the object of the curse. The harms invoked range from death and illness to loss of divine favor and loss of children. Some deities are associated more with one type of harm than with others. Curses from earlier in the period tend to invoke the triad of Anu, Enlil, and Ea.⁹

The conditional curses invoked as a punishment for breaking the pledge could be quite inventive and detailed. Some examples, ranging from the simple to the extremely involved, include the following:

- Straightforward: "May demon, devil and evil spirit select your houses!"
- Uniquely relevant: "May the head of [a personal name] be cut off!"
- Detailed: "May all the great gods of heaven and earth who

8. Samuel A. B. Mercer, "The Oath in Cuneiform Inscriptions III. The Oath in Inscriptions since the Time of the Hammurabi Dynasty," *The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures* 30, no. 3 (1914): 198.

9. Bruce Wells, review of "Oaths and Curses: A Study in Neo- and Late Babylonian Legal Formulary," by Malgorzata Sandowicz, *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 139, no. 1 (2019): 215–19.

inhabit the universe and are mentioned by name in this tablet, strike you, look at you in anger, uproot you from among the living and curse you grimly with a painful curse!”

- Creative: “May your days be dark and your years dim, may darkness which is not to be brightened be declared as your fate. May your life end in exhaustion and sleeplessness.”¹⁰

These oaths thus combined the invocation of deities, binding pledges, and conditional curses. The oaths above, and many similar oaths, span time periods ranging from ancient Sumerian and Akkadian times all the way to the Neo-Assyrian empire. While this includes time periods after the Jaredites left Mesopotamia (generally believed to be somewhere between 2,400 and 2,200 BC),¹¹ the oath pattern was established much earlier on.¹² This formula endured for millennia and crossed cultural boundaries.¹³

Sumerian Structure of the Oath of Akish

In his analysis of the story of the daughter of Jared, Joseph M. Spencer identifies the Oath of Akish as belonging to a much older textual strata that can be clearly separated from the surrounding text. He sees the oath as possessing a poetic character that clearly separates it as having a more complex compositional history.¹⁴ The oath does indeed seem to partake of the ancient structure established by the Sumerians, as illustrated in table 1. The formulaic nature of the oath is, perhaps, what made it stand out to Spencer.

Sumerian deities in the Oath of Akish

At first glance, Akish’s oath appears to invoke only a single deity: “the God of heaven.” However, this straightforward interpretation may be the result of an obscuring of polytheistic tendencies that the text itself

10. Mi-Ja Jang, “Biblical Covenant-Curses in the Light of Ancient Near Eastern Curse” (PhD diss., University of Liverpool, 1998, 65, 77, 113, 269).

11. “Ether 1–5,” in *Book of Mormon Student Manual* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1979), churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/book-of-mormon-student-manual/chapter-50-ether-1-5.

12. John Nicholas Postgate, *City of Culture 2600 BC: Early Mesopotamian History and Archaeology at Abu Salabikh* (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2024), 188.

13. Jang, “Biblical Covenant-Curse,” 64–67.

14. Joseph M. Spencer, “Jared’s Two Daughters,” in *Illuminating the Jaredite Records*, ed. Daniel L. Belnap (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University [BYU]; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2020), 210–13.

hints were present in the land (for example, Ether 7:23). Rosalynde Frandsen Welch observes in her theological introduction to the book of Ether that "Ether's voice is largely absent from Moroni's rendition."¹⁵ Similarly, Grant Hardy says that "although the Jaredite record refers to 'the Lord' more than a hundred times, nothing specifically links this deity to Jesus or his gospel."¹⁶

The obvious exception to this observation is Ether 3:14 where Christ introduces himself to the brother of Jared. Although the text shows clearly that the brother of Jared, had an astonishing theophany in which he saw the pre-mortal Lord, the Jaredites certainly would not have worshipped God and his son under the same names as the Hebrews. The name *Jesus Christ* combines the Greek *Iesous*, which is the transliteration of the Hebrew *Jeshua* or *Joshua* (meaning "Jehovah is salvation"),¹⁷ with *Christos*, the Greek equivalent of Hebrew *māšîah* (Messiah or "anointed one"). Thus, *Jesus Christ* may be understood as Jesus "the Anointed One" or, in broader theological terms, "the Anointed Savior."¹⁸ It seems likely that when the Lord introduced himself to the brother of Jared, he would have used words with similar meanings in the native tongue of the man he was addressing.

If, as some commentators propose, the Jaredites originated from Mesopotamia,¹⁹ their original religious framework could have included multiple deities, particularly the triad of *An*, *Enlil*, and *Enki* (or *Ki*).²⁰ Perhaps the Jaredites would have worshipped the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost under these or other names familiar to them. If they were from a Sumerian background, the most natural fit would be the worship of the gods of their culture who were the counterparts of the Hebrew deities. Adam Stone states that "Without question Enlil, with

15. Rosalynde Frandsen Welch, *Ether: A Brief Theological Introduction* (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute, 2020), 5.

16. Grant Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 235.

17. "Origin of the Name of Jesus Christ," *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, New Advent, newadvent.org/cathen/08374x.htm.

18. Andreas J. Köstenberger, "Messiah," in *The Encyclopedia of Christian Civilization*, ed. George Thomas Kurian (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), doi.org/10.1002/9780470670606.wbecc0894.

19. Hugh Nibley, "Israel's Neighbors" (Provo, UT: class lecture, 24 February 1965, p. 2, *Nibley Online Collection*, Harold B. Lee Library, BYU), contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/NibleyOC/id/20.

20. In later Sumerian myths the god *Enki*, whose name means "Lord of the Earth," supplanted the goddess *Ki*.

An and Enki, form the supreme Mesopotamian triad of deities.”²¹ Jean Bottéro confirms this.²² When read against the backdrop of Sumerian and Mesopotamian practice, the oath’s structure aligns with the triadic formula invoking *An* (heaven), *Ki/Enki* (earth), and *Enlil* (lord of heaven) as witnesses.

Akish and his followers “sware by the God of heaven, and also by the heavens, and also by the earth.” This structure appears to closely mirror Sumerian formulae. In Sumerian, *An* refers both to the sky and to the god of the sky;²³ *Ki* means “earth” and is also the name of the goddess of the earth. Alternatively, the oath might be meant to invoke *Enki*, whose name means “Lord of the Earth.”²⁴ *Enki* was a later earth deity commonly worshipped across ancient Mesopotamia.²⁵ The divine son of *An* was *Enlil*, the “Lord of Heaven.”²⁶ This was a god who mediated between heaven and earth and who was often invoked in royal legitimation.²⁷ Later Babylonian legal texts preserve the same triad under Akkadian names: *Anu* (*An*), *Enlil* (*Bel*), and *Ea* (*Enki*).²⁸

A Mesopotamian equivalent to Jesus Christ?

While the Jaredites would have used their own names for divine beings and have maintained a tradition and religious culture separate from the Hebrew tradition, this fact is obscured by Moroni’s approach, which contextualizes the Jaredite record inside of the Nephite Christian religion. Careful reading, however, may allow one to differentiate what the

21. Adam Stone, “Enlil/Ellil (god),” *Ancient Mesopotamian Gods and Goddesses*, online project of Oracc and the UK Higher Education Academy, 2019, oracc.museum.upenn.edu/amgg/listofdeities/enlil/.

22. Jean Bottéro, *Mesopotamia: Writing, Reasoning, and the Gods*, trans. Zainab Bahrani and Marc van de Mieroop (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 213.

23. Kathryn Stevens, “An/Anu (god),” *Ancient Mesopotamian Gods and Goddesses*, online project of Oracc and the UK Higher Education Academy, 2019, oracc.museum.upenn.edu/amgg/listofdeities/an/.

24. Joan O’Brien, “Nammu, Mami, Eve and Pandora: ‘What’s in a Name?’,” *The Classical Journal* 79, no. 1 (1983): 38.

25. Rita Anne Casey, “Inanna and Enki in Sumer: An Ancient Conflict Revisited,” (PhD diss., California Institute of Integral Studies, 1998), 13–16.

26. Stone, “Enlil/Ellil (god).”

27. Stevens, “An/Anu (god).”

28. For example, C. H. W. Johns records an oath which states: “Whosoever shall attempt to alter this agreement, may Anu, Bêl, and Ea curse him with a bitter curse.” *Babylonian and Assyrian Laws, Contracts and Letters* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1904), 109, gutenberg.org/files/28674/28674-pdf.pdf.

Jaredite records says from the interpretive lens applied by Moroni. A similar approach to the Bible points to a polytheistic context in Israel. Examples include Psalm 82:1 (God renders judgment among the gods), Exodus 15:11 (who among the gods is like you, Lord?), and many instances in the book of Chronicles.²⁹ Margaret Barker has written extensively on the subject, noting that "What has become clear to me time and time again is that the evidence indicates that pre-Christian Judaism was not monotheistic in the sense that we use that word."³⁰

As pointed out earlier, the Jaredites would not have used a Greek transliteration to refer to the Son of God, the anointed Savior. Nor would they have used Hebrew to refer to him. So, who was *the Lord* as worshipped by the Jaredites? The Sumerian civilization existed for thousands of years before the Hebrews came on the scene in the Ancient Near East and, while certain cultural ideas diffused throughout the region over time, there is a great deal of distance, both literally and figuratively, between Sumerian beliefs and Hebrew religion. However, if the Sumerian religion is viewed through a Nephite Christian lens, it is not too much of a stretch to view *An*, the head of the Sumerian pantheon and king of the gods,³¹ as equivalent to God the Father.

Likewise, a case could be made for the equivalency of Jesus Christ, the Jehovah of the Old Testament and pre-mortal God of the Nephites,³² to *An's* son, *Enlil*. While *An* seems to have ruled from a distance and been less involved in direct intervention in human affairs, *Enlil* was much more involved in the day-to-day ruling of the earth. It was *Enlil* who was considered "the king of all the lands."³³ In this, he is analogous to Jesus Christ's (Jehovah's) being "the God of the whole earth" (3 Nephi 11:14).

There are other hints in the book of Ether that *Enlil* may have been the deity worshipped as *the Lord* by the Jaredites, such as the fact that

29. Kiyoun Kim, "The Chronicler's Portrayal of Monotheism: Yhwh Among Other Gods and its Didactic Impact on the Yehud Community," *Religions* 16, no. 4, 412 (2025): 1–2.

30. Margaret Barker, *The Great Angel: A Study of Israel's Second God* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992). The quote appears on an introductory webpage to the book at Barker's website, margaretbarker.com/Publications/GreatAngel.htm.

31. Stevens, "An/Anu (god)."

32. Monte S. Nyman, "The Designations Jesus Gives Himself in 3 Nephi," in *The Book of Mormon: 3 Nephi 9–30, This Is My Gospel*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, BYU, 1993), 41–58.

33. Stone, "Enlil/Elil (god)."

he (the Lord) veils himself in a cloud (Ether 2:4–5, 14). *Enlil* was associated with cloud phenomena.³⁴ Further, a few specific statements such as “the winds have gone forth out of my mouth,” use imagery that the Sumerians also associated with *Enlil*.³⁵ Of course, nothing in extant Sumerian literature includes the concept of a god who becomes mortal and dies for the sins of the world. Thus, while there are a few points of overlap between Mesopotamian and Hebrew conceptualizations of the roles and characteristics of deities, there are also vast differences.

A Mesopotamian equivalent to the Holy Ghost?

If *An* and *Enlil* could be interpreted from a Jaredite perspective as God the Father and his Son, that would leave *Enki*, the third member of the ancient Mesopotamian triad, to play the role of the Holy Ghost. Such an identification may have a few points in its favor. One is *Enki*’s close association with the chaotic waters of creation, the *Abzu*³⁶ (Genesis 1:2, “the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters”). It is important to note, again, that the correlation between Hebrew and Sumerian conceptualizations are spotty at best.

The lack of extensive overlap in the Sumerian and Hebrew religious worlds may help to explain why Moroni did not delve deeply into Jaredite doctrine and theology. In the book of Ether, Moroni limits himself to identifying a few unambiguous points of overlap between the experiences of the brother of Jared₁ and the teachings of Ether with his Nephite Christian theology. Otherwise, Moroni primarily restricts himself to recounting history and making commentary based on broad parameters such as the overall righteousness or wickedness of the people.³⁷

The Role of *An*, *Enlil*, and *Enki* in Kingmaking

From the earliest Sumerian records, the gods *An*, *Enlil*, and *Enki* are associated with making and breaking kings. An ancient version of the Sumerian flood story indicates that these gods appointed the king of *Eridu* and made him the leader of the people: “An, Enlil, and Enki, the

34. Enlil in the E-kur,” in *The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature* (2001): 109–23, etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/section4/tr4051.htm.

35. *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*, s.v. “Enlil,” britannica.com/topic/Enlil.

36. Ruth Horry, “Enki/Ea (god),” *Ancient Mesopotamian Gods and Goddesses*, an online project of Oracc and the UK Higher Education Academy, 2019, oracc.museum.upenn.edu/amgg/listofdeities/enki/.

37. Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 234–39.

father(s) of the gods, they chose Alulim, 'the seed of the red deer' for the shepherdship of the entirety of the many people."³⁸ Likewise, Sin-iddinam, the king of the Mesopotamian city-state of Larsa, notes that "An, Enlil, and Enki had given me kingship of Larsa."³⁹

Stone points out that "Enlil is described as 'king of heaven and the netherworld . . . whose command no god can set aside . . . the lord of destinies . . . the nominator of kings.'"⁴⁰ Thus, whenever an old king was overthrown and a new ruler took his place through conquest, it was *Enlil* who decreed the change. When Sargon conquered various Sumerian cities, it was said,

Once Enlil's frown had killed Kiš like the Bull of Heaven, once he had slaughtered the house of Uruk-place in the dust like a mighty ox, when at that time Enlil had given rulership and kingship from lowlands to highlands to Sargon the king of Agade.⁴¹

When Hammurabi conquered rival kings, he told those who read his words that it was *An* and *Enlil* who mandated his actions.⁴² Thus, there is a long history in Mesopotamia of kings justifying their violent overthrow of rival rulers based on the decree of their gods.

Whose God is the True God?

It is widely known that many traditional Christian churches do not consider members of the Latter-day Saint belief system to be true Christians.⁴³ Frequently at the root of the discussion is the divergence between the Latter-day Saint view of the Godhead and that of the churches that adopt trinitarian views, such as the Athanasian Creed.⁴⁴

38. Jeremiah Peterson, "The Divine Appointment of the First Antediluvian King: Newly Recovered Content from the Ur Version of the Sumerian Flood Story," *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 70 (2018): 44.

39. C. Jay Crisostomo, "The Sumerian Discourse Markers u4-Ba and u4-Bi-a," *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 69 (2017): 62.

40. Stone, "Enlil/Elil (god)."

41. Crisostomo, "Sumerian Discourse Markers," 55, capitalization adjusted.

42. Matthew Rutz and Piotr Michalowski, "The Flooding of Ešnunna, the Fall of Mari: Hammurabi's Deeds in Babylonian Literature and History," *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 68 (2016): 15–43.

43. Trent Horn, "Are Mormons Christian?" *Catholic Answers* (website), catholic.com/qa/are-mormons-christian.

44. "The Council of Nicaea and The Nicene Creed: the Athanasian Creed," *Regent Library* (website), Regent University, libguides.regent.edu/nicaea/athanasian.

Such a divergence of beliefs is not a recent occurrence. The Book of Mormon portrays several instances of people who worship the same God but have different notions about just who God is and what he desires. One of the first of the conflicting vignettes of God is found in the book of Jacob. Jacob clearly teaches his people about the coming of the Messiah and the need to repent and accept his Atonement (Jacob 4:11). However, Sherem takes umbrage with Jacob's moralizing and especially with his preaching about a Messiah. He declares that Jacob is a blasphemer who is leading the people astray (Jacob 7:7). Many groups of people in the Book of Mormon, from Nehor to the Zoramites, seem to prefer the worship of an undemanding and amoral god who allows the rich and powerful to do whatever they like (Alma 30:17, 27). Such people seem to prefer a distant and uninvolved God to the God of the Nephite prophets who demands so many behavioral modifications.

Like modern Christians and the examples just given from the Book of Mormon, the Jaredite followers of the Lord seem to have also found themselves at odds with some of their countrymen over the attributes and commandments of God. When Jared₂ is successful in getting himself crowned king, the reader gets a glimpse of the competing conceptions of God at play among the Jaredites. On the one hand, there seems to have been a group with beliefs like those found in the extant stories of Sumerian deities that portray the gods as powerful but ambivalent figures. Those gods have no particular interest in human morals and their favor could be curried by offerings.⁴⁵ On the other hand, the God portrayed by Moroni is a different deity—one concerned with correct behavior (Ether 9:20) and one who invites all mankind, irrespective of wealth or status, to “come unto me.”

The hand of wickedness

The god worshipped by Akish and Jared₂ seems to be the sort who is not the least concerned with morality. Moroni notes the detail that “Jared_[2] was anointed king over the people, by the hand of wickedness” (Ether 9:4). The anointing of a king was a religious ritual denoting the divine nomination of a ruler. In ancient Mesopotamia, kings bolstered their claim to the throne by claiming to have been made the

45. Kathryn Stevens, “Iškur/Adad (god),” *Ancient Mesopotamian Gods and Goddesses*, an online project of Oracc and the UK Higher Education Academy, 2019, oracc.museum.upenn.edu/amgg/listofdeities/ikur/.

legitimate king "by the hand of Enlil."⁴⁶ The fact that Moroni tells us that Jared₂ was made king "by the hand of wickedness" suggests an alternative formulation in which the secret combination has subverted both the political and the religious authority behind the throne.

Thus, the secret combination seems to coalesce as an alternative to the religion practiced from the foundation of the Jaredite people. It provides an alternative narrative in which "might makes right." Michael Ulrich comments on the dichotomy in the religious practices of the Jaredites as represented in chapters 3 and 8 of Ether. He states that "Ether 3 is a righteous initiation into a closer proximity with God, whereas Ether 8 is an evil initiation ritual, probably inspired by an idolatrous goddess and aimed at usurping political power."⁴⁷

In this way, the secret combination becomes the anti-religion composed of rites and rituals divorced from their original meaning and used to justify the naked abuse of power. Such an attitude was very much at home among the writings of Sargon and other Mesopotamian kings who understood success in battle as the primary physical manifestation of divine favor, legitimizing their rule and expansionist policies through the claimed patronage of the gods.⁴⁸

Other evidence of who is the "true God"

There are other details in the narrative that hint at a linkage between the beliefs of a portion of the Jaredite population and the cultural beliefs of ancient Sumeria. For example, the attempt to take Omer's head fits within the trophy-taking context of Ancient Near Eastern culture in which military victory and divine favor were made evident by the public display of the heads of the defeated and shamed conquered enemy.⁴⁹ In such cases, the strength of the god of the victor and the

46. "The Inscriptions of the Kings of Agade," *The Museum Journal* 14, no. 3 (September 1923): 203–20, archive.org/details/museumjournal14univ/page/202/mode/2up.

47. Michael Ulrich, "Possible Remembrance and Re-enactment of Old World's Hieros Gamos in the Book of Ether," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 66 (2025): 281, interpreterfoundation.org/journal/possible-remembrance-and-re-enactment-of-old-worlds-hieros-gamos-in-the-book-of-ether.

48. Brian Lewis, *The Sargon Legend: A Study of the Akkadian Text and the Tale of the Hero Who was Exposed at Birth* (Cambridge, MA: American Schools of Oriental Research, 1980), 131, 133.

49. Kathryn Frakes Kravitz, "Divine Trophies of War in Assyria and Ancient Israel: Case Studies in Political Theology" (PhD diss., Brandeis University, 1999), 10–11.

impotence of the god of the loser were considered self-evident based solely on the outcome of the contest.

This twisting of religion into just another tool to seize and maintain power is described in the Book of Mormon as an attribute of secret combinations across time. Moroni takes the opportunity in the narrative of Akish to warn his readers about the way in which the devil has used secret combinations from the beginning to overthrow governments and provide the unscrupulous and ambitious with a means to seize power (Ether 8:18–26). Ulrich suggests the following:

This episode may contain not only a struggle for power but also the struggle between two religious conceptions—one promoted by King Omer based on the revelations of the Lord to his ancestors and another advocated by Jared’s daughter, of which we know virtually nothing but that probably would have been closer to Mesopotamian religious conceptions.

The story of the daughter of Jared₂ and Akish emerges as one more vignette in a long series that illustrates the way in which secret combinations adopt and then distort religious rites and symbols on their way to corrupting the people. This approach explains why Nephi was told by an angel that “there are save two churches only; the one is the church of the Lamb of God, and the other is the church of the devil” (1 Nephi 14:10).

Summary and Conclusions

The Oath of Akish appears to preserve structural features of Ancient Near Eastern legal and religious practice. Its triadic divine invocation, explicit pledge, and conditional curse closely resemble ancient Mesopotamian oaths, which consistently invoked *An*, *Enki*, and *Enlil*. The linguistic and structural parallels suggest that the Jaredites, whose lineage and migration are traced to the region of the “Great Tower,” may have carried with them enduring forms of Mesopotamian ritual language.

Recognizing this Sumerian pattern enhances our understanding of the Jaredite world as a civilization deeply rooted in the Ancient Near East. Far from being an isolated episode of intrigue, the Oath of Akish serves as a window into the Jaredite fusion of politics, religion, and divine sanction. It also hints at the possibility of divergent religious tradition among the Jaredites, just as was the case among the

later Nephites. In these details, the Book of Mormon narrative retains echoes of Ancient Near Eastern legal and religious frameworks, in which cosmic order and human politics intersect in a nefarious plot where success is the only measure of morality that matters.



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