

# “What Thank They the Jews”? (2 Nephi 29:4)

**A Note on the Name Judah and Antisemitism**

Dr. Matthew L. Bowen – Brigham Young University–Hawaii

# “What Thank They the Jews”? (2 Nephi 29:4)

**A Note on the Name Judah and Antisemitism**

Dr. Matthew L. Bowen – Brigham Young University–Hawaii

## *Why We Should Thank the Jews* (2 Nephi 29:4-6)

**Nephi’s View of the Jewish Role in Human Salvation**

## “Judah” as “Praise” or “Thanks”



- 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* ( יד"ה ) which in its causative stem means ‘to offer praise out of a feeling of gratitude.’”
  - Moshe Garsiel, *Biblical Names: A Literary Study of Midrashic Derivations and Puns* (trans. Phyllis Hackett; Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1991), 171.

## “Judah” as “Praise” or “Thanks” Genesis 29:35



- “And [Leah] conceived again, and bare a son: and she said, Now **will I praise** [’ôdeh] **the LORD** [’et-yhwh]: therefore she called his name **Judah** [ יהודה? , yěhûdâ – pun: yěhô+ ’ôdeh]; and left bearing.”

## Judah = “praise” or “thanks”

### Genesis 49:8

- “**Judah** [yěhûdâ] thou art he whom thy brethren **shall praise** [yôdûkâ, or, “**thou—thy brethren shall thank thee**”] **thy hand** [yāděkâ] shall be in the neck of thine enemies; thy father’s children shall bow down before thee.”





## Jews = “Praised Ones,” Romans 2:28-29, and “Supersessionism”



- Anglican scholar N.T. Wright: “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,’ *loudaios* in Greek, ought to mean ‘praise’. This highlights what Paul is saying: the very word *loudaios* 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 ‘on the surface.’” ...

## Jews = “Praised Ones,” Romans 2:28-29, and “Supersessionism”



- ... “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.’”

## Jews = “Praised Ones,” Romans 2:28-29, and “Supersessionism”



- ▶ ... “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.’”
- ▶ Wright’s comments highlight the inevitable problem that emerged from Paul’s letter to the Romans: Paul’s adjustment or redefinition of boundary identity markers would eventually lead to the Gentile Christian notion that they had replaced the Jews in God’s plan (supersessionism). Note: Christians continued to attend the synagogue at least until the 5<sup>th</sup> Century CE.

## Jews = “Praised Ones,” Romans 2:28-29, and “Supersessionism”



- ▶ Mark D. Nanos: “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.”
- ▶ 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.

## The “Firstfruit” and the “Natural Branches”

- ▶ Paul himself anticipates the potential misunderstanding and misappropriation of his words.
- ▶ Romans 11:12-26: “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 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.” ...



## The “Firstfruit” and the “Natural Branches”

- ▶ “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.**” ...



## The “Firstfruit” and the “Natural Branches”

- “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 graft 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?**” ...



## The “Firstfruit” and the “Natural Branches”

- “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)





## The False Doctrine of Supersessionism

- “Supersessionism” (or replacement theology) = the longstanding Gentile Christian belief that the Gentiles have replaced the Jews in God’s plan.
- Note: 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)

## Paul Was NOT a Supersessionist!

- ▶ 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.
- ▶ Mark D. Nanos: “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)”
  - ▶ (“Paul and Judaism,” in *Jewish Annotated New Testament*, 552).



## “What Thank They the Jews”?

Judah = “offer praise out of a feeling of gratitude”

Jews = those to be “praised out of a feeling of gratitude”

- 2 Nephi 29:3-4: “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-hayyěhûdîm] for the Bible which they receive from them?”



## “What Thank They the Jews”?

Judah = “offer praise out of a feeling of gratitude”

Jews = those to be “praised out of a feeling of gratitude”

- 2 Nephi 29:5-6: “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 return all these things upon your own heads; for I the Lord have not forgotten my people.” ...

## “What Thank They the Jews”?

Judah = “offer praise out of a feeling of gratitude”

Jews = those to be “praised out of a feeling of gratitude”

- ... “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?**”
- Jewish preservation of the scriptures



# Jewish Authorship and Preservation of the Scriptures

- ▶ “the book [that] proceeded forth from the mouth of a Jew” (1 Nephi 13:24, 28; 14:23)
  - ▶ All of the books of the Tanakh (*tôrâ*, [“teaching”/“law”], *něbîîm* [“Prophets”], and *kětûbîm* [“writings”]), the Hebrew Bible, or the Christian “Old Testament” were authored by Jews/Israelites.
  - ▶ All of the books of the New Testament were also apparently written by Jews, with the likely exception of Luke-Acts (Luke was an early convert born of Gentile parentage)
  - ▶ The Septuagint (LXX) used by Greek-speaking diaspora Jews and many early Christians was translated by Jews.





## “Respect[ing] the Words of the Jews” and the Jews (2 Nephi 33:14)

- Nephi cites the “words of the Jews” as one of three scriptural witnesses that will constitute the record whereby humankind will be judged.
- Nephi closes his record: “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)



## Not “Hiss[ing],” “Spurn[ing],” or “Mak[ing] Game of the Jews” (3 Nephi 29:8)

- ▶ A warning to latter-day Gentiles against antisemitism and supersessionism.
- ▶ “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**; 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).

## “Their Diligence unto Me, in Bringing Forth Salvation unto the Gentiles”

- “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?”





## “Their Diligence unto Me, in Bringing Forth Salvation unto the Gentiles”

- ▶ “Bringing forth salvation unto the Gentiles” did not just consist of scribal activity
  - ▶ “we labor diligently to **write**, to **persuade** our children, and also our brethren, to believe in Christ, and to be reconciled to God” (2 Nephi 25:23)
- ▶ The problem was not necessarily Jewish “exclusivism” as is so often assumed and suggested.
- ▶ Note Jesus’s criticism of the scribes and Pharisees of his time: “**ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte** and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves” (Matthew 23:15)



## “Their Diligence unto Me, in Bringing Forth Salvation unto the Gentiles”

- In other words, some sectarian Jews went overboard (if anything) in trying to “bring forth salvation unto the Gentiles” and to mold proselytes in accordance with their own particular sectarian notions of Judaism.
  - Proselytes
  - *gēr Ṣedeq*
  - *gēr tōšāb*
  - Gentile “God-fearers”



## “Salvation is of the Jews” Jesus (*yēšûa* ‘ = salvation)

- **Jesus** [*lēsous* = *yēšûa* ‘] saith unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for [the] **salvation** [*hē sōtēria* = *yēšû* ‘*â*] **is of the Jews**. (John 4:21-22; cf. Matthew 1:21)





## “Thou Art My Servant, O Israel” (Isaiah 49:3) Jesus and Jews/Saints as “Suffering Servant”

- ▶ “And said unto me, Thou *art* my servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified.”
- ▶ Traditional Jewish vs. traditional Christian interpretations of the “suffering servant” of Isaiah 53
  - ▶ Jewish: “servant” = Israel/the Jews
  - ▶ Christian: “servant” = Jesus Christ
  - ▶ Nephi and his successors: “servant” = **both!**  
Messiah + prophets + Jews/Israel/saints  
(cf. Jacob 5)



## “Thou Art My Servant, O Israel” (Isaiah 49:3) Jesus and Jews/Saints as “Suffering Servant”

- ▶ “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?**” (2 Nephi 29:4)
  - ▶ Isaiah 53:11: “He shall see **of the travail** [*mē ‘āmal*] of his soul and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall **my righteous servant** justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities.”
  - ▶ Isaiah 53:3: “He is despised and rejected of men; a man of **sorrows** [*< pains, mak ’ōbôt*] and acquainted with grief”; “Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried **our sorrows**” [*< our pains, mak ’ōbēnû*]
  - ▶ Isaiah 49:4: “Then I said, I have **laboured** in vain, I have spent my strength for nought, and in vain”



## Abinadi's Exegesis of the "Messenger" Song of Isaiah 52:7-10 and Servant Song of Isaiah 53 in Mosiah 12-16

"How beautiful upon the mountains are **the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!** Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice; with the voice together shall they sing: for they shall see eye to eye, when the LORD shall bring again Zion. Break forth into joy, sing together, ye waste places of Jerusalem: for the LORD hath comforted his people, he hath redeemed Jerusalem. **The LORD hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations [Gentiles]; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.**"



## The Suffering “Servant” Messiah – the Prophets – the Saints

- “And he said, **It is a light thing that thou shouldst be my servant** to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for **a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation [yěšû ‘ātî] unto the end of the earth”** (Isaiah 49:6)



## The Work of the “Suffering Servant(s)”

- Thus saith the LORD, In an acceptable time have I heard thee, and **in a day of salvation** have I helped thee: and **I will preserve thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth, to cause to inherit the desolate heritages; That thou mayest say to the prisoners, Go forth; to them that *are* in darkness, Shew yourselves.** They shall feed in the ways, and their pastures *shall be* in all high places. (Isaiah 49:8-9)

# On both sides of the veil





## Joseph F. Smith's Vision of the Spirit World – Faithful Israelites/Jews



- ▶ "While this vast multitude waited and conversed, rejoicing in the hour of their deliverance from the chains of death, **the Son of God appeared, declaring liberty to the captives who had been faithful.** And there he preached to them the everlasting gospel, the doctrine of the resurrection and the redemption of mankind from the fall, and from individual sins on conditions of repentance. But unto the wicked he did not go, and among the ungodly and the unrepentant who had defiled themselves while in the flesh, his voice was not raised;" ...

## Joseph F. Smith's Vision of the Spirit World – Faithful Israelites/Jews



- ... “Neither did the rebellious who rejected the testimonies and the warnings of the ancient prophets behold his presence, nor look upon his face. Where these were, darkness reigned, but among the righteous there was peace; And the saints rejoiced in their redemption, and **bowed the knee and acknowledged the Son of God as their Redeemer** and Deliverer from death and the chains of hell. Their countenances shone, and the radiance from the presence of the Lord rested upon them, and **they sang praises unto his holy name.** (D&C 138:19-24)

## “Messengers Clothed with Power and Authority” – Israel’s “Labor”

”But behold, from among the righteous, he organized his forces and appointed **messengers** [angels], **clothed with power and authority**, and commissioned them to go forth and carry the light of the gospel to them that were in darkness, even to all the spirits of men; and thus was the gospel preached to the dead. And the chosen messengers went forth to declare the acceptable day of the Lord and proclaim liberty to the captives who were bound, even unto all who would repent of their sins and receive the gospel” (D&C 138:30-31)



# “Messengers Clothed with Power and Authority” – Israel’s “Labor”





## “Sacrifices of Praise”

### Jeremiah 17:26

- And they shall come from the cities of **Judah** [yěhûdâ], and from the places about Jerusalem, and from the land of Benjamin, and from the plain, and from the mountains, and from the south, bringing burnt offerings, and sacrifices, and meat offerings, and incense, **and bringing sacrifices of praise** [tôdâ, “thanksgiving”], **unto the house of the LORD.**

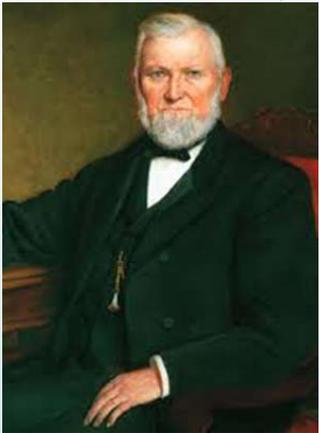


## “Sacrifices of Praise”

### 1 Nephi 15:15

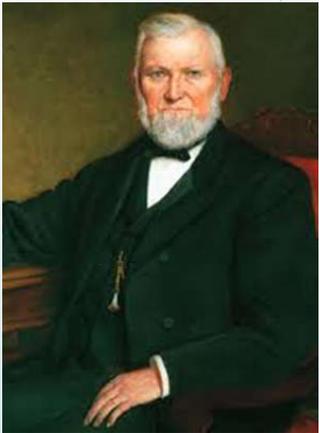
- ▶ Like Paul, Nephi saw himself and his descendants within the religion of Israel not apart from it: “And then shall the remnant of our seed know concerning us, how that we came out from Jerusalem, and that **they are descendants of the Jews**. (2 Nephi 30:4)
- ▶ “And then at that day will they not rejoice and **give praise** [give thanks] unto their everlasting God, their rock and their **salvation** [their *yěšû ‘â*, i.e., *yěšûa* ‘]? Yea, at that day, will they not receive the strength and nourishment from the true vine? Yea, will they not come unto the true fold of God?” (1 Nephi 15:15)

## The Prophetic Destiny of the Jews and Jewish Latter-day Saints



- President Wilford Woodruff (1807–98): “This is the will of your great Elohim, O house of Judah, and whenever you shall be called upon to perform this work, the God of Israel will help you. **You have a great future and destiny before you and you cannot avoid fulfilling it; you are the royal chosen seed, and the God of your father’s house has kept you distinct as a nation for eighteen hundred years, under all the oppression of the whole Gentile world. . .**”

## The Prophetic Destiny of the Jews and Jewish Latter-day Saints



- ... “When you meet with Shiloh your king, you will know him; **your destiny is marked out, you cannot avoid it.** It is true that after you return and gather your nation home, and rebuild your City and Temple, that the Gentiles may gather together their armies to go against you to battle . . . ; but **when this affliction comes, the living God, that led Moses through the wilderness, will deliver you,** and your Shiloh will come and stand in your midst and will fight your battles; and you will know him, and **the afflictions of the Jews will be at an end**” (quoted in Matthias F. Cowley, *Wilford Woodruff: History of His Life and Labors*, 2nd ed. [1909], 509–10).



## The Prophetic Destiny of the Jews and Jewish Latter-day Saints

- The “Suffering Servant”:
  - Messiah – prophets – Jews/Israelites/Saints
  - Isaiah 53: “man of sorrows”—i.e., “man of pains”
- “And they also of **the tribe of Judah, after their pain**, shall be sanctified in holiness before the Lord, to dwell in his presence day and night, forever and ever.” (D&C 133:35)