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“What Thank They the Jews”? (2 Nephi 29:4): A Note on the Name “Judah” and Antisemitism

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“WHAT THANK THEY THE JEWS”?
(2 NEPHI 29:4):
A NOTE ON THE NAME “JUDAH”
AND ANTISEMITISM

Matthew L. Bowen

*The Hebrew Bible explains the meaning of the personal and tribal name “Judah”—from which the term “Jews” derives—in terms of “praising” or “thanking” (*ydy/ydh). In other words, the “Jews” are those who are to be “praised out of a feeling of gratitude.” This has important implications for the Lord’s words to Nephi regarding Gentile ingratitude and antisemitism: “And what thank they the Jews for the Bible which they receive from them?” (2 Nephi 29:4). Gentile Christian antisemitism, like the concomitant doctrine of supersessionism, can be traced (in part) to widespread misunderstanding and misapplication of Paul’s words regarding Jews and “praise” (Romans 2:28-29). Moreover, the strongest scriptural warnings against antisemitism are to be found in the Book of Mormon, which also offers the reassurance that the Jews are still “mine ancient covenant people” (2 Nephi 29:4-5) and testifies of the Lord’s love and special concern for them.*

Despite the horrors of World War II, the Holocaust, and the resultant deaths of tens of millions including approximately six million Jews, the last several decades have seen a resurgence of virulent antisemitism.¹ The strongest

1 See, e.g., Peter Kenez, “Antisemitism in post World War II Hungary,” *Judaism* 50/2 (Spring 2001): 144-157; Robert Fine, “Fighting with Phantoms: A Contribution to the Debate on Antisemitism in Europe,” *Patterns of Prejudice*

scriptural warnings against antisemitism come from the Book of Mormon.² Since the Book of Mormon “was written for our day”³ (cf. Mormon 8:35), I do not believe this to be a coincidence.

The Book of Mormon not only manifests the Lord’s love and special concern for the Jews, but also an awareness of the traditional meaning of the name “Judah” (“praise,” i.e., one who is to be “thanked”) and the derived gentile designation “Jews” as those who are to be “praised” or “thanked.” In this article I wish to examine several passages in the Book of Mormon in which the connotation of “Judah” and “Jews” as those who are to be “praised” or “thanked” appears to be relevant, including a direct wordplay on “Jews” in 2 Nephi 29:4, and awareness of the meaning of this term in 2 Nephi 33:14 and 3 Nephi 29:8. To contextualize these passages, I will first examine a pair of Genesis texts which etiologize⁴ “Judah” and “Jews” in terms of the verb *ydy (or *ydh, to “praise,” “thank,” or “acknowledge”). Next, I will examine Paul’s wordplay on “Jews” in terms of

43/5 (2009): 459–479; Andrew Higgins, “Jews in Europe Report a Surge in Anti-Semitism,” *New York Times*, Friday, November 8, 2013 (<http://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/09/world/europe/jews-in-europe-report-a-surge-in-anti-semitism.html>). Recent antisemitic incidents include the distribution of a leaflet, as a political ploy of some kind, in troubled pro-Russian east Ukraine (a region with a history of strong antisemitism) mandating that Jews “provide a list of property they own and pay a registration fee” or face punishment including the loss of property and citizenship and even forced expulsion; see Oren Dorell, “Leaflet Tells Jews in East Ukraine,” *USA Today*, Thursday, April 17, 2014 (<http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2014/04/17/jews-ordered-to-register-in-east-ukraine/7816951/>). The mere fact that Jews are being made a political tool amid the Russian-Ukrainian turmoil shows how deeply-seated the antisemitism is in both nations.

2 See Daniel Peterson, “Book of Mormon expressly condemns anti-Semitism,” *Deseret News*, Thursday, September 1, 2011 (<http://www.deseretnews.com/article/700175284/Book-of-Mormon-expressly-condemns-anti-Semitism.html>).

3 Ezra Taft Benson, “The Book of Mormon — The Keystone of Our Religion,” *Ensign*, November 1986, 4.

4 An etiology (from Greek *aitia* “cause” + *logia*) is an explanation of the cause or origin of something.

“praise,” after which I will examine the relevant Book of Mormon passages.

“Thy Brethren Shall *Thank* Thee”

Moshe Garsiel observes that in the Hebrew Bible the name Judah (Heb., *Yěhûdâ*) is repeatedly “explained in terms of a derivation from the root *y-d-h* (יהד), which in its causative stem means ‘to offer praise out of a feeling of gratitude.’”⁵ The aforementioned explanation for the name “Judah” occurs first in the account of the naming of Jacob’s sons. Leah is said to have named her youngest son as follows: “And she conceived again, and bare a son: and she said, Now **will I praise the LORD** [*’ôdeh ’et-Yhwh*]: therefore she called his name **Judah** [*Yěhûdâ*, the pun, which makes no attempt at scientific etymology, suggests the idea of *Yahô* + *ôdeh*]; and left bearing” (Genesis 29:35; emphasis in all scriptural citations added).

This passage suggests that Leah named her son “Judah,” i.e., “praised out of a feeling of gratitude”⁶ because she wished to thank the Lord (*Yahweh*) for his giving her this particular son. Later when Jacob, nearing death, pronounces his final blessing on his sons and their posterity, he blesses Judah and his descendants as follows: “**Judah** [*Yěhûdâ*], thou art he whom **thy brethren shall praise** [lit., thou — thy brethren **shall thank thee**, *yôdûkâ*]; thy hand [*yâdêkâ*] shall be in the neck of thine enemies; thy father’s children shall bow down before thee” (Genesis 49:8). This passage suggests that Judah’s descendants, the Jews, are those who are to be “acknowledged” or “praised out of a feeling of gratitude,”⁷ especially by those of the house

5 Moshe Garsiel, *Biblical Names: A Literary Study of Midrashic Derivations and Puns* (trans. Phyllis Hackett; Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1991), 171.

6 Garsiel, *Biblical Names*, 171.

7 Garsiel, *Biblical Names*, 171.

of Israel (“thy brethren,” “thy father’s children”), though the reason for that praise is not here specified.

Paul’s Hidden Pun on “Judah” and the Roots of Gentile Christian Antisemitism

The roots of Gentile Christian antisemitism extend at least as far back as the early Church’s understanding of Paul’s writings. In at least three passages (Romans 2:28–29, 1 Corinthians 7:19, and Philippians 3:2–3), Paul offers a bold and “dramatic redefinition of what it means to be circumcised.”⁸ In Romans 2:28–29 he states: “For he is not a **Jew** [*Ioudaios*], which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a **Jew** [*Ioudaios*], which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose **praise** [*epainos*] is not of men, but of God” (Romans 2:28–29).

N.T. Wright suggests that Paul’s use of the word *epainos* in this text is a conscious pun on the name “Judah” and “Jews” which would have been particularly evident to Jewish Christians, some of whom were still zealous of the Law of Moses:

The last two verses of the chapter [i.e., Romans 2:28–29] are the key, though their dense Greek almost defies translation, and they depend for their force on another pun, this time a hidden one. The Hebrew for ‘praise’ is *jehuda*, ‘Judah,’ so that the very name “Jew,” *Ioudaios* in Greek, ought to mean ‘praise’. This highlights what Paul is saying: the very word *Ioudaios* is now to be predicated of a different group, no longer defined ethnically by the possession of Torah, not marked out by things which are *en tō phanerō*, “in the open” or

8 N.T. Wright, *Paul in Fresh Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 118.

“on the surface.” Rather, *ho en tō kryptō Ioudaios*, the Jew in “secret,” that is, the “the Jew is the Jew who is so in secret,” and “circumcision” consists in the spirit rather than the letter. Such a person, Paul declares with the Hebrew in mind, gains “praise” not from humans but from God.⁹

Mark D. Nanos writes that “Paul’s point is not that Gentiles are the true Jews, or that the foreskinned are the true or real circumcision; quite the opposite: the terms ‘Jew’ and ‘circumcision’ are reserved for Israelites.”¹⁰ He suggests that Romans 2:29 should be translated thus: “Rather, the deepest character of the Jew, even the purpose of circumcision, is about the spirit, the intentions of the heart (at work through the way one lives who is so marked), not (merely) inscribed (in flesh) (as if a mark alone fully defined who one is).”¹¹

Paul himself anticipates the potential misunderstanding and repercussions of the thoughts that he is articulating to his Roman audience. Nevertheless, Paul’s rhetoric — intended for a blended community of Jewish and Gentile believers in Jesus as Messiah (I will use the admittedly anachronistic term *Christians*)¹² — has been used as a basis for supersessionism (or replacement theology), i.e., the longstanding Gentile Christian belief that the Gentiles have replaced the Jews in God’s plan.¹³ He further admonishes them that it is God’s intent (and in his plan) to eventually save all Israel:

Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fulness? For

9 Wright, *Paul in Fresh Perspective*, 118.

10 Mark D. Nanos, “The Letter of Paul to the Romans” in *The Jewish Annotated New Testament: New Revised Standard Version Bible Translation*, ed. Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 259.

11 Nanos, “The Letter of Paul to the Romans,” 259.

12 The term Christian begins as a pejorative designation (see Acts 11:26 [cf. 26:28] and 1 Peter 4:16). Its use as a designation for believers in Jesus becomes general over time.

13 2 Peter 3:15-16 also marks the contemporary early (Gentile) Christian misuse and abuse of Paul’s writings: “And account that the long suffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction.”

I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office: If by any means I may provoke to emulation them which are my flesh, and might save some of them. For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead? **For if the firstfruit be holy, the lump is also holy: and if the root be holy, so are the branches.** And if some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive tree, wert grafted in among them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree; **boast not against the branches.** But **if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee.** Thou wilt say then, The branches were broken off, that I might be grafted in. Well; because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. **Be not highminded, but fear:** For if God spared not the natural branches, **take heed lest he also spare not thee.** Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off. And they also, if they abide not still in unbelief, shall be grafted in: for **God is able to graff them in again.** For if thou wert cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and wert grafted contrary to nature into a good olive tree: **how much more shall these, which be the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?** For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so **all Israel shall be saved:** as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob. (Romans 11:12–26)

Although Paul wishes to “provoke” his fellow Jews who do not believe in Jesus as the Messiah to “jealousy” (Romans 11:11) or to “emulation,” he is no supersessionist.¹⁴ To be sure, Paul’s discussion in Romans 9–11 presupposes that ultimately salvation is in and through Jesus Christ, but as Isaiah 52:7–53:12 (cf. Luke 1:67–79; 2:25–30) and the Book of Mormon suggest, the paradigm of seeing the “salvation of . . . God” in a person was embraced by Israelites within Israel well before the birth of Jesus.¹⁵ Like the prophets of old, Paul understands the “mystery” of how “all Israel shall be saved” (Romans 11:26; Jacob 4:17–18), with the Atonement of Jesus Christ gradually having its intended effect (Jacob 5, see especially vv. 75–76; D&C 138:58) through the fulfilling of God’s covenant to Abraham and his descendants (Acts 3:26; 3 Nephi 20:26). Paul, like Mormon, comprehends that “the Lord worketh in many ways to the salvation of his people” (Alma 24:27), or in the words of the wise woman of Tekoah, “neither doth God respect any person: yet doth he devise means, that his banished be not expelled from him” (2 Samuel 14:14; cf. 1 Timothy 2:4).¹⁶ Paul does not hate his fellow Jews or the Law of Moses. In fact, Paul intends by faith in Jesus to “establish the law” (Romans 3:31), just as Jesus “fulfilled” it,¹⁷ the “law” itself being an addition¹⁸

14 Mark D. Nanos, “Paul and Judaism,” in *Jewish Annotated New Testament*, 552. Nanos writes: “Paul saw himself wholly within Judaism, as one who was assigned a special role in the restoration of Israel and the nations (Rom 11.1–15; Gal 1.13–16).”

15 See 1 Nephi 10:5–6; 2 Nephi 25:20; 30:1–2; 31:21; Jacob 7:11; Mosiah 3:17–18; this is the sum and substance of Abinadi’s arguments in Mosiah 12–17, which are based on his exegesis of Isaiah 52:7–53:12.

16 1 Timothy 2:4: God “will have [*thelei*, wants to have] all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.” Cf. Isaiah 45:23; Romans 14:11; Mosiah 27:31; D&C 88:104.

17 Matthew 5:17–18; Luke 24:44; cf. Romans 2:27; 8:4; 13:8–10; Galatians 5:14; 6:2; James 2:8; see also 2 Nephi 25:24–30; Alma 25:15; 30:3; 34:13; 3 Nephi 1:25; 9:17; 12:17–19, 46; Ether 12:11; D&C 74; cf. 2 Nephi 9:7.

18 Galatians 3:18–19. Paul states that the “law” was “added because of transgressions,” but also note how Moroni states that “by faith was the law of

to (and thus a part of) the promise or covenant that the Lord made with Abraham¹⁹ — ultimately the covenant that God has intended to offer all of the human family “from the beginning” (cf. D&C 22:1; 49:9),²⁰ i.e., the new²¹ and everlasting covenant²² — a covenant which has yet to be wholly fulfilled.²³ In the end, it all belongs to “the covenant of the Father” (3 Nephi 21:4; Moroni 10:33) or “the shedding of the blood of Christ, which is in the covenant of the Father unto the remission of your sins, that ye become holy, without spot” (Moroni 10:33; see also Acts 3:26; 3 Nephi 20:25–26).

Nevertheless, the very arguments that Paul anticipates — and inveighs against in Romans 11 — are those that Christians (sadly) have used for centuries in justifying persecution and mistreatment of the Jews. The Gentiles have, in fact, “boasted against the branches” (i.e., the natural branches; Romans 11:18), and in many instances continue to do so. Gentile Christians

Moses given” (Ether 12:11). These are not mutually exclusive ideas. Notably, elsewhere Paul calls the law “holy” (Romans 7:12) and “spiritual” (7:14) and its commandment(s) “holy, and just, and good” (7:12).

19 See, e.g., Genesis 17:1–22.

20 Cf. the Lord’s covenant with Enoch (Moses 7:51–53; 8:2; JST Genesis 9:10–15; 14:25–40); Noah (Genesis 9:8–17; JST Genesis 9:10–15); David (2 Samuel 7; 23:5) Lehi (1 Nephi 5:5; 2 Nephi 1:5); Enos (Enos 1:16–17); cf. Isaiah 56:2–8.

21 “New covenant” (Hebrew *bĕrīt ḥādāšā*; Greek *diathēkē kainē*): Jeremiah 31:31–33; Hebrews 8:8, 13; 12:24; D&C 76:69; 84:57; 107:19; or, “new testament” (KJV, i.e., “new covenant,” Greek *diathēkē kainē*): Matthew 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20; 1 Corinthians 11:25; 2 Corinthians 3:6; Hebrews 9:15. Jeremiah 31:31–33 is, of course, the source of the idea of a “new covenant” versus an “old covenant” and thus the canonical division of the Bible into “Old Testament” and “New Testament.”

22 “Everlasting covenant” (Hebrew *bĕrīt ‘ōlām*): Genesis 9:16; 17:7, 13, 19; Leviticus 24:8; 2 Samuel 23:5; Psalm 105:10; Isaiah 24:5; 55:3; 61:8; Jeremiah 32:40; Ezekiel 16:60; 37:26; Hebrews 13:20; 1 Chronicles 16:17; D&C 45:9; 49:9; 66:2; 76:101; 78:11; 101:39; 133:57; “new and everlasting covenant”: D&C 22:1; 131:2; 132:4, 6, 19, 26–27, 41–42.

23 1 Nephi 14:12–20; 22:6–28; 2 Nephi 6:8–18; 2 Nephi 9 (*passim* — vv. 2 and 53 form an *inclusio* [envelope figure] on the term “covenant”); 10:7–22; 15:18; 3 Nephi 16:4–20; 20:11–46; 29:1–9; Mormon 5:12–24; 8:21–23; etc.

have frequently been “highminded,” have not “fear[ed]” (11:20), and have been “wise in [their] own conceits” (11:25).²⁴ The doctrine of supersessionism and its Gentile advocates are “ignorant of [the] mystery” of how the Lord will ultimately save Israel (see also Jacob 4:14–6:4). They do not “receive with meekness the engrafted word” (James 1:21), i.e., scriptures that come almost entirely from the Jews (Romans 3:2; 2 Nephi 29:4–6; cf. Acts 7:38).

“What Thank They the Jews for the Bible which They Receive from Them?”

Like Paul, the Lord anticipated Gentile (including Gentile Christian) antisemitism. Speaking to Nephi sometime in the sixth century BCE, well in advance of Gentile Christianity and the doctrine of supersessionism, the Lord pointedly offered a reason for the descendants of Judah, the Jews, to be “praised out of a feeling of gratitude,” and he indignantly noted that this is precisely what would *not* be done by the Gentiles:

And because my words shall hiss forth — many of the Gentiles shall say: A Bible! A Bible! We have got a Bible, and there cannot be any more Bible. But thus saith the Lord God: O fools, they shall have a Bible; and it shall proceed forth from the Jews, mine ancient covenant people. And what **thank they the Jews** [**yôdû 'et-hayyêhûdîm*] for the Bible which they receive from them? Yea, what do the Gentiles mean? *Do they remember the travails, and the labors, and the pains of the Jews, and their diligence unto me, in bringing forth salvation unto the Gentiles? O ye Gentiles, have ye remembered the Jews, mine ancient covenant people? Nay; but ye have cursed them, and have hated them, and have not sought to recover them.* But behold, I will

24 Cf. Romans 12:16.

return all these things upon your own heads; for I the Lord have not forgotten my people. Thou fool, that shall say: A Bible, we have got a Bible, and we need no more Bible. Have ye obtained a Bible save it were by the Jews? (2 Nephi 29:3–6)

The Lord seems to be using the traditional association between Judah and *y-d-h*, using a direct wordplay in the phrase, “what thank they [Hebrew **yôdû*] the Jews [**’et-hayyēhûdîm*] ... ?”²⁵ While we do not know if Nephi recorded this revelation in Egyptian or Hebrew (using an Egyptian script), we can infer that it was probably spoken²⁶ to Nephi in his native language (Hebrew). This wordplay stresses the point that the Jews are to be “praised out of a feeling of gratitude,” i.e., “thanked” for their painstaking efforts to preserve the scriptures. Instead of gratitude for the Jews’ “travails,” “labors,” and “pains” (a triad), the Gentiles have ungratefully “cursed,” “hated,” “and not sought to recover” the Jews (another triad). The Lord twice calls the Jews “mine ancient covenant people,” even stating that they are the source of “salvation [Heb. *yěšû’â*] unto the Gentiles”²⁷ which may also be a deliberate wordplay on the name “Jesus” (Heb. *yěšûa’*). This antisemitism often overlooks the fact that Jesus was a Jew: “salvation is of the Jews” (John 4:22; cf.

25 Cf. the verbal noun *yěhōdeh* “thanksgiving” in Nehemiah 11:17.

26 The language of 2 Nephi 29:2 indicates that the Lord spoke this revelation directly to Nephi: “... that I may remember the promises which I have made unto thee, Nephi and also unto thy father, that I would remember your seed”

27 2 Nephi 29:4; see also especially Isaiah 49:3–6 (1 Nephi 21:3–6): “Thou art my servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified. ... I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth.” This text is sometimes interpreted narrowly to mean the Messiah or Isaiah, but can be interpreted more widely to refer to all Israel.

Romans 3:1–2).²⁸ As the Lord’s words intimate, the Jews in their “travails,” “labors,” “pains” (2 Nephi 29:4) and suffering are not wholly unlike Jesus the Suffering Servant, the “man of sorrows” (Isaiah 53:3) whose “travail of ... soul” (Isaiah 53:11) brought “salvation” (Isaiah 52:10, *yěšû‘â*) to all humankind.²⁹

“Respect[ing] the Words of the Jews”

Nephi, in the remarks that conclude his personal record (2 Nephi 33), reflects upon a lifetime of revelations including the Lord’s revelation to him in 2 Nephi 29 on the importance of “the words of the Jews”³⁰:

28 John Tvedtnes recommends that John 4:22 preserves a similar kind of wordplay: “Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for **salvation** [Gk. *sōtēria* = Heb. *yěšû‘â*] **is of the Jews**” (personal communication). Jesus seems to be playing on his own name. This is not to suggest (and neither is Paul suggesting) that “salvation” automatically comes to anyone. Compare Articles of Faith 1:3: “We believe that through the Atonement of Christ, all mankind may be saved, by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel.” The same is true of the dead (D&C 138:58).

29 I am suggesting that the Lord’s words as reported in 2 Nephi 29:4–6 are conscious of Isaiah’s servant motif in Isaiah 49, 52–53 and elsewhere.

30 See especially 2 Nephi 29:10–14: “Wherefore, because that ye have a Bible ye need not suppose that it contains all my words; neither need ye suppose that I have not caused more to be written. For I command all men, both in the east and in the west, and in the north, and in the south, and in the islands of the sea, that they shall write the words which I speak unto them; for out of the books which shall be written I will judge the world, every man according to their works, according to that which is written. For behold, **I shall speak unto the Jews and they shall write it**; and I shall also speak unto the Nephites and they shall write it; and I shall also speak unto the other tribes of the house of Israel, which I have led away, and they shall write it; and I shall also speak unto all nations of the earth and they shall write it. And it shall come to pass that the Jews shall have the words of the Nephites, and the Nephites shall have **the words of the Jews**; and the Nephites and the Jews shall have the words of the lost tribes of Israel; and the lost tribes of Israel shall have **the words of the Nephites and the Jews**. And it shall come to pass that my people, which are of the house of Israel, shall be gathered home unto the lands of their possessions; and my word also shall be gathered in one. And I will show unto them that fight against my word and against my people, who are of the house of Israel, that I am God, and that I covenanted with Abraham that I would remember his seed forever.”

And you that will not partake of the goodness of God, and **respect the words of the Jews**, and also my words, and the words which shall proceed forth out of the mouth of the Lamb of God, behold, I bid you an everlasting farewell, for these words shall condemn you at the last day. (2 Nephi 33:14)

Note how Nephi invokes “the words of the Jews” as one of three judgment witnesses in the final judgment, according to Deuteronomic requirement for “two or three witnesses” governing capital cases (Deuteronomy 17:6; 19:15).³¹ The Bible, which the Jews have largely written and preserved, and for which the Lord said the Gentiles would fail to “thank” the Jews (2 Nephi 29:4), will stand as one of the scriptural witnesses by which all humankind will be judged. Every accountable individual will be judged according to his or her performance or non-performance of the principles contained in “the words of the Jews” (the Bible), Nephi’s words and the words of his descendants (the Book of Mormon), and by “the words which shall proceed forth out of the mouth of the Lamb of God” (2 Nephi 33:14), which, I suppose, includes all of the revelation according to which the Lord expects us to live (Deuteronomy 8:3; Matthew 4:4; Luke 4:4; Moroni 7:25; D&C 84:44; 98:11).

When writing the epilogue to Jesus’s ministry among the Nephites, Mormon reflects on the Lord’s much earlier words to his ancestor Nephi and the latter’s final words: “Yea, and **ye need not any longer hiss, nor spurn, nor make game of the Jews, nor any of the remnant of the house of Israel;**

31 This law is apparently an eternal principle and more important than we suppose. See Matthew 18:16; 2 Corinthians 13:1; 1 Timothy 5:19; Hebrews 10:28; 1 John 5:8; 2 Nephi 11:3; 2 Nephi 27:12; Ether 5:4; Moroni 6:7; D&C 5:15; 6:28; 128:3, 20. On the “law of witnesses” as it occurs in 2 Nephi, see Bruce A. Van Orden, “The Law of Witnesses in 2 Nephi,” in *Second Nephi, The Doctrinal Structure*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1989), 307–21.

for behold, the Lord remembereth his covenant unto them, and he will do unto them according to that which he hath sworn” (3 Nephi 29:8). Mormon was expressly concerned that Gentile ingratitude toward the Jews would extend beyond not remembering them (i.e., “cursing,” “hating” and “not [seeking] to recover them”) to other virulent forms of antisemitism, i.e., “hissing,”³² “spurning,”³³ and “making game”³⁴ of the Jews (another triad). All of these actions are consciously antonymic to “thanking” the Jews (2 Nephi 29:4) and “respecting” their words (2 Nephi 33:14). Unfortunately, historic expressions of Gentile Christian supersessionism and antisemitism in general have been manifest in even worse forms than the kinds of ingratitude that Mormon enumerates.

Gratitude: Praising the Lord with Sacrifices of Praise

The prophet Jeremiah foresaw a time of restoration for Judah that would follow much tribulation, a time when they would be able to “praise” or “thank” the Lord under much more favorable conditions:

Thus saith the Lord; Again there shall be heard in this place, which ye say shall be desolate without man and without beast, even in the cities of **Judah** [*Yěhûdâ*],

32 Or whistling — often as an insult (cf. the Hebrew verb *šāraq* and its cognate noun[s] *šērēqâ/šēriqâ*); see, e.g., 1 Kings 9:8; Jeremiah 18:16; 19:8; 25:9, 18; 29:18; 49:17; 50:13; 51:37; Ezekiel 27:36; Micah 6:16; Zephaniah 2:15; Lamentations 2:15–16; 2 Chronicles 29:8; Job 27:23; 1 Nephi 19:14 and 3 Nephi 16:9 (“a hiss and a byword”). “Hissing” or “whistling” is also a means of summoning. See, e.g., Isaiah 5:26; 7:18; Zechariah 10:8; 2 Nephi 29:2–3; Moroni 10:28.

33 I.e., to contemptuously reject; in the LDS scriptures, this word occurs only here in 3 Nephi 29:4, 8 (twice).

34 I.e., mocking; cf. the mocking described in Ezekiel 22:4–5; cf. also possibly Ishmael’s “mocking” of Isaac in Genesis 21:9; the “mocking” endured by the Savior as a part of his atoning suffering (Matthew 20:19; 27:29, 31, 41; Mark 10:34; 15:20, 31; Luke 18:32; 23:11, 36; Mosiah 15:5); and the mocking from the great and spacious building (1 Nephi 8:27).

and in the streets of Jerusalem, that are desolate, without man, and without inhabitant, and without beast, The voice of joy, and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom, and the voice of the bride, the voice of them that shall say, **Praise** [“give thanks [to],”³⁵ *hòdû*] the Lord of hosts: for the Lord is good; for his mercy endureth for ever: and of them that shall bring the sacrifice of **praise** [*tòdâ*, “thank offering”³⁶] into the house of the Lord. For I will cause to return the captivity of the land, as at the first, saith the Lord (Jeremiah 33:10-11; cf. 1 Nephi 15:15).

One could argue that this prophecy (which plays on the name “Judah”)³⁷ remains to be fulfilled. Everything we do in the restored gospel is done to the end that “the sons of Levi ... may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness.”³⁸ If Jesus’s ministry in Third Nephi is a type and shadow of “good things to come” for the house of Israel, Judah’s brethren will yet “praise [*yòdûkâ*]” him and “shall bow down [*yištahăwwû*] before” the lion of the tribe of Judah (Genesis 49:8; Revelation 5:5) just as the Nephites and Lamanites of Bountiful did (3 Nephi 11, 17:9–10).³⁹

Conclusion

Seeing that our Bible — both “Old” and “New” Testaments — was mostly written by Jews, it is truly “the book [that]

35 See Garsiel, *Biblical Names*, 172.

36 See Garsiel, *Biblical Names*, 172.

37 See Garsiel, *Biblical Names*, 172.

38 Malachi 3:3; 3 Nephi 24:3; D&C 13:1; D&C 128:24; JS-H 1:6; see also Oliver Cowdery’s account of John the Baptist’s words at the end of JS-H.

39 See Matthew L. Bowen, “‘They Came Forth and Fell Down and Partook of the Fruit of the Tree’: Proskynesis in 3 Nephi 11:12–19 and 17:9–10 and Its Significance” in *Third Nephi: New Perspectives on an Incomparable Scripture* (ed. Gaye Strathearn, Andrew Skinner; Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute and Deseret Book, 2011), 107–129.

proceeded forth from the mouth of a Jew” (see 1 Nephi 13:23–24, 38; 14:23). For the composition and preservation of this book which is “of great worth unto to the Gentiles” (1 Nephi 13:23), as well as to the house of Israel, we all owe a great debt of “acknowledgement” and “thanks,” both to the Jews and to the God of Israel.

For Latter-day Saints in particular, antisemitism and the doctrine of supersessionism should be out of the question. In the Lord’s words, the Jews are ever “mine ancient covenant people” (2 Nephi 29:4): “for I the Lord have not forgotten my people” (29:5); “for behold, the Lord remembereth his covenant unto them [the Jews and all the house of Israel], and he will do unto them according to that which he hath sworn” (3 Nephi 29:8). All of this suggests that we are accountable for not only our actions but our attitudes toward the Jews and the scriptures that we have through their “travails,” “labors,” “pains,” and “diligence unto [the Lord]” (2 Nephi 29:4). We thus do well to “remember” and “thank” them (29:4).

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