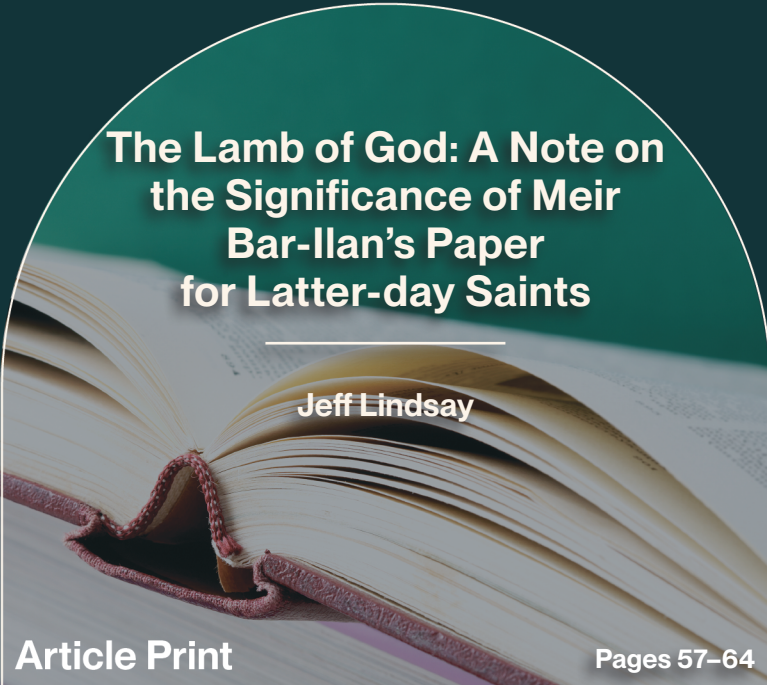


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## **The Lamb of God: A Note on the Significance of Meir Bar-Ilan's Paper for Latter-day Saints**

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**Jeff Lindsay**

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# The Lamb of God: A Note on the Significance of Meir Bar-Ilan's Paper for Latter-day Saints

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Jeff Lindsay

**Abstract:** *Dr. Meir Bar-Ilan's paper, "The Heavenly Lamb, Sacrifices on the Heavenly Altar, and the Song of the Lamb," appearing concurrently in Interpreter, is a welcome contribution from a noted Jewish scholar. Bar-Ilan has called the world's attention to a remarkable Hebrew manuscript with origins in antiquity, Words of Gad the Seer. Those interested in the relationship between Jewish texts and Latter-day Saint scriptures may also wish to compare the findings in Bar-Ilan's paper with treatments of the Lamb of God in the Book of Mormon and the Book of Moses.*

The Interpreter Foundation is pleased to publish, immediately following my comments, an article by Professor Meir Bar-Ilan,<sup>1</sup> a widely recognized scholar from a noted Israeli university, Bar-Ilan University. The university, founded in 1955, was named after his grandfather, Rabbi Meir Bar-Ilan, a prominent figure in Jewish education and in the rise of Israel. Professor Bar-Ilan's work on an ancient Hebrew text, the long-overlooked manuscript known as *Words of Gad the Seer*,<sup>2</sup> may be of particular value to Latter-day Saints. It has resonance with many themes of interest to the Restoration and to students of the

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1. Meir Bar-Ilan, "The Heavenly Lamb, Sacrifices on the Heavenly Altar, and the Song of the Lamb," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 64 (2025): 65–88, [interpreterfoundation.org/the-heavenly-lamb-sacrifices-on-the-heavenly-altar-and-the-song-of-the-lamb/](https://interpreterfoundation.org/the-heavenly-lamb-sacrifices-on-the-heavenly-altar-and-the-song-of-the-lamb/).

2. For information on Bar-Ilan's works on *Words of Gad the Seer*, see Bar-Ilan, "Heavenly Lamb," 65n1.

Book of Mormon. *Words of Gad the Seer* has roots in antiquity and was preserved by a colony of Jews in Cochin, India. I have previously reviewed Bar-Ilan's translation of the text and offered reasons why it ought to be considered a blessing by Latter-day Saints.<sup>3</sup>

After learning of potential Latter-day Saint interest in *Words of Gad the Seer* through *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship*, Professor Bar-Ilan kindly contributed an article on a particular aspect of *Words of Gad the Seer*—the role of the Lamb of God mentioned in the first of fourteen chapters, including the significance of the “song of the Lamb.” It was a genuine delight to work with Dr. Bar-Ilan during our peer-review process. I was deeply touched that he spent time to bring this paper to us while living in adverse circumstances in Israel with regular rocket attacks and tragedies suffered by people in his community. He has continued with courage and hope as he seeks to help us appreciate the value of an important Hebrew text. I am greatly thankful for this kindness.

The term *Lamb of God* occurs thirty-five times in the Book of Mormon, mostly from Nephi, far more often than the two occurrences in the King James Bible (John 1:29, 36). A shorter form, *The Lamb*, occurs as a divine title twenty-four times in the book of Revelation and twenty-seven times in the Book of Mormon, mostly but not exclusively from Nephi. Is the abundant use of this term in the Book of Mormon the result of Joseph Smith's familiarity with the New Testament, or was it a more ancient term that may have been used by ancient Jews? Could that term even have been on the Brass Plates (a sacred compilation of scripture that Nephi acquired in 600 B.C. in Jerusalem, including various texts that became lost to the world)?

Students of the Book of Mormon may have noted that the Lamb of God in Nephi's writings centuries before Christ may seem out of place since that term has long been assumed to originate in the writings of John in the New Testament. Meir Bar-Ilan reminds us that this term was not an innovation from John, but something older that John may have been alluding to. Some students of the Book of Mormon may have encountered a short note by John Welch that mentioned the occurrence of this title in another old Hebrew manuscript, *Testaments*

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3. Jeff Lindsay, “The Words of Gad the Seer: An Apparently Ancient Text With Intriguing Origins and Content,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 54 (2022): 147–76, [journal.interpreterfoundation.org/the-words-of-gad-the-seer-an-apparently-ancient-text-with-intriguing-origins-and-content/](https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/the-words-of-gad-the-seer-an-apparently-ancient-text-with-intriguing-origins-and-content/).

of the *Twelve Patriarchs*,<sup>4</sup> also discussed in Bar-Ilan's paper. Bar-Ilan notes that the occurrence of the Lamb of God could be a Christian intrusion into the text, though Welch offers reasons why he thinks that to be unlikely. But the occurrence of the Lamb of God in a Hebrew manuscript that has been in the care of a remote colony of Jews in India seems to clearly rule out a Christian intrusion for *Words of Gad the Seer*, and points to the antiquity of that concept. In fact, in his new paper, Bar-Ilan observes that the song of the Lamb in the text may indicate that the *Words of Gad the Seer* predates the writings of John or is at least contemporaneous. (However, as noted in the Hebrew critical edition, the text shows indication of coming from the same milieu as Revelation, so by "predates" Bar-Ilan is not thinking of many centuries.<sup>5</sup>)

The Book of Moses, the canonized initial portion of Joseph Smith's translation of the Bible which may have a relationship to a text on the Brass Plates that influenced the Book of Mormon,<sup>6</sup> also makes a Messianic reference to "the Lamb . . . slain from the foundation of the world" (Moses 7:47). Perhaps Dr. Bar-Ilan's paper may help us better understand such references in both the Book of Moses and the Book of Mormon.

There are other connections with the extrabiblical ancient scriptures of the Restoration to consider. For example, the concept of removing impurity in chapter one of *Words of Gad the Seer* is also reflected in Nephi's prophecy of the Lamb of God, through whose

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4. John W. Welch, "The Lamb of God" in Pre-Christian Texts," in *Pressing Forward with the Book of Mormon: The FARMS Updates of the 1990s*, ed. John W. Welch (Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies [FARMS], 1999), 40–42, [scripturecentral.org/archive/books/book-chapter/the-lambofgodinpre-christiantexts](http://scripturecentral.org/archive/books/book-chapter/the-lambofgodinpre-christiantexts).

5. Meir Bar-Ilan, email correspondence to author, 14 November 2024.

6. Jeff Lindsay, "Further Evidence from the Book of Mormon for a Book of Moses-Like Text on the Brass Plates," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 61 (2024): 415–94, [interpreterfoundation.org/further-evidence-from-the-book-of-mormon-for-a-book-of-moses-like-text-on-the-brass-plates/](http://interpreterfoundation.org/further-evidence-from-the-book-of-mormon-for-a-book-of-moses-like-text-on-the-brass-plates/); and Jeff Lindsay and Noel B. Reynolds, "'Strong Like unto Moses': The Case for Ancient Roots in the Book of Moses Based on Book of Mormon Usage of Related Content Apparently from the Brass Plates," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 44 (2021): 1–92, [journal.interpreterfoundation.org/strong-like-unto-moses-the-case-for-ancient-roots-in-the-book-of-moses-based-on-book-of-mormon-usage-of-related-content-apparently-from-the-brass-plates/](http://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/strong-like-unto-moses-the-case-for-ancient-roots-in-the-book-of-moses-based-on-book-of-mormon-usage-of-related-content-apparently-from-the-brass-plates/).

power people were not only healed, but “devils and the unclean spirits were cast out” (1 Nephi 11: 31).

The Book of Moses may offer further parallels. In Moses 7, for example, a text that includes revelation received by Enoch, there are several concepts that may merit comparison with the section on the Lamb of God in *Words of Gad the Seer*, as shown in table 1.

**Table 1.** Comparing Moses 7 to *Words of Gad the Seer*, chapter 1.

Moses 7	Words of Gad the Seer, chapter 1
A complaint over the wickedness of man (v. 48, spoken by the earth).	Complaint of the Lamb over impurity (v. 15, echoed by a man dressed in linen, v. 18).
Yearning for cleansing from filthiness (v. 48).	The Lamb’s shepherd, apparently God, expresses a desire for purity (vv. 20–24).
Themes of grace, sacrifice, purification, redemption, and expiation: The Lord’s Chosen suffers for the sins of the wicked (v. 39). The blood of the Righteous is shed that the penitent may have eternal life (v. 45). The Lamb is slain from the foundation of the world (v. 47). Blessed are those who accept the Messiah (v. 53).	“Intelligence is stopped up until I do greatly in keeping grace” (vv. 25–26). Impurity is driven out with the aid of the Lamb who offers a peace-offering on the altar (vv. 27–30). “And the lamb took of the pure, that had been mixed with the impure, and brought it as a peace-offering sacrifice on the altar before El Shaddai Jealous Lord of hosts” (v. 30). “For God has saved one who had strayed and obliterated the impurity from the Earth” (v. 38). “He fought my fight and brought into the light my righteousness by His help” (v. 39). “For in your shadow lived all these and by thy wounds they were healed!” (v. 51).
The redeemed come in at the gate (v. 53).	The “gates of intelligence” are mentioned (v. 24, they have been “turned around”).
Songs of everlasting joy (v. 53).	The song of the Lamb is sung, which mentions the delivery of his people, the obliteration of impurity, and the saving of one who has strayed (vv. 31–37 ff.).
Enoch prays to God “in the name of thine Only Begotten, even Jesus Christ” (v. 50).	“You are My son, you are My firstborn, you are My first-fruit” (v. 47).

The metaphor of the Messiah as the Lamb is a powerful one in Christianity and in the scriptures of the Restoration. David Rolph Seely and Jo Ann H. Seely discuss various aspects of the metaphor of the Lamb employed by Enoch when he said, “The Righteous is lifted up,

and the Lamb is slain from the foundation of the world" (Moses 7:47).<sup>7</sup> They note that the concept of a sacrificial lamb is related to the experience of Adam and Eve who offered sacrifice as commanded, but did not understand the significance until an angel explained to them that, "This thing is a similitude of the sacrifice of the Only Begotten of the Father, which is full of grace and truth" (Moses 5:7). In addition to the sacrificial lamb, they also consider the "suffering servant and Passover lamb" and the "apocalyptic lamb" of the book of Revelation, aspects that involve a paradox:

There is a profound paradox regarding the image of the meek and lowly Lamb, who has now become victorious and has the power to conquer and cast out the beast. The paradox is the same as the Suffering Servant—that the victory over sin, death, and hell could only be accomplished through humility and submission to the will of the Father and self-sacrifice on behalf of others.<sup>8</sup>

This is consistent with the humble, sacrifice-offering Lamb of God in *Words of Gad the Seer* who, rejected and despised (v. 13), when pained over the impurity of the world, cries out with a voice "like the voice of a lion roaring over his prey" (v. 15), showing his great power.

Other issues to consider in Bar-Ilan's paper include the notion of prayers of the righteous being offered up on the Heavenly Altar, which may resonate with the modern Latter-day Saint practice of placing names on the temple prayer roll.<sup>9</sup> Further, the concept of sacrifices of the souls of the righteous or their prayers and deeds mentioned by Bar-Ilan could be compared to the statement of Christ to Book of Mormon peoples after his Resurrection:

And ye shall offer up unto me no more the shedding of blood; yea, your sacrifices and your burnt offerings shall be done away, for I will accept none of your sacrifices and your burnt offerings.

And **ye shall offer for a sacrifice unto me a broken**

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7. David Rolph Seely and Jo Ann H. Seely, "Behold the Lamb of God," in *Behold the Lamb of God: An Easter Celebration*, ed. Richard Neitzel Holzapfel, Frank F. Judd Jr., and Thomas A. Wayment (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2008), 17–48, [rsc.byu.edu/behold-lamb-god/behold-lamb-god](http://rsc.byu.edu/behold-lamb-god/behold-lamb-god).

8. David Rolph Seely and Jo Ann H. Seely, "Behold the Lamb of God," 41.

9. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, "Temple Prayer Roll Submission," [churchofjesuschrist.org/tools/temple-prayer-roll-submission](http://churchofjesuschrist.org/tools/temple-prayer-roll-submission).

**heart and a contrite spirit.** And whoso cometh unto me with a broken heart and a contrite spirit, him will I baptize with fire and with the Holy Ghost, even as the Lamanites, because of their faith in me at the time of their conversion, were baptized with fire and with the Holy Ghost, and they knew it not. (3 Nephi 9:19, 20)

The sacrifice of humility and contrite obedience to the Lord instead of burnt offerings results in an even more efficacious “burning” as the Holy Ghost purifies us, cleansing us of impurity and preparing us to serve and worship the Lamb of God, the Lamb that is also our Shepherd who laid down his life for us, his sheep. There is much to contemplate as we consider the subtle allusions, echoes, and imagery related to the Lamb of God in the vision of Gad the Seer and in other passages of *Words of Gad the Seer*.

I am extremely grateful to Professor Meir Bar-Ilan for making this possible and for sharing his insightful paper with us. I trust you will find his contribution to *Interpreter* both fascinating and illuminating.



**Jeffrey D. Lindsay** has been providing online materials defending the Church for more than twenty years, primarily at [JeffLindsay.com](http://JeffLindsay.com). His Mormonity blog on Church topics began in 2004 and was recently converted to [ArisefromtheDust.com](http://ArisefromtheDust.com). He is currently on the Board of Directors for The Interpreter Foundation. Jeff has a PhD in chemical engineering from BYU and is a US patent agent. Jeff has been a Fellow of the American Institute of Chemical Engineers since 2014. Every year since 2015 he has been named as one of the world's leading intellectual property strategists on the IAM 300 Strategy List by IAM Media Group in the UK. He is currently president of Planet Lindsay, LLC, assisting a variety of clients with intellectual property and innovation. From 2011 to 2019 he was the head of Intellectual Property for Asia Pulp and Paper in Shanghai, China, one of the world's largest forest product companies. Formerly, he was associate professor at the Institute of Paper Science and Technology (now the Renewable Bioproducts Institute) at Georgia Tech, then went into R&D at Kimberly-Clark Corporation, eventually becoming corporate patent strategist and senior research fellow. Jeff served a mission in the German-speaking Switzerland Zurich Mission. He and his wife,



*Kendra, are the parents of four boys and have fifteen grandchildren. They are both serving as ministering specialists for African immigrants in their community and are learning Swahili. Jeff also serves as a board member for Hope and Help Together, a community organization in Appleton, Wisconsin, which works to assist refugees and immigrants in the Fox Cities region.*





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