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Jaredite Zion Societies: Hope for a Better World

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Frank F. Judd, Jr.

Introduction

When people think of the book of Ether in the Book of Mormon, they often remember scenes of deception, darkness, and bloodshed. This is not all that surprising, for indeed the book of Ether contains much of these kinds of things. The text speaks of a time of terrible wickedness when “all the people upon the face of the land were shedding blood, and there was none to restrain them” (Ether 13:31). All the men kept their swords in their hands and no one would lend anything to another because no one was trustworthy in all the land (14:1–2). These unrestrained contentions led to so much bloodshed “that the whole face of the land was covered with the bodies of the dead. And so swift and speedy was the war that there was none left to bury the dead, . . . leaving the bodies of both men, women, and children strewed upon the face of the land, to become prey to the worms of the flesh. And the scent thereof went forth upon the face of the land” (vv 21–23). Because “the Spirit of the Lord had ceased striving with them, and Satan had full power over the hearts of the people; for they were given up unto the hardness of their hearts, and the blindness of their minds that they might be destroyed,” all the Jaredites “were drunken with anger, even as a man who is drunken with wine” (15:19, 22). The final bloodbath culminated when Coriantumr decapitated Shiz, leaving only Coriantumr and Ether alive (vv 30–34).

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Why All That Wickedness?

When we read the bloody conclusion of Ether, the following statement by the Lord to the brother of Jared at the commencement of the record seems strange: “There [in the promised land] will I bless thee and thy seed, and raise up unto me . . . a seed, upon all the face of the earth” (Ether 1:43). We wonder why Moroni included all that wickedness if the Jaredites were such a “great nation” and whether the record contained on the gold plates was, as Moroni said, “of great worth” (Mormon 8:14).

First, to read the book of Ether as a record of only wickedness is to miss Moroni’s intent in placing it in the Book of Mormon record. Moroni knew that the Jaredites, like his own people, had been destroyed because of wickedness. Consequently, the Jaredite record stands as a second witness with the Nephite record to the fact that if the inhabitants of the promised land do not serve the God of that land, who is Jesus Christ, they will be destroyed (Ether 2:8). Together, these two records witness to latter-day readers in the Western Hemisphere that they must also serve Jesus Christ or suffer a similar fate. Perhaps this is what Moroni meant when he said he included certain events in his abridgment so that we, his readers, “may learn to be more wise” than they (Mormon 9:31).

Second, amidst his description of the scenes of frightening carnage and bloodshed in the book of Ether, Moroni said that it is important for these things to come to us, “that thereby ye may repent of your sins, and suffer not that these murderous combinations shall get above you” (Ether 8:23). Moroni therefore included examples of people who were able to overcome these “murderous combinations.” In addition to the incredible spiritual experiences of the brother of Jared recorded in the first chapters of the book of Ether, there are at least four more examples of righteousness among the terrible wickedness. Just as the Lord provided for the brother of Jared “stones to shine in darkness” (Ether 6:3), Moroni provided in his abridgment of the Jaredite record the experiences of a few righteous societies, which show the modern reader how to overcome the darkness. These Zion-like societies were primarily under the leadership of Orihah, Shule, Emer, and Lib (Ether chapters 6, 7, 9 and 10).

Orihah

When the people of Jared desired to have a king, with acute prophetic foresight the brother of Jared warned, “Surely this thing leadeth to captivity” (Ether 6:23). All of his sons and all of the sons of his brother Jared declined the throne save one. Luckily for the Jaredites, the remaining son Orihah proved to be a good man and a righteous king. The record states, “Orihah did walk humbly before the Lord, and did remember how great things the Lord had done for his father [Jared], and also taught his people how great things the Lord had done for their fathers” (Ether 6:30). Just as were the righteous Nephites, the Jaredites were blessed by the Lord with all manner of riches, and they prospered in the land under Orihah (v 28). He lived to a ripe old age and “did execute judgment upon the land in righteousness all his days.” Orihah prospered personally and was blessed with a large posterity of 31 children, including 23 sons (7:1–2). But this peace and prosperity did not last long. Following Orihah’s death, rival factions arose and spread discord and captivity until Shule restored peace and order to the kingdom (vv 3–9).

Shule

Shule “did execute judgment in righteousness” (Ether 7:11). He punished all those who “did revile against the prophets, and did mock them” (v 24). Because Shule was so determined to defend righteousness, “the people were brought unto repentance” (v 25). The Lord saw the sincerity of their repentance, spared them from a terrible destruction, and blessed them. Shule prospered and was blessed with a great posterity, and the people prospered under the care of God. Additionally, “there were no more wars in the days of Shule; and he remembered the great things that the Lord had done for his fathers in bringing them across the great deep into the promised land” (v 27). Both Orihah and Shule remembered the great things that God had done for their fathers, which brings to mind one of the original purposes of the Book of Mormon stated on the title page:

An abridgment taken from the book of Ether also, which is a record of the people of Jared, who were scattered at the time the Lord confounded the language of the people, when they were building a tower to get to heaven—Which is to show unto the remnant of the House of Israel *what great things the Lord hath done for their fathers*. (Title Page; emphasis added)

Unfortunately, after the reign of Shule, the Jaredite people once again slipped into their previous ways of wickedness. These wicked practices were characterized by the people of Akish, who “were desirous for gain, even as Akish was desirous for power” (Ether 9:11). Following a period of apostasy and deception, however, Emer was anointed king over the land.

Emer

When Emer reigned as king in righteousness, “the Lord began again to take the curse from off the land, and the house of Emer did prosper exceedingly under the reign of Emer; and in the space of sixty and two years they had become exceedingly strong, insomuch that they became exceedingly rich” (Ether 9:16). In his abridgment of this part of the Jaredite record, Moroni specifically states that the people of Emer were blessed with an abundance of precious metals (gold and silver), other fine materials (silk and linen), food (grain, fruit, and beasts), and domestic stock animals (vv 17–19). Additionally, Emer was blessed with many sons and daughters (v 21). As these verses indicate, not only did Emer prosper, but his whole household prospered, similar to the conditions described in 4 Nephi.

Not only did the people of Emer prosper materially, but they were able to live in peace during his reign. The experiences of Emer are some of the most promising moments in these chapters of rampant wickedness among the Jaredites. As a very righteous leader of his people, Emer was privileged to have the veil parted and see the Lord Himself. The text says, “Emer did execute judgment in righteousness all his days . . . ; and he saw peace in the land; yea, and he even saw the Son of Righteousness, and did rejoice and glory in his day” (Ether 9:21–22). Emer seems to have exercised faith comparable to that of the brother of Jared and to have been granted similar holy experiences. Moroni said the following concerning the sacred experience when the brother of Jared saw the Lord: “And because of the knowledge of this man he could not be kept from beholding within the veil; and he saw the finger of Jesus, which, when he saw, he fell with fear; for he knew that it was the finger of the Lord; and he had faith no longer, for he knew, nothing doubting” (3:19). Moroni may have desired to show us through Emer that not only righteousness but perfect faith is possible in a world sandwiched in on all sides by wickedness.

Likewise, Emer's son Coriantum "did walk in the steps of his father" and treated his subjects very well. They prospered and built "many mighty cities" (Ether 9:23). Again similar to the 4 Nephi account, these Jaredites remained righteous for at least two generations (4 Nephi 1:22). Following the reign of Coriantum, certain Jaredites "began to embrace the secret plans again of old" (Ether 9:26). The land which had been greatly blessed under the reigns of Emer and Coriantum became cursed, insomuch that famine spread and poisonous serpents plagued the inhabitants of the land (see vv 28–32). Moroni recorded that "when the people saw that they must perish they began to repent of their iniquities and cry unto the Lord" (v 34). But this repentance was only temporary and wickedness soon prevailed again.

Lib

Not until the days of a king named Lib, many years later, were the poisonous serpents finally destroyed (Ether 10:19). Lib was a righteous ruler like Orihah, Shule, and Emer. He "did that which was good in the sight of the Lord" (v 19). Lib was blessed for his righteousness and begat many children. Under the leadership of Lib the people became "exceedingly industrious, and they did buy and sell and traffic one with another, that they might get gain" (v 22). Moroni recorded that these people prospered as they worked inside the earth and mined ore such as gold, silver, brass, iron, and copper. Just like the people of Emer, they obtained fine cloth such as silk and linen. Additionally, they worked the soil to sow and reap bounteous harvests. There is a big difference between the way this people prospered compared with the deceptive and bloodthirsty means by which previous wicked men murdered to get gain. Moroni said of the people of Lib, "And [there] never could be a people more blessed than were they, and more prospered by the hand of the Lord" (v 28). The language which Moroni used to describe the state of the people of Lib is remarkably similar to the language his father Mormon used to describe the Zion society of the Nephites in 4 Nephi. Mormon wrote concerning them, "Surely there could not be a happier people among all the people who had been created by the hand of God" (4 Nephi 1:16). It seems possible that Moroni was trying to bring to our

memory the precious experiences of those Nephites as he describes the righteousness among the people of Lib.

Conclusion

Moroni included the accounts of incredible wickedness in his abridgment of the Jaredite record for important reasons. While preparing an abridgment of the wickedness that was among the Jaredites, he was also preparing a pattern of the type of society in which we would be living in the last days. As Moroni himself said, “Jesus Christ hath shown you unto me, and I know your doing. And I know that ye walk in the pride of your hearts; and there are none *save a few only* who do not lift themselves up in the pride of their hearts” (Mormon 8:35–36; emphasis added). Moroni shows in the book of Ether that those “few” righteous people can indeed beat the incredible odds, overcome wickedness, and live in righteousness similar to the near perfect Zion society of the Nephite Saints in 4 Nephi. The account in the book of Ether provides a map for us, that we might *not* end up like Coriantumr and Shiz, but that we might follow the examples of righteous men such as Jared and his brother, Orihah, Shule, Emer, and Lib. Moroni stated plainly, “This cometh unto you, O ye Gentiles, that ye may know the decrees of God—that ye may repent, and not continue in your iniquities until the fulness come, that ye may not bring down the fulness of the wrath of God upon you as the inhabitants of the land have hitherto done” (Ether 2:11). As we hearken to this wise counsel we also “might with surety hope for a better world, yea, even a place at the right hand of God, which hope cometh of faith, maketh an anchor to the souls of men, which would make them sure and steadfast, always abounding in good works, being led to glorify God” (12:4).