

ETHER 1–5

John W. Welch Notes



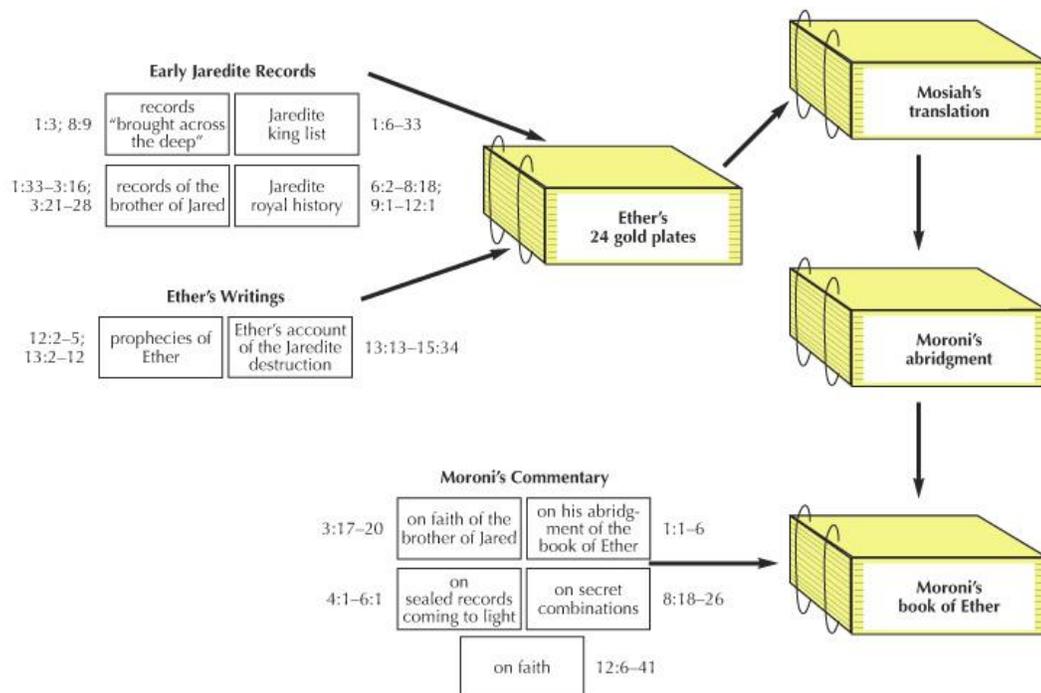
Study Questions for the Book of Ether

As you study the book of Ether, you may wish to observe its overall organization and its most salient points of emphasis, paying particular attention to the historical, personal, doctrinal, and religious importance of the experiences of the Brother of Jared and of the Jaredite people. Since it is proverbially said that a good question is half the answer, bear in mind the following constructive questions:

- Many instructive things can be (and have been) said about this book appended to the main line of the Book of Mormon. What do you find most amazing, impressive, and inspiring about the complex book of Ether given to us by Moroni?
- If you were writing a history of a fallen civilization, what sorts of details might you include or not find important?
- What was going on in Moroni's very lonely life and traumatized situation when he was finally able to fulfill his father Mormon's editorial promise that "this account shall be written hereafter; for it is expedient that all people should know the things which are written in this account" (Mosiah 28:19)? Note that about 15 years had passed since the final Nephite battle and Mormon's death (Mormon 8:6).
- In addition to fulfilling his father's plan to include something of the record of Ether, why else did Moroni craft this book the way he did? Was it to solidify his testimony of Jesus as the Lord God from the beginning of history (Ether 2–3) until the end of time with "a New Jerusalem" (Ether 13:4)? Was it to overcome his fears with faith? Was it to assuage his own disappointment over the total destruction of his own people? Or was it to show that he, as a lone voice, could hope to make a difference for future people, just as the lone survivor Ether had left a helpful record that told of the demise of the Jaredite civilization?

- Who was Ether? When and why was his account written? (See Ether 12:2–5; 13:2–12).
- What records did Ether rely on as he wrote his original multilayered account of the destruction of his people, the Jaredites, on his 24 gold plates? Those records included at least certain records “brought across the deep” (Ether 1:3; 8:9), a Jaredite king list (1:6–33), records of the brother of Jared (1:33–3:16; 3:21–28); and a Jaredite royal history (6:2–8:18; 9:1–12:1). Ether’s account was translated by King Mosiah, the son of Benjamin about 92 BC (Mosiah 28). See *Charting the Book of Mormon*, chart 15:

Sources behind the Book of Ether



- What then motivated Moroni as he chose what to include in his abridgement of Ether’s account, which Moroni describes as an “account of those ancient inhabitants who were destroyed by the hand of the Lord upon the face of this north country” (Ether 1:1)?
- What personal editorial comments and instructional impressions did Moroni interject? See Ether 1:1–6; 3:17–20 (on the faith of the brother of Jared); in 4:1–6:1 (on sealed records coming to light); in 8:18–26 (on the damage caused by secret combinations); in 12:6–37 (on the nature of faith, as well as of hope and charity); and in 12:38–41 (to bid farewell to the Gentiles, testifying that he had talked with Jesus “face to face”).

- What do you think Moroni wanted his readers to learn from the devastating Jaredite experiences, and also from the regrettable Nephite experiences?
- What are your three or four favorite verses in the book of Ether? You may wish to memorize them.

Seeing the Underlying Record of Ether as an Epic

It appears that the Jaredite story was originally told and written in the manner of an epic. Epics, such as the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, were a very early style of poetic literature, singing “of gods and of men.” Richard D. Rust, in his book, *Feasting on the Word: The Literary Testimony of the Book of Mormon*, discusses the many types and styles of writing in the Book of Mormon, and categorizes the Jaredite story as a classic epic.

In *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, M. H. Abrams explains that most epics are in poetry; however, durable and persuasive epics may also be written in prose. He defines characteristics of literary epics as follows (the examples from Jaredite literature are added):

- The hero is a figure of great national or even cosmic importance. In *The Iliad*, he is the Greek warrior Achilles, the son of the sea nymph Thetis. Sometimes there are two brothers who stand in contrast with each other. In the story of the Jaredite origins, there were two brothers, Jared and his brother, rather like Romulus and Remus, or other such pairs.
- The setting is ample and even huge in scale, possibly even cosmic. With help from the gods, Odysseus sails or wanders over the Mediterranean basin, the whole of the known world. The Jaredites, with divine assistance, cross a huge ocean to an unknown land.
- The action involves superhuman deeds either in battle, as in *The Iliad*, or long arduous journeys, as in *The Odyssey*. The Jaredite journey was certainly arduous, dangerous, and long.
- In these great actions, the gods or other supernatural beings take an interest or an active part. The Olympian Gods are involved in Homer’s epics. Jehovah, the Son of God who will come to Earth, provides guidance for the Jaredite journey.
- An epic is a ceremonial performance narrated in a ceremonial style, not given in normal speech. The text of the brother of Jared, who goes up into a high mountain where he sees not only the finger but also the face of God, is extraordinary, and it beckons to its readers to also strive to find an opening through the heavenly veil.

This last point does not mean that epics are, of necessity, only fictional literature and not historical. For many years people believed all components of *The Iliad*, including the siege of Troy, were mythological. The Homeric epics were validated when in 1868, Heinrich Schliemann discovered the city of Troy, now well excavated at the archaeological site of

Hisarlik. The excavation demonstrated the existence of many levels of occupation, city gates, and city walls, many of the things that Homer described are there. Indeed, history and human experience fundamentally precede poetry and theology.

The purpose of an epic was not simply entertainment. Epics were crucial in the reflection of essential needs and in the formation of the particular culture. There are no extant Olmec epics, but there are Maya creation epics such as the *Popol Vuh*. Those stories tell of the origin of their civilization, as seven ships sail across the sea and arrive in Central America. In addition, the great Israelite epic is the exodus from Egypt. The liberation, the plagues, the wandering in the wilderness, crossing the Red Sea, and acquiring their land contribute to their becoming a people.

And coming right from Mesopotamia in the third millennium BC, about the same time as the Jaredite departure, were the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, the *Epic of Nergal and Erishkegal*, the *Enuma Elish* and other sagas, reflecting a twilight world of kings, mighty warriors, dispersions, migrations, boats, feasts, rebellions, underground oppositions, jails, chaos, violence and savage reprisals, with the involvement of gods and battles to the death of all involved, as Hugh Nibley thoroughly introduced to LDS readers back in the 1950s and as John Thompson developed further in the 1990s.

Seen against this background, the book of Ether adheres in style and content to the typical configuration of an ancient epic. Its conclusion had a tragic, but didactically valuable, ending. Rather than showing only the foundation of a great culture, or the success of one political group over another, the record of Ether demonstrates the crumbling of one, initially strong civilization, and provides sober warnings for future cultures to avoid the same fate.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[Why Is the Book of Ether an Epic? \(Ether 7:9\)](#)," *KnoWhy* 241 (November 29, 2016).

Richard Dilworth Rust, *Feasting on the Word: The Literary Testimony of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book Co: 1997).

M. H. Abrams and Geoffrey Galt Harpham, *A Glossary of Literary Terms—Edition 11* (Boston, MA: Cengage Learning, 2014).

Heinrich Schliemann, *Troy and Its Remains: A Narrative of Researches and Discoveries Made on the Site of Ilium, and in the Trojan Plain*, ed. Philip Smith., trans. Dora Schmitz (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

Hugh W. Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert; the World of the Jaredites; There Were Jaredites*, CWHN 5, ed. John W. Welch, with Darrell L. Matthews and Stephen R. Callister (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988, esp. 172–263, 285–307, 350–379. This material is conveniently summarized in Hugh Nibley’s, “Some Test Cases from the Book of Ether,” in *An Approach to the Book of Mormon* (Provo and Salt Lake City, UT: FARMS and Deseret Book, 1988).

John S. Thompson, “The Jaredite Exodus: A Literary Perspective of a Historical Narrative,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, 3, no. 1 (1994): 104–112.

Ether 1

Ether 1:1–2—Moroni as Abridger, Editor, Commentator, or Author

Moroni took that epic and abridged it and added his own comments to the record left by Ether. Moroni would have most likely relied on King Mosiah’s translation of Ether’s twenty-four plates. And as Moroni’s intent was for the record to teach future generations “from the dust,” he did not hold back in inserting his own editorial comments. Because this text is “layered,” it is interesting to notice, at the outset, that in any given verse, the following “voices” may be speaking to us or influencing the text’s wording and meaning. Those possible voices would include (1) Jared or the brother of Jared, (2) other ancient Jaredite recordkeepers or story-tellers, (3) the final Jaredite prophet Ether, (4) King Mosiah as translator, (5) Moroni as abridger or editor, (6) Moroni as commentator or as author adding his own thoughts and impressions, and finally (7) Joseph Smith as translator bringing it forth in English. Facing this complexity would normally be unsettling, but realizing that all of this was possible—at every important turn—because of the gift and power of God gives us as readers confidence going forward.

Considering these layers further: As is recorded in Mosiah 28, the messengers of Limhi had found Ether’s plates during their unsuccessful journey in search of Zarahemla, and then Mosiah translated them using the Urim and Thummim because his people were anxious to know about the former civilization. Mormon commented in Mosiah 28:19 that the contents would be written later because it was “expedient that all people should know the things which are written in this account.” Possibly, as Mormon lay dying, he reminded Moroni to be sure to let people know about the history of the Jaredites.

Mormon and Moroni may have been even more interested in ensuring that the history was available for later generations of readers after they knew that their own generation had suffered the same kind of fate as the Jaredites. The whole book of Ether becomes,

then, a prophetic, allegorical warning to the Nephites and to us, of how these things happened. The historical content of the Jaredite history is not allegorical, but Moroni used it allegorically, making it into a series of valuable lessons.

Moroni's abridgement most likely relied on King Mosiah's translation. Although he says in Ether 1:2 that he is taking his account from the twenty-four gold plates, it is not likely that Moroni retranslated Ether's plates; he would probably have said so if he had. It is not clear that he even had those plates with him, though he would have known of them. It is unlikely that Moroni would have kept many records with him during his wandering and travels, although he certainly had some, in addition to the plates of Mormon, which he was finishing.

Ether 5 contains an important disclosure by Moroni: "And now I, Moroni, have written the words which were commanded me *according to my memory*" (Ether 5:1). Apparently, he knew these Jaredite origin stories by heart, as was common in ancient cultures. Parts of Moroni's book of Ether may be a retelling of the Jaredite history based on things that he learned from his father Mormon, who would have had particular access to these records. As they were engrossed in wars, both Mormon and Moroni would have studied the final chapters of the Jaredite history particularly to learn military strategies from them.

Moroni's purpose was to demonstrate that what had become of the Jaredites had happened to his generation of Nephites and would happen to later generations of Gentiles. In Ether 2:11 Moroni added, "And this cometh unto you, oh, ye Gentiles." Moroni wrote this about fifteen years after he had written his first farewell in Mormon 8 and 9, in which he had spoken directly to the Gentiles. In Ether 2 he continued that conversation about what they needed to know, "that ye may know the decrees of God—that ye may repent." The call to repentance is a persistent theme throughout Moroni's writings.

Interestingly, Moroni was honest enough to tell readers when he was chiming in, when he was abridging, and even when he was quoting. For example, in Ether 2:13, Moroni did not say, "And now I proceed with Ether's record," but rather, "Now I proceed with *my* record of the Jaredites" (emphasis added). Moroni's abridgment produced what one may thus call "Moroni's Book of Ether." In addition to his abridgement of existing material, Moroni took occasion to interject his own commentary, asides, and sometimes prophecies. Here are the main ones: Ether 1:1–6; 4:1–6:1; 12:6–41; and 15:33.

As mentioned above, the book of Ether has a very complex textual history, but one of the most interesting things about Moroni's book of Ether in particular, and about the Book of Mormon in general, is the candor and the honesty of this text. Mormon and Moroni usually state clearly when they are interjecting their own commentary. Thus, there is not

the same confusion here as in the Old Testament, where dissecting its layers of redaction and editing is often ambiguous and uncertain.

Another intriguing feature is the source text's underlying continuity. If one were to mark everything spoken by Moroni in one color, and mark everything that is archaic Jaredite in a contrasting color, one can take the Moroni material out, and the underlying Jaredite text flows seamlessly together. This careful splicing of the text is incredibly difficult to do successfully without a word-processor. The result is, from a text-critical point of view, a powerful testimony of the antiquity and the editorial process by which this came.

On the original Jaredite record, presumably also in Mosiah's translation, there was an account of the creation. This is one more feature that marks this record as a work of ancient prophecy. In Ether 1:3, Moroni stated that he was going to spare us the rehearsal of the creation account because he expected that it would be available from other sources, as it had been for him on the Plates of Brass.

Ether 1:3–5 — What Was Contained in the Jaredite Scriptures?

The book of Ether originates in a very different time of human history than did Lehi and Nephi. One must shift gears to understand the world in which they lived. They seem to have left the Middle East shortly after the fall of the tower and the confusion of the languages at Babel, before Abraham and King Hammurabi, and long before Moses. Perhaps about 2300 BC, an arbitrary date that seems to work out based on the underlying royal genealogy. Beginning that long ago, the Jaredites did not know about the Abrahamic Covenant, the Law of Moses or circumcision, nor did they have brass plates to take as Lehi did. There was no national religion; everything was local. They may have known of the prophets Noah and Enoch. They must have had some knowledge of the ancient dealings of God in the history of mankind, because Moroni records that they had an account of the creation (see Ether 1: 4–5).

As far as their other literary sources, we know they kept their king list and probably some kind of oral history, if not a written one, up to the fall of the tower. The twenty-four plates were made after the migration to the promised land. We cannot measure the Jaredite culture against the Nephite culture, because we do not even know for sure that they were Semitic, though some of the names and the root of their creation story may indicate that they were. It is a blessing that they made a record at all.

Were any laws recorded on those plates of Ether? Hammurabi (ca. 1810–1750 BC) was the sixth king of the First Babylonian dynasty of the Amorite tribe, reigning from c. 1792 BC to c. 1750 BC, is best known for having issued the Code of Hammurabi, which he claimed to have received from Shamash, the Babylonian god of justice. Hammurabi was

eventually able to establish a unified Kingdom in the area from which Jared and his brother had earlier originated, when he united Southern and Northern Mesopotamia—the Sumerian culture in the south, and the Akkadian culture in the north. He established a law code, though he was not the first one to do that. Starting a couple hundred years earlier, people began writing laws down and following them. But, before then, as far as we know, there was not much in the way of law. Lehi and his family took with them in 600 BC a whole set of laws, the Law of Moses on the brass plates and a whole culture with them; but which the Jaredites much earlier did not have.

Since they knew of the Creation, they probably knew of Noah. In terms of law, God had made a covenant with Noah that related especially to protecting life and avoiding murder—if a person killed another man, the perpetrator’s blood had to be shed (Genesis 9:6). These rules issued by Noah are thought to apply to all of Noah’s posterity as the minimal rules of basic civilization. These very fundamental things are what we ever see by way of legal regulation in the Book of Ether. We see other atrocious things that apparently were considered “legal” within their civilization.

Ether 1:6–32 — Ether’s Genealogy Is Listed Back to Jared

In an early analysis of the source of material for the Book of Ether, we get the sense that this book is the product of a long history, including several stages of composition, beginning with Jared, after whom the Jaredites were named.

First, there would have existed among the Jaredites general oral traditions and some specific archaic writings. Anciently, the basic historical information found in the book of Ether was probably handed down in the form of a king list kept among the descendants of Jared, who were the Jaredite rulers for over one thousand years.

This king list could have been either written or oral. King lists similar to the one in Ether 1 appear among the earliest written records in ancient Mesopotamia, and many Mesoamerican monuments have now been shown to contain historical information about royal lines. Most of the short accounts of each king’s reign in Ether 6–11 are not dissimilar in scale. Yet some early peoples also orally transmitted memorized king lists and stories about their origins. While it is not clear whether Ether worked in this respect from a written royal record, an oral tradition, or a combination of both, the integrity of the Jaredite king list as a separate source is underscored by its apparent insertion as a unit in the midst of Moroni’s introductory materials (Ether 1:3–5, 33). The words in these verses follow very closely the words of Mosiah² in Mosiah 28:17. The king list appears in the middle of this material, from Ether 1:5, which mentions that the account begins “from the tower,” to verse 33, which picks back up with the same language: “from the great tower.”

The genealogy in the book of Ether (Ether 1:6–33) is a prime example of these ancient king lists. The list, which served as an identification and reference for the author, is listed from the author down to his earliest ancestor. Ether is named first, Aaron is tenth, Shiz is twentieth, and Jared is thirtieth. Whether or not the number thirty is important is not clear, but the Maori people can recite their lineage, and it was important to them to be able to recite their lineage back thirty generations.

Likewise, the Jaredite king list given to us by Ether contains thirty generations. Here is that list as it was given in Ether 1:6–32, from the perspective of Ether, the narrator and the final Jaredite prophet.

Notice that the names are first listed from Ether back to Jared, in genealogical order:

Order	Passage	Name
1	1:6	Ether, the son of
2	1:6	Coriantor, son of
3	1:7	Moron, the son of
4	1:8	Ethem
5	1:9	Ahah
6	1:10	Seth
7	1:11	Shiblom
8	1:12	Com
9	1:13	Coriantum
10	1:14	Amnigaddah
11	1:15	Aaron
12	1:16	Heth
13	1:16	Hearthom
14	1:17	Lib
15	1:18	Kish
16	1:19	Corom
17	1:20	Levi
18	1:21	Kim

19	1:22	Morianton
20	1:23	Riplakish
21	1:24	Shez
22	1:25	Heth
23	1:26	Com
24	1:27	Coriantum
25	1:28	Emer
26	1:29	Omer
27	1:30	Shule
28	1:31	Kib
29	1:32	Orihah, the son of
30	1:32	Jared

Then, as the story of the Jaredites unfolds, the same names are given in exactly the opposite order, in their historical order from Jared down to Ether. Here are all of those same names in the order of their first mention in the scriptural narrative, with their chapter and verse numbers given:

Order	Passage	Name
1	1:33	Jared, begat
2	6:14	Orihah, begat
3	7:3	Kib, begat
4	7:7	Shule
5	8:1	Omer
6	9:14	Emer
7	9:21	Coriantum
8	9:25	Com
9	9:25	Heth
10	10:1	Shez
11	10:4	Riplakish

12	10:9	Morianton
13	10:13	Kim
14	10:14	Levi
15	10:16	Corom
16	10:17	Kish
17	10:18	Lib
18	10:29	Hearthom
19	10:31	Heth
20	10:31	Aaron
21	10:31	Amnigaddah
22	10:31	Coriantum
23	10:31	Com
24	11:4	Shiblom
25	11:9	Seth
26	11:10	Ahah
27	11:11	Ethem
28	11:14	Moron
29	11:18	Coriantor
30	11:23	Ether

The following graphic combines these two sequences visually into a single graphic:

The Genealogy from Jared to Ether



Two of the more uplifting features of the book of Ether are the accounts of the tremendous faith of Jared and, even more so, of the Brother of Jared, who were the first characters in what may be considered Ether's family history. Note that Ether did not descend from the brother of Jared. Rather, he descended from Jared, and so the brother of Jared is not mentioned in the genealogical king list in Ether 1, though he was crucially important.

Culturally, king lists were especially important in ancient Mesopotamia, the place where the story of the Jaredites begins. In Mesopotamia, the number system was based, not on the number 10, but on the number 60. Throughout the ancient Near East, for commercial and legal purposes, there were 60 shekels in a mina, and 60 minas equaled 1 talent. The number 60 was conveniently divisible by 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 10, 15, 20, and 30. And thus, the number 30, being the number of names in this king list may well have had some cultural meaning or symbolic significance.

The written history that is then given in the book of Ether follows this list chronologically, but now in the opposite order, beginning with Ether's oldest ancestor whose name shows up last on the list and working down to the time of Ether, whose name is first on the list. Other names appear in the history that are not listed in this royal lineage (the brother of Jared, for example), and sometimes the names of these kings appear in the narrative history more than once, but none of the names in the king list appear *their first time in the narrative* out of this order. Thus, the thirty names first given from Ether back to Jared are then introduced into the narrative from Jared down to Ether in exactly the opposite order, and not a single one of them is left out.

Needless to say, the precision of the reverse repetition of the Jaredite king list in the book of Ether is absolutely amazing. If you haven't seen this before, join the crowd. I first saw this feature in the book of Ether in 2009.

Also, in this context, think of Joseph Smith dictating the translation of Ether 1–12 to Oliver Cowdery, presumptively over the four days from May 25–28, 1829. Imagine anyone telling a story, beginning with a list of 30 names, and then over the next four days elaborating the histories of those 30 leaders in exactly the opposite order, interspersing various side stories, interactions between parties, conflicts, and editorial asides, and yet never leaving out a single name in the original list or confusing their order. There is no evidence or reason to believe that Joseph had any notes or even access to Oliver's manuscript page for Ether 1 as he revealed the text of Ether 6–12. In fact, reported interviews from Emma Smith and David Whitmer indicate that there were no such outlines or notes.

Thus, in addition to Moroni's divinely guided work in remembering, abridging, and writing the book of Ether, we benefit from the inspiration of Joseph Smith, who translated this record accurately and precisely "by the gift and power of God."

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "Why Does the Book of Ether Begin with Such a Long Genealogy? (Ether 1:18)," *KnoWhy* 235 (November 21, 2016). "It may be easy to think of the authors of the Book of Mormon as distant from readers today. They're people from the remote past, who may seem difficult to relate to in modern times. Yet, on occasion, the curtain gets pulled back and the modern reader can almost sit with the authors and compilers and observe their manners and methods as they work. The book of Ether is one of those occasions. One can almost see Ether referring to the king list as he crafted his 24-gold-plate record of the Jaredites. One can also observe Moroni as he interspersed his own editorial commentaries (Ether 1:1–6; 3:17–20; 4:1–6:1; 8:18–26; 12:6–41) into the Jaredite story as it unfolded." See also, John W. Welch, "Preliminary Comments on the Sources behind the Book of Ether," *Preliminary Reports* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1986). On the timing of the translation, see John W. Welch, "Timing the Translation of the Book of Mormon: 'Days [and Hours] Never to Be Forgotten'," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 57, no. 4 (2018): 10–50.

John L. Sorenson, "The Years of the Jaredites," *Preliminary Reports* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1969).

Thorkild Jacobsen, "The Sumerian King List," *Oriental Institute Assyriological Studies* 11 (Chicago, IL: Oriental Institute, 1939); S. N. Kramer, *The Sumerians* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 328–331; A. Malamat, "King Lists of the Old Babylonian Period and Biblical Genealogies," *JAOS* 88 (1968): 163–173.

Lyle Campbell and Terrence Kaufman, "Mayan Linguistics: Where are We Now?" *Annual Review of Anthropology* 14 (1985): 193.

M. D. Johnson, *The Purpose of the Biblical Genealogies, with Special Reference to the Setting of the Genealogies of Jesus* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 101, 115.

Ether 1:33 — Who Was the Brother of Jared?

Even though the brother of Jared plays a crucial role in this narrative, the focus is on Jared's lineage because Ether was a direct descendant of Jared. There is no mention of the brother of Jared's name in the Book of Mormon text. Joseph Smith later revealed that it was Mahonri Moriancumer.

Ether knew, as a prophet himself, how important the faith of the brother of Jared was. Without that faith, the Jaredites would never have arrived at their new land or known of the promises of the Lord.

One may ask why Jared, who clearly had faith too, did not seek the guidance himself. Jared sent his brother repeatedly to consult with the Lord on behalf of himself and their families. It appears that there may have been a priesthood function involved. In the ancient world, families would dedicate some of their children to serve in the temple. We also know that temple building and seeking heaven was a big part of this culture, though the people of Babel went about it in the wrong way.

Temple priests served an important role in Mesopotamian society. In the ancient Mesopotamian world, they even sold temple franchises. The temples were an economy that had to be managed. Priests would have stewardships over crops, land, and animal. They had to be able to hold the proper festivals. They needed to support themselves so that they could attend to the functions of the temple and the religion. It was a great honor for a family to dedicate a child or two to this service. The priests probably did not make a lot of money, but they certainly garnered great prestige.

Perhaps Jared and his family had a connection of that nature through the brother of Jared. He may have been involved in the religious worship and he had faith necessary to be able to get the answers and blessing from the Lord that he needed.

The brother of Jared received some truly great revelations about the wonderful mysteries of things from the beginning to the end, and they were clearly new to him. Without his brother's faith and *savoir-faire*, Jared would not have had the critical information needed to conduct the expedition.

Ether 1:33 — Josephus's Account of the Tower of Babel

At the time of Jesus' life in Jerusalem, Flavius Josephus, a Jewish historian, wrote the *Antiquities of the Jews*. In it he wrote of the effects of the fall of the tower of Babel:

After this they were dispersed abroad, on account of their languages, and went out by colonies everywhere; and each colony took possession of that land which they light upon, and unto which God led them; so that the whole continent was filled with them, both the inland and the maritime countries. *There were some also who passed over the sea in ships, and inhabited the islands.* And some of those nations do still retain the denominations which were given them by their first founders: but some have lost them also. ([Book 1, Chapter 5](#)).

At least this point made in antiquity is consistent with the story of the Jaredite journey.

Ether 1:41–43 — The Lord Led Jared and His Brother to a Promised Land

The central river valley of Mesopotamia has few natural boundaries such as mountains to separate peoples and polities. The geographical problems of the Middle East today are endemic. Alexander the Great could not hold the area together for long. The Romans conquered northern Mesopotamia for a short time and could only hold it for 30 or 40 years. And the Ottomans tried too, but they also had to struggle for success. It was, and still is, an area of migration and movement, and so, to the people of Jared, the idea of migrating to a new land would likely not have been a foreign concept.

Ether 2

Ether 2 — Study Questions and Items of Interest

- On Ether 2:3 — After what did Brigham Young name the territory of Deseret? Hugh Nibley wrote, “The founders of the Second Civilization of Egypt [ca. 1550–1070 BC] had the bee as the symbol of their land, their king, and their empire, to all of which they applied the designation *deseret*, or something [dsrt] very close to it.” How could the Egyptians and the people of Jared have had the same word? Maybe ancient peoples got around a lot more than modern people have typically thought they could have or would have. Does the honeybee symbol provide inspiration to you? It has been a symbol of industry and unity in many cultures around the world.
- On Ether 2:7–12 — How did the Lord describe the land of promise? He provided conditions for prospering in the new Western Hemisphere land. What were they? How would the inhabitants be able to avoid bondage and captivity? Why did Moroni record the reasons for the downfall of the Jaredite civilization?
- Ether 2:14 — When the people of Jared got to the shore, they were busy for four years, and the brother of Jared had neglected to “call upon the Lord” in all that time. How serious was that sin? How did the Lord respond? Would it be better for you to go on forgetting, or for the Lord to chastise you for three hours?
- Ether 2:23, 25 — When the brother of Jared prayed for help in the preparation of the barges, the Lord encouraged him to propose a solution to the lighting problem. Why did the Lord do that? Does he still do that sometimes with us? Why did Moroni incorporate this in his text? What can we learn from these experiences?

Ether 2:1 — The Valley Northward

The “valley which was northward,” that the people of Jared went “down” to was named the valley of Nimrod (See Genesis 10:8–10). In another interesting statement, Josephus, in his *Antiquities of the Jews*, said,

Now it was Nimrod who excited them to such an affront and contempt of God. He was the grandson of Ham, the son of Noah: a bold man, and of great strength of hand. He persuaded them not to ascribe it to God, as if it was through his means that they were happy; but to believe that it was their own courage which procured that happiness. He also gradually changed the government into tyranny; seeing no other way of turning men from the fear of God, but to bring them into a constant dependence on his own power. He also said, “He would be revenged on God, if he should have a mind to drown the world again: for that he would build a Tower too high for the waters to be able to reach; and that he would avenge himself on God for destroying their fore-fathers.”

[About An. 2520] Now the multitude were very ready to follow the determination of Nimrod, and to esteem it a piece of cowardice to submit to God: and they built a Tower; neither sparing any pains, nor being in any degree negligent about the work. And, by reason of the multitude of hands employed in it, it grew very high, sooner than anyone could expect. But the thickness of it was so great, and it was so strongly built, that thereby its great height seemed, upon the view, to be less than it really was. It was built of burnt brick, cemented together with mortar, made of *bitumen*; that it might not be liable to admit water. When God saw that they acted so madly, he did not resolve to destroy them utterly; since they were not grown wiser by the destruction of the former sinners: but he caused a tumult among them, by producing in them diverse languages; and causing, that through the multitude of those languages, they should not be able to understand one another. The place wherein they built the Tower is now called *Babylon*: because of the confusion of that language which they readily understood before: for the Hebrews mean by the word *Babel*, *Confusion* ([Book 1, chapter 4](#)).

According to this account, what was Nimrod’s motive for building the Tower? How did the righteous Jaredites fare during the catastrophe? Why and how did God make good from the retribution? What can we do as individuals to try to avoid reaping similar retribution from God?

Ether 2:1–3 — Possible Geographical Influences

Mesopotamia at this time was composed of many small, competitive, and vulnerable cities. Mesopotamia’s lack of natural boundaries made it difficult to defend. Egypt, on the

other hand, was easily defensible because its territory surrounded one large river (the Nile), with limited access from other places. Its geographic advantages also made Egypt more unified. There was only one language and one pharaoh who ruled the whole Nile River by controlling the boats and the commerce.

However, in the Mesopotamian area, there are two rivers, the Tigris and the Euphrates. There is an upper and lower area, with different altitudes, climates, cultures, and languages. There were nomadic people, who could travel in and out of the desert. There were people that came down from the hills from what is now Iran. There were waves of immigrants, tired of being hunters up in the mountains, coming down into the lush, fertile land. Thus, there were many competing cultures.

When the ancestors of Ether left and moved to the Valley of Nimrod, they were temporarily reversing the usual process. They reverted from an agricultural culture to one of hunter-gatherers. They even named the valley after Nimrod, the great hunter.

Ether 2:4–5, 14 — The Lord Spoke Through a Cloud (or Veil)

At one point, the brother of Jared had neglected to consult with the Lord for four years. The text explains in Ether 2:14 that the Lord came to him, and “stood in a cloud and talked with him.” The Lord spoke to and chastened the brother for three hours.

For the Israelites going through the desert, the Lord was in a cloud at the tabernacle, protected from their vision. They could only speak with the Lord through the appropriate authority of the high priest, in this case Moses. Their cloud appeared as a pillar of fire at night, leading them both physically and spiritually. This calls to mind the burning bush from which the Lord addressed Moses. How do you see the veil and the cloud described in the book of Ether as being in harmony with similar events in Hebrew history and related Latter-day doctrine?

ETHER 3

Ether 3 — Questions to Ponder and Principles to Apply

- In Ether 3:1–5 — To solve the lighting problem, the brother of Jared melted clear rocks out of the mountain and then bravely asked the Lord for a miracle to make them glow. How do you think he came up promptly with that idea? What can we learn about self-help and help from the Lord? What can we begin with when we need light in our own lives? How can we apply this metaphorically to ourselves?

- In Ether 3:6–16 — What caused the veil to be “taken from off the eyes of the brother of Jared?” Why did he fall to the ground? What does the nature of his fear tell you about the character of the man? What did the Lord ask of him before he could be admitted into the presence of the Lord? Why would the Lord ask that? Did he not know the heart of the brother of Jared? How much does the principle of expressed commitment matter to the Lord?
- In Ether 3:21–28 — What is the nature of the visions that this prophet had? What did he see? Who else saw this information? Where are the contents of the vision recorded, and how shall they be seen?

Ether 3:6–28 — The Brother of Jared Is Admitted to the Divine Council

In Ether 3:6, when the veil was taken from the eyes of the Brother of Jared and he saw the finger of the Lord, he fell to the ground in fear. In Ether 3:6–8, the record says, “I feared lest he should smite me.” He had asked the Lord to touch the stones in verse 4 but had apparently not expected to see the finger perform the action.

Subsequently, the Lord showed himself fully to the brother of Jared in person, presented in what biblical scholars call a “prophetic call” narrative: “He showed unto the brother of Jared all the inhabitants of the earth which had been, and also all that would be; and he withheld them not from his sight, even unto the ends of the earth.” David Paulsen published an interesting article in the *Harvard Theological Review* about the logic of divine embodiment. Latter-day Christology has always held that the Lord Jesus Christ had a spiritual body before he had an earthly one, and that he was the one who communicated with the ancients.

Further Reading

David L. Paulsen, “Early Christian Belief in a Corporeal Deity: Origen and Augustine as Reluctant Witnesses,” *The Harvard Theological Review* 83, no. 2 (1990): 105–116.

Ether 3:6–13, 19–20 — The Brother of Jared Is Admitted into the Presence of the Lord

In Latter-day doctrine, we speak of a symbolic veil that has two applications. In one case, the veil is a mechanism that shades the memory as we transition to Earth from our pre-Earth life. In a second, but related, application, the veil provides a protective barrier to protect us from unauthorized interaction with the Lord in the present. In each instance, the veil is penetrable under circumstances such as the brother of Jared’s great faith that allowed him to see beyond it.

In Ether 3:6, Moroni commented that the veil was taken from the eyes of the brother of Jared, and he saw the finger of the Lord. In Ether 3:19 he says, “Because of the knowledge of this man, he could not be kept from within the veil....” Clearly, the veil is a symbol for

the sacred cloud, a holy protection that shields people on the Earth from interacting with the Lord inappropriately.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central ["Why Did Moroni Use Temple Imagery While Telling the Brother of Jared Story?"](#) (Ether 3:20)," *KnoWhy* 237 (November 23, 2016).

Ether 3:14–18 — The Premortal Jesus Ministered to the Brother of Jared

The Lord told the brother of Jared that he was witnessing the "body of my spirit, as I will appear unto my people in the flesh." He did not touch the Lord's body; it was a body of spirit, a pre-Earth body. This man spoke for three hours with the Lord the first time. The Lord then explained his role in the Plan of Redemption to the brother of Jared. In verse 14, it is recorded that the Lord said, "I am he who was prepared from the foundation of the world to redeem my people. Behold, I am Jesus Christ. I am the Father and the Son. In me shall all mankind have life, and that eternally, even they who shall believe on my name; and they shall become my sons and my daughters." This is the earliest instance on record when Jesus introduced himself in this way, giving his name and setting forth the basic elements of Christology and salvation history.

Ether 3:15 — Was the Savior's Appearance to the Brother of Jared Unique?

In Ether 3:15, the statement by the Lord, "Never have I showed myself unto man that I created, for never has man believed in me as thou hast," raises a question as to what the Lord meant by this. He had shown himself to certain of the patriarchs such as Adam and Eve. Enoch and Noah had preceded the brother of Jared and spoken with God.

A *BYU Studies* article by Kent Jackson presented several different views for how this may be understood. Bruce R. McConkie interpreted the verse as, "Never have I showed myself in the manner and form now involved . . . Never before has the veil been lifted completely so that a mortal man has been able to see my spirit body *in the full and complete sense of the word.*"

As another interpretation, Sidney Sperry thought that the word "man" might mean "an unbelieving man," but "to the faithful, he had indeed shown Himself."

Daniel Ludlow included Ether 3:19–20 in pointing out that the brother of Jared had gained a perfect "*knowledge*" so great that he "could not be kept from beholding from within the veil," and thus, as verse 26 says, that the Lord could not withhold anything from him. Perhaps that was what distinguished the brother of Jared from others to whom the Lord (such as Adam) to whom the Lord had appeared.

Kent Jackson, rightly agreeing that these three views are not mutually exclusive, summarized by adding that this was the first recorded manifestation of Jehovah in which he *particularly identified himself specifically in his roles as creator and redeemer*. As the Savior said, in verse 14, “I am he who was prepared from the foundation of the world to redeem my people.”

Further Reading

Kent P. Jackson, “‘Never Have I Showed Myself Unto Man’: A Suggestion for Understanding Ether 3:15a,” *BYU Studies* 30, no. 3 (1990): 71–76.

Ether 4

Ether 4 — Questions about the Sealed Record

- Ether 4:1 — Who translated the record from the Jaredite language into the Nephite language? See Mosiah 28:11–17.
- Ether 4:1 — Why did King Mosiah not publish the record of the vision of the brother of Jared?
- Ether 4:4–5 — Why did Moroni record the contents of the vision? What was he told to do with that record? Do we know, then, at least part of what the sealed portion of the plates of Mormon will contain? See also 2 Nephi 27:7–10 and Ether 3:25–26.
- Ether 4:5–6 — Why might the Lord not yet have given us the full the record of this vision?
- Ether 4:7, 15 — When will we receive this information? How can we be preparing for them to come forth?
- Ether 4:16–17 — What does the coming forth of the Book of Mormon have to do with the revelations of John? How do we know that the revelations of John are indeed revelations from God? See 1 Nephi 14:18–27. What “work of the Lord” has “commenced upon all the face of the land”? What does all this have to do with the fulfilling of the Covenant?

Ether 4:7 — When Will The Sealed Record be Revealed?

The record and the revelations shown to the brother of Jared were sealed up and obscured until the Lord sees fit to share the information with mankind in general, “even to the unfolding unto them all my revelations, saith Jesus Christ.” When will that be? Ether 4:7 indicates that it will be “In that day that they shall exercise faith in me ... even as the brother of Jared did, that they may become sanctified in me, then will I manifest unto them the things which the brother of Jared saw, even to the unfolding unto them all my revelations.”

Ether 4:19 — Why Do So Many of Mormon’s Teachings Appear in Ether 4 and 5?

The following chart (see KnoWhy 239) illustrates several of the many interesting intertextual similarities between Moroni’s writings in Ether 4–5 and also Moroni 10 of distinctive words and doctrinal themes that had been previously written by Mormon in Moroni 7. Obviously, Moroni read, knew, and treasured the record he had of his father’s great sermon. Although, at the time that Moroni wrote Ether 4 and 5, he had not yet decided to include that record in his final book of Moroni, it is evident that Moroni draws on his father’s rhetoric and vocabulary here in Ether 4 and 5, as he will again in Moroni 10. It is clear that Moroni had taken seriously the training and instruction that he had received from his father, Mormon. And he hopes that we will as well.

Parallel Element	Moroni 7 (Mormon)	Ether 4–5 (Moroni)	Moroni 10 (Moroni)
Addressed to specific audience	To the church, the peaceable followers of Christ (7:3)	Addressed to specific audience	To the church, the peaceable followers of Christ (7:3)
Must have faith, hope, and/or charity to be part of church/kingdom	... that have obtained a sufficient <i>hope</i> by which ye can enter into the rest of the Lord ... until ye shall rest with him in <i>heaven</i> ” (7:3) “for if ye have not <i>faith</i> in him then ye are not fit to be numbered among the people of his <i>church</i> (7:39)	... blessed is he that is found <i>faithful</i> unto my name at the last day, for he shall be lifted up to dwell in the <i>kingdom</i> (4:19)	And except ye have <i>charity</i> ye can in nowise be saved in the <i>kingdom</i> of God; neither can ye be saved in the <i>kingdom</i> of God if ye have not <i>faith</i> ; neither can ye if ye have no <i>hope</i> (10:21)
Discerning good from evil; all that is good (every good gift) comes from God; anything that is good invites to come to Christ and not deny Him; good people work by the “power and	Wherefore, a man being evil cannot do that which is good; neither will he give a <i>good gift</i> . Wherefore, all things which are <i>good cometh of God</i> ; and that which is evil cometh of the devil; For behold, the Spirit of Christ is given to every man, that he	For because of my Spirit he shall know that these things are true; for it <i>persuadeth men to do good</i> . And whatsoever thing <i>persuadeth men to do good</i> is of me; for <i>good cometh of none save it be of me</i> . I am the same that <i>leadeth men to all good</i> (4:11–12)	And whatsoever thing is good is just and true; wherefore, <i>nothing that is good denieth the Christ, but acknowledgeth that he is</i> . And I would exhort you, my beloved brethren, that ye remember that <i>every good gift cometh of Christ</i> .

<p>gift(s)" of Christ/God</p>	<p>may know good from evil; wherefore, I show unto you the way to judge; for every thing which <i>inviteth to do good, and to persuade to believe in Christ</i>, is sent forth by the <i>power and gift</i> of Christ; wherefore ye may know with a perfect knowledge it is of God.</p> <p>But whatsoever thing <i>persuadeth men to do evil, and believe not in Christ, and deny him</i>, and serve not God, then ye may know with a perfect knowledge it is of the devil ... Wherefore, I beseech of you, brethren, that ye should search diligently in the light of Christ that ye may know good from evil; (<u>7:5–19</u>)</p>	<p>And wo be unto the children of men if this be the case; for there shall be none that doeth good among you, no not one. For if there be one among you that doeth good, he shall work by the <i>power and gifts of God</i>. (<u>10:6, 18, 25</u>)</p>	
<p>Pray unto Father with "heart"</p>	<p>... <i>pray unto the Father</i> with all the energy of <i>heart</i> (<u>7:48</u>)</p>	<p>... yea, when ye shall <i>call upon the Father</i> in my name, with a broken <i>heart</i> and a contrite spirit (<u>4:15</u>)</p>	<p>... <i>ask God, the Eternal Father</i>, in the name of Christ ... ye shall ask with a sincere <i>heart</i>, with real intent ... (<u>10:4</u>)</p>
<p>By the Spirit, one can know the truth</p>	<p>... the way to judge is as plain, that ye may <i>know</i> with a perfect knowledge ... For behold, the <i>Spirit of Christ</i> is given to every man, that he</p>	<p>For because of my <i>Spirit</i> he shall <i>know</i> that these things are <i>true</i> ... (<u>4:11</u>)</p>	<p>... he will manifest the <i>truth</i> of it unto you, by the power of the <i>Holy Ghost</i>. And by the power of the Holy Ghost ye may <i>know</i> the <i>truth</i> of all things (<u>10:4–5</u>)</p>

	may <i>know</i> good from evil (7:15–16)		
God will provide witnesses	Wherefore, by the <i>ministering of angels</i> , and by <i>every word which proceeded forth out of the mouth of God</i> , men began to exercise faith in Christ; For behold, [the angels] are subject unto [Christ], to minister according to the word of his command, <i>showing themselves</i> unto them of strong faith and a firm mind in every form of godliness. And the office of their ministry is to call men unto repentance ... to prepare the way among the children of men, by <i>declaring the word of Christ</i> unto the chosen vessels of the Lord, that they <i>may bear testimony of him</i> . (7:25, 29–31)	And unto three shall [the plates] be shown by the power of God; wherefore they shall know of a surety that these things are true. And in <i>the mouth of three witnesses</i> shall these things be established; and the <i>testimony of three, and this work</i> , in the which shall be shown forth the power of God and also his word, of which <i>the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost bear record</i> —and all this shall stand as a <i>testimony</i> against the world at the last day. (5:3–4)	And I exhort you to remember these things; for the time speedily cometh that ye shall know that I lie not, for ye shall see me at the bar of God; and the <i>Lord God will say unto you</i> : Did I not declare my words unto you, which were written <i>by this man</i> , like as one crying from the dead, yea, even as one speaking out of the dust? And <i>God shall show unto you</i> , that that which I have written is true. (10:28–29)
The problem of unbelief	But whatsoever thing persuadeth men to do evil, and <i>believe not</i> in Christ, and deny him, and serve not God, then ye may know with a perfect knowledge it is of the devil (7:17)	And now, after that, they have all dwindled in <i>unbelief</i> ... the knowledge which is hid up because of <i>unbelief</i> and it hath not come unto you, because of <i>unbelief</i> . Behold, when ye shall rend that veil of <i>unbelief</i> which doth	... all these gifts of which I have spoken, which are spiritual, never will be done away, even as long as the world shall stand, only according to the <i>unbelief</i> of the children of men. if the day cometh that the power and gifts of God shall be done away

cause you to remain in your awful state of wickedness, and hardness of heart, and blindness of mind ... (4:3, 13–15)

among you, it shall be because of *unbelief*. (10:19, 24)

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Do So Many of Mormon’s Teachings Appear in Ether 4 and 5?](#) (Ether 4:19),” *KnoWhy* 239 (November 25, 2016).

Ether 5

Ether 5 — Questions about Witnesses

- Whose voice do we hear throughout this chapter? Why is Moroni so adamant about his instruction to whoever translates the Nephite record? How do we know that we can equate the record to a “holy thing?”
- Ether 5:2–4 — Compare these verses with 2 Nephi 27:12–13. How many witnesses were to see Mormon’s original record? Why so? See Deuteronomy 19:15 pertaining to the Hebrew law of witnesses. Why would the Lord retain the ancient law of witnesses for a sacred record? Who were the three people who saw the plates? Who were the three sacred Heavenly witnesses of the work?
- Ether 5:6 — Moroni testifies that he will stand as a witness of his record at the Judgment bar. How many reasons can you think of for why Moroni repeated this very testimony in Moroni 10:27, 34?

Ether 5:1–4 — The Plates Will Be Shown to Three Witnesses

In 2 Nephi 27:12–13, Nephi foresaw that the plates of the Book of Mormon would be “hid from the eyes of the world” and that “the eyes of none shall behold it save it be that three witnesses shall behold it, by the power of God” and “none other ... shall view it, save it be a few according to the will of God.” Here in Ether 5:2–3, Moroni reaffirmed that the plates will be shown by the power of God to three of the people who had assisted in bringing forth the plates to verify the truth of the work. In Ether 5:4, Moroni is quoting, either of himself or through the Lord, the ancient Hebrew law of witnesses, in which two or three witnesses were required in establishing the truth of important testimonies in court. Deuteronomy 19:15 says: “One witness shall not rise up against a man for any iniquity, or for any sin, in any sin that he sinneth: at the mouth of two witnesses, or at the

mouth of three witnesses, shall the matter be established." Moroni said, "In the mouth of three witnesses shall these things be established" (Ether 5:4).

This is followed by a statement that "the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost bear record—and all this shall stand as a testimony against the world at the last day." Moroni knows that he has no one else that he can call on to validate the truthfulness of the record he is giving here in the book of Ether. So, he calls these three Heavenly witnesses to corroborate that his record is true. Likewise, in Doctrine and Covenants 6:28, the Lord affirmed the validity of this law of witnesses, declaring in April, 1829, that "in the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established." Witnesses, together with physical and written evidences, still play crucial roles in religious life, as well as in legal systems throughout the modern world, in coming to recognize and know the truth.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[Why Were Three Key Witnesses Chosen to Testify of the Book of Mormon? \(Ether 5:4\)](#)," *KnoWhy* 267 (January 27, 2017).

Ether 5:5–6 — Ye Shall See Me, and We Shall Stand Before God at the Last Day.

Ether 5 consists entirely of one of Moroni's commentaries, in which he testified of the truthfulness of his record, and explained the need for witnesses, not only in this life, but also in the world to come. He reiterated his main point that "If it so be that they [we] repent and come unto the Father in the name of Jesus, they [we] shall be received into the kingdom of God." Many people are looking forward to greeting him, "when ye shall see me, and we shall stand before God at the last day" (Ether 5:6). Here Moroni puts himself on the line as a witness on the day of God's judgment. To quote 2 Nephi 33:15, "For what I seal on earth, shall be brought against you at the judgment bar." Moroni later will likewise say, "Ye shall know that I lie not, for ye shall see me at the bar of God" (Moroni 10:27).