

ETHER 6–11

John W. Welch Notes



Ether 6

In these chapters, we find the historical chapters that cover the history of the Jaredites. I hope that these notes from times I have taught these chapters will be of interest to you. Obviously, these chapters contain no doctrinal discourses. But they do contain solemn admonitions about wickedness, immorality, idolatry, political strife, power struggles, secret oaths, violence, failing to heed prophetic warnings, and refusing to repent. By no means are these chapters irrelevant today.

Ether 6 — Questions to Ponder about the Jaredite Migration

- How many similarities or differences can you detect between the account of the Jaredite journey and the journey of Lehi's family? Why might those comparisons be helpful to understand?
- The vessels are said to have been tight "like unto the ark of Noah." How many other features of these vessels may have been like the ark? How much divine instruction and guidance did Noah or the Jaredites have to prepare their vessels? How much divine help did Nephi have to prepare his ship? How much divine help is available to us as we journey towards our "promised land?"
- It is clear that the Lord cared about the people having light during this long journey. Does this help us believe that he cares about bringing light to us when we sit in spiritual or existential darkness? How does this account help us identify what steps we can take to obtain that light?

- How long did the ocean part of the Jaredite journey last? What source of power drove the vessels? How did the people pass much of the time? How do those kinds of activities help us during times of trial?
- What can we derive from this statement by President Brigham Young?

We are on the old ship Zion. ... [God] is at the helm and will stay there. ... All is right, sing Hallelujah, for the Lord is here. He dictates, guides and directs. If the people will have implicit confidence in their God, never forsake their covenants nor their God, He will guide us right (Brigham Young, "Remarks," *Deseret News*, Nov. 18, 1857, 291).

- Were the Jaredites justified in singing praises and songs of gratitude to the Lord? (See Elder Russell Ballard's Talk, "[Stay on the Boat and Hold On!](#)" *Ensign*, October 2014.)

Ether 6:2–3 — The Lord Provides Light for the Jaredite Barges

The brother of Jared went to the Lord with his concern about the lack of light in the barges. The Lord did not provide an immediate solution to the problem, but asked, "What will ye that I should do that ye may have light in your vessels?" (Ether 2:23). In response, the brother of Jared "did molten out of rock sixteen small stones; and they were white and clear, even as transparent glass" (Ether 6:3). He then went back to the Lord and asked the Lord to touch each stone, which caused them to "shine in darkness, to give light unto men, women, and children, that they might not cross the great waters in darkness" (Ether 6:3).

Referencing this account, Hugh Nibley asked, "[W]ho gave the brother of Jared the idea about stones in the first place? It was not the Lord, who left him entirely on his own; and yet the man went right to work as if he knew exactly what he was doing. Who put him on to it?"

Nibley acknowledged that the brother of Jared's shining stones narrative "has been the subject of much mockery and fun among the critics of the Book of Mormon." However, both Nibley and John A. Tvedtnes have found that there is a substantial body of ancient literature that contain legends and histories of stones that provided light. Tvedtnes noted, "The account of the stones used to provide light in the Jaredite barges fits rather well into a larger corpus of ancient and medieval literature." These texts from antiquity were unknown in the world during Joseph Smith's time or were unavailable to Smith.

One ancient account was of Alexander the Great, who was said to have a stone—a jewel that would glow. He carried it under his belt until he lost it in the Euphrates. Even Aristotle (Alexander's tutor) mentioned Alexander's stone.

Of greater relevance to the Jaredite record, are the accounts linking shining stones to Noah's ark. The story of Noah and the flood would have been relatively recent history for the Jaredites, who had departed from the "great tower, at the time the Lord confounded the language of the people" (Ether 1:33). An ancient glowing stone known as the "Pyrophilus" and other examples of luminous stones appear in various ancient texts, such as in the Epic of Gilgamesh. Nibley noted, "The *Pyrophilus* legend, wherever it is found, has accordingly been traced back ultimately in every case to the story of Noah."

Lucian of Samosata related the story of a temple in Syria where throngs of pilgrims were shown a hole in the ground where they believed the waters of the flood receded. This Syrian temple had a stone, known as the "lynchnis," that shone brightly at night, but not in the day. The lynchnis illuminated the whole sanctuary to simulate how Noah could tell how many days had passed during his voyage.

In the Babylonian Talmud, a Jewish commentator reported that the Lord instructed Noah to "set therein precious stones and jewels, so that they may give thee light, bright as the noon." Another ancient Jewish rabbi explained, "During the whole twelve months that Noah was in the Ark he did not require the light of the sun by day or light of the moon by night, but he had a polished gem which he hung up." Shaul Yosef Leiter, in a weekly Torah message, explained that the Torah description of the ark construction in Genesis 6:16 used the Hebrew word "tzohar," meaning "something that shines." In the Jerusalem Talmud, there are extensive debates about whether this "tzohar" was a window or a shining stone.

These various Jewish accounts of a shining stone being used in Noah's ark are of particular interest, considering that Ether 6:7 made a direct comparison between the Jaredite vessels and Noah's ark: "[T]here was no water that could hurt them, their vessels being tight like unto a dish, and also they were tight like unto the ark of Noah."

Hugh Nibley gave the following summary:

Now whether the ark of Noah was actually lit by shining stones or not is beside the point, which is that the idea of stones shining in the darkness of the ark was not invented by Joseph Smith or anybody else in the nineteenth century, but [1] was known to the ancient rabbis in an obscure and garbled version, [2] was clearly indicated in the properties of a very ancient shrine dedicated to the Syrian Noah, and [3] was mixed in among the legends of the very ancient Alexander cycle by means of which scholars quickly and easily ran it down to its oldest visible source, namely the old Sumerian Epic of the Babylonian Noah. However ridiculous the story of the shining stones may sound to modern ears, there is no doubt that it is

[genuinely ancient], going back to the proper sources as far as Ether is concerned. (Numbering added for clarity.)

Far from being an amusing creation of Joseph Smith, the shining stones are features of ancient texts that were not known in Smith's place and time.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "Where did the Brother of Jared Get the Idea of Shining Stones? (Ether 6:3)," *KnoWhy* 240 (November 28, 2016).

Hugh Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, 1st edition (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1957), chapter 25, pp. 288–298. Nibley, Hugh W., "There Were Jaredites - The Shining Stones – Continued." *Improvement Era* 59, no. 9 (1956): 630–632, 672–675.

Hugh Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley, Volume 6 (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988), 285, 337–358.

John A. Tvedtnes, "Glowing Stones in Ancient and Medieval Lore," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 6, no. 2 (1997): 99–123.

Ether 6:4–11 — Comparing Lehi's Journey with the Jaredite Journey

The record of the Jaredites and the record of Lehi's family were written centuries apart and yet, the two narratives are very similar. Perhaps Moroni was very deliberate in drawing the similarities so that contrasts between the two accounts would be more apparent. Below are a few of the many similarities found in both the Jaredite and Nephite narratives:

- There was a declaration by the people that they would be faithful before the journey. The Lord promised to go before them and lead them into a choice land—their Promised Land.
- They had a journey through the wilderness before they got to the shore.
- They dwelt in tents by the shore for a period of time.
- The Lord commanded them to build sea vessels according to his specifications.
- They faced a problem with the construction of the sea vessels, requiring them to exert their own thought and effort before going to the Lord to ask for help.
- There was ongoing revelation from the Lord, as well as preparation of food and the other provisions that they needed to take.
- They were promised a specific choice land that would be free from captivity if the people living in the land would serve the Lord. There is parallel language used in both accounts regarding this promise.

- The Lord provided light for both journeys. (The Lord provided light in the Jaredite vessels as they were swallowed up in the depths of the sea. In the Nephite account, the Lord was their light in the wilderness.)

Some verses in each account are also quite similar. The Jared record states, “[A]nd it came to pass that when they had done all these things they got aboard of their vessels or barges, and set forth into the sea, commending themselves unto the Lord their God. And it came to pass that the Lord God caused that there should be *a furious wind blow upon the face of the waters, towards the promised land*; and thus, they were tossed upon the waves of the sea before the wind” (Ether 6:4–5).

The Nephite version reads: “And it came to pass after we had all gone down into the ship, and had taken with us our provisions and things which had been commanded us, we did put forth into the sea and were *driven forth before the wind towards the promised land*.” (1 Nephi 18:8). There are five sections in that verse that are identical to the Jaredite record. The Nephite record later talks about winds never ceasing to blow towards the Promised Land.

Even though both narratives are similar, there is much that can be learned from differences between the two accounts. The Jaredite record states that *the Lord God* caused furious winds, and that the people were “tossed upon the waves of the sea” as their vessels were pushed forward to the promised land. In other words, it was not an easy voyage—they had their trials along the journey, but they did ultimately make it to their desired destination. Knowing that it was the Lord who provided the tempest that pushed the Jaredites forward towards the Promised Land, we can apply this situation to ourselves metaphorically. When we face personal trials, tribulations, or trauma, it may be for a greater purpose. We may undergo these difficult experiences to get us to our desired destination—helping us to become more like the Son and the Father so that we can live in their presence someday.

On the other hand, it was the disobedience of Laman and Lemuel which caused the worst recorded storm on the voyage of Lehi’s family to the Promised Land. When out of anger, Laman and Lemuel tied their brother on the boat, Nephi had to pray to get his brothers under control so the Lord would stop the terrible storm. In both narratives, the people were traveling to their Promised Land and they had the same general purpose for getting there. However, in one scenario the people were allowed to learn and grow through necessary trials and tribulations—not of their making—along the journey. In the other scenario, the disobedient choices of a few caused unnecessary delay and difficulty for all on the ship. These two narratives had similar conditions that served two completely separate purposes.

Ether 6:4–11 — Prevailing Currents in the Pacific Ocean

Scholars have been unable to identify the specific land route the Jaredites took to arrive at the ocean shore. As they made their way toward the ocean, they had barges that were used to cross smaller bodies of water—perhaps rivers, inland lakes, or seas (like the Caspian Sea). They eventually ended up somewhere on the coast of China or Korea, where they entered barges that took them across a very large body of water. The journey on the water was a long one—344 days—until they arrived at a landing place in their Promised Land. The ocean voyage was probably a longer trip than the inland route that they might have taken.

John L. Sorenson, a renowned Mesoamerican scholar, has pointed out that if you throw a tennis shoe in the water off the coast of Korea or Japan and then let the Pacific current take its course, the shoe will wash ashore somewhere around El Salvador in about 340 days. Such are the currents of the ocean. This exact scenario was recently proven. Not too long ago, there was a container-load of Nike shoes on a ship that went down in a storm right off the coast of Japan. The container went to the bottom of the ocean and broke open. The shoes all popped up on top of the water and floated with the ocean currents. This story was in the news because there were hundreds of shoes that washed ashore in Central America. As a result, people were running along the shoreline picking up brand-new, brand-name shoes.

Ether 6:25–30 — All but One Son Refuse to be King

In ancient Mesopotamia there were two models of government. The first was monarchical—with one person, like Hammurabi, ruling over the people as king. The second form of government was democracy—run by councils.

Many years after landing in the Promised Land, as Jared and his brother approached death, they numbered the Jaredite people. The Jaredite group had grown to include fifty or more people. Jared and his brother asked the people for their preference of government and the people requested that one of the sons of Jared or his brother be anointed king. We often see the glamorous side of kingship, but in the Book of Ether we see it was a curse for this civilization.

Jared and his brother did not see eye to eye on the question of kingship. The more righteous brother of Jared was upset about the people desiring a king and predicted “surely this thing leadeth into captivity” (6:23; compare 1 Samuel 8:10–18, and Mosiah 29:16–23). What do these expressed concerns about having a king have in common? How accurate was the prophecy of the brother of Jared concerning what would happen if they had a king?

Ironically, the people then chose the firstborn of the brother of Jared, but he refused (6:25). Might that imply that the people hoped to unify the group by selecting the son of the brother who did not want kingship? They may not have been surprised when he followed the wise counsel of his father and refused to become king. But they may have been more surprised when all the other sons of the brother of Jared, and of Pagag, and even of Jared also refused, except for Jared's son, Orihah. Orihah was a good king and served the people well: "Orihah did walk humbly before the Lord, and did remember how great things the Lord had done for his father, and also taught his people how great things the Lord had done for their fathers" (6:30). But that happy situation would not last long.

Ether 7

Ether 7 — Questions Regarding Kingship

This chapter raises several interesting questions about kingship.

- Why was the youngest son selected to be king in each of these cases?
- How many generations was it before a king was deposed and kept in captivity?
- What was the motive behind Shule's rising up against his brother? Was it selfish and power-seeking, or did he have a less selfish motive? What reward did he get?
- Notice that Corihor repented, but one of his sons took back the throne and put Shule in captivity. How was Shule rescued? By whom?
- How did it come about that the kingdom was divided?
- How did king Shule protect the prophets?
- How far do the benefits of one good man reach? Think of Abinadi.

Ether 7:3 — Kib, the Youngest, Rules in Orihah's Stead

It was important for stability in ancient societies to have as few transitions of authority as possible under monarchical government. Every time a king's throne was vacated, the social structure of the whole community was upset. Generally, the kingship became vacant upon the monarch's death. It was highly unusual, almost unthinkable, for a king to give up his office voluntarily or for a king to be replaced by popular vote. Regardless, when a king died or left office, all government officials serving under that king were automatically released and replaced by the new king. The new king had the right to replace or keep any government official. It was analogous to what happens in the Church today when a bishop is released. The counselors in the bishopric are generally released with the outgoing bishop. Similarly, when the Relief Society President is released, her counselors are usually released with her. In the ancient world, it was not unusual for a new king to simply reinstall the previous bureaucrats, officers in the military, and other

government officials. However, change to monarchical authority was often difficult and took a period of time before stability was resumed in the community. This may provide some explanation as to why leadership was often passed on to a younger son of the king.

There may be another reason why the younger son of a king would assume office—the older sons were often needed as workers. In an agrarian world, the older sons were needed to till the fields and take care of the herds. They typically worked in agriculture or learned to be businessmen or craftsmen. Usually the younger sons—the favored sons—stayed home, studied, learned languages, and became educated and trained. They had a closer relationship with their father. I think we see that with Nephi. Nephi recorded, “Having been born of goodly parents, therefore I was taught somewhat in all the learning of my father ...” Nephi was the record keeper. He became the successor to Lehi.

When you look at how succession in the early part of the Book of Mormon went from Jacob to Enos to Jarom and to Omni, only a few generations covered a lot of years. In order for that to make sense, Enos was likely born very late in Jacob’s life; Jarom was likely born very late in Enos’ life. As the king or patriarch of a family aged, he could leave much of the day-to-day dealings to his older sons. The father would have more time to train and school a younger son as successor and give him all of the necessary expertise in politics, linguistics, and economics. A powerful king or patriarch would not have wanted to train his sons too soon, lest they upstage the father. Ancient kings and patriarchs often selected their younger sons as successors.

Ether 7:23 — Idolatry Begins to be Practiced Widely

In the Book of Ether, idolatry kept recurring. It was appealing to the ancients to have an idol—especially a very large, prominent, beautifully-carved stone image of something. This made belief and worship easy—the image could be seen and the idol could be touched. Not only could they see and touch an idol, but there was a pleasant smell associated with idol worship since incense was often burned as part of the ceremonies. The visual, tangible, olfactory sensory experience of idols was what was appealing. All of this gave a feeling of permanence. Idols seemed to have a bigger-than-life presence and, in fact, many of them were larger than life. Large stone idols were intimidating and put the worshipper in a secondary or lowly state. That appealed to the kings and rulers, who generally wanted the ordinary people to feel lowly. The humbler the people were, the easier it was to maintain control in the land.

During his ministry on the earth in the Meridian of Time, Jesus Christ could be seen, touched, and heard. He has appeared and spoken to prophets in every dispensation of the gospel. The reality of these events is recorded in scripture for the benefit of all of us. However, most of us live by faith in Jesus Christ. Both Moroni and the Apostle Paul

emphasized that we must have faith in Jesus Christ, even though we do not see. Paul stated that “we walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7). Hebrews 11:1 explains that “faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things *not seen*.” Moroni stated that “faith is things which are hoped for and *not seen*; wherefore, dispute not because ye see not, for ye receive no witness until after the trial of your faith” (Ether 12:6). These scriptures help us to avoid the lure of idolatry.

Ether 7:25 — Protection Given to the Prophets

As the people continued in their wickedness and idol worship, they began persecuting the prophets who were sent to teach repentance. In response, a law was enacted under the direction of King Shule that provided protection for the prophets, allowing them freedom of travel and freedom of speech. Apparently, the people were allowed some freedom of religion to the extent that they could choose to listen to the prophets and then choose whether or not to repent of their wickedness and idolatry.

Even though prophets in ancient America often spoke unflattering things about the kings, there was strong respect and reliance on prophecy among the Maya people. John Sorenson has written a paper on this topic. Maya kings rarely made important decisions without first consulting the prophets.

Further Reading

Evidence Central, “[Book of Mormon Evidence: Links between Jaredite History and the Book of Mosiah](#),” September 19, 2020, online at evidencecentral.org.

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

John L. Sorenson, “[Prophecy Among the Maya](#),” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon: A Decade of New Research*, ed. John W. Welch (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1992), 263–226.

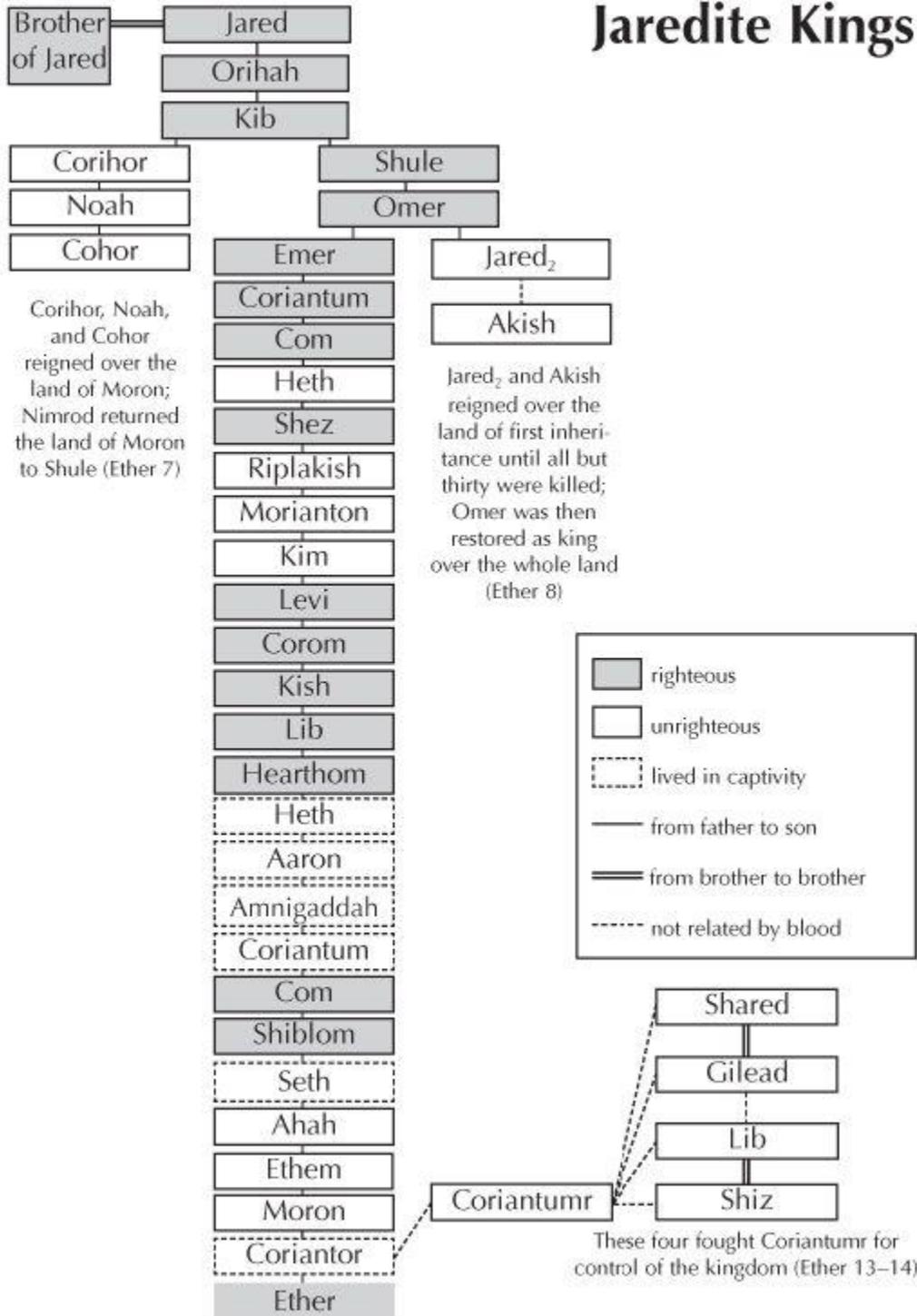
Ether 8

Ether 8:4 — How Does a King Spend His Life in Captivity?

Ether is full of accounts of kings living in captivity—often for the remainder of their lives. This was very characteristic at this time. A king was believed to connect the human and divine realms and was considered to hold the unique position of appeasing the idolatrous gods for the benefit of all the people. In this way, royal monarchs were viewed as being sacred or even quasi-divine. The enemies of a king could not put him to death without

fearing retribution in society or fearing that they would be the cause of punishment on all the people by idolatrous gods.

Jaredite Kings



What kind of captivity was Omer in where he could beget “sons and daughters?” How long was he in captivity? How old must his sons have been to deliver him? “Captivity” did not mean being put behind bars or in a penitentiary. There were no jails or prisons in antiquity and there was no sentence of “life-in-prison.” Incarcerating people was very expensive. If someone needed to be restrained temporarily, he would be thrown and contained in a cistern for a short period of time.

This ancient society had class distinctions and was highly class structured, as was all of the ancient near-eastern world. With class distinction came privileges and legal benefits for those in the upper class—particularly for royalty. Enemies of a king could confine him and other royal members in a restricted area where they were required to stay—in a palace or a specific part of the land. Even though they were restricted in their movement, they lived their lives in comparative ease. They were not put into slavery, nor were they required to work for other people. Therefore, the many kings over several generations who were required to live “in captivity” in the Book of Ether were likely confined to living in restricted areas, but were permitted to live and act with relative freedom.

Below is a chart showing the chronology of the Jaredite kings, indicating those who ruled righteously, those who were a wicked influence over the people, and those who lived in captivity. The main column of this chart shows the founder of the Jaredite nation and follows his progeny down to Ether, who was not a king. His name is on this book in the Book of Mormon because it was Ether who told the history of the Jaredite people. This list also gives the names of others who created conflict with particular kings and asserted power as rulers.

Ether 8:20 — “And Now I, Moroni ...”

In Ether 8, the problem of ancient, secret, and wicked oaths comes in with a vengeance (8:15, 16, 20). Here we have an early arising of the secret oaths and combinations, instigated by a daughter of king Jared. What did she propose? According to Moroni, where did the secret oaths come from? Who maintained and restored the oaths? (8:9–16). Why does Moroni not record the “manner of their oaths?” What does Moroni prophesy about nations that “uphold such secret combinations, to get power and gain?” What does Moroni suggest we should do when we see “these things come among you?” Who is behind the building up of this system? What are some solutions for us in our day? (8:20–26).

In describing the book of Ether, Book of Mormon scholar Grant Hardy observed, “Moroni maintains a more pervasive narrator presence” than his father, Mormon. Moroni interspersed comment on the Jaredite narrative at five points: Ether 1:1–6; 3:17–20; 4:1–6:1; 8:18–26; 12:6–41. In the book of Ether alone, the phrase, “I, Moroni” appears eleven times. In contrast, the phrase “I, Mormon” only appears three times outside Mormon’s own writing about his own

lifetime. Moroni used Mormon's classic phrase "and thus we see" only once. This occurrence in Ether 8:20 is a good place to look at Moroni's editorial philosophy.

There may be several explanations as to why Mormon's and Moroni's approaches were so different. Unlike Mormon, who had time to carefully craft his abridging and commentary, Moroni's life was constantly under threat, making it so he had to work under incredibly difficult circumstances. He had to edit, abridge, and write under the assumption that his life could end suddenly. This accounts for why Moroni wrote multiple endings to his record. For example, in Moroni 1:1 he states: "Now I, Moroni, after having made an end of abridging the account of the people of Jared, I had supposed not to have written more, but I have not as yet perished."

It may be that Moroni left the blocks of Jaredite record more or less intact and edited the original text less than his father Mormon did. When Moroni's five comments are removed from Ether, the remaining text flows flawlessly. For example, when the text of Ether 12:5 and 13:2 is read back to back, they read like they belong together: "Ether did prophesy great and marvelous things unto the people, which they did not believe, because they saw them not ... For behold, they rejected all the words of Ether; for he truly told them of all things, from the beginning of man." Even though there is almost an entire chapter of commentary from Moroni separating these verses, they flow together perfectly.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[Why Did Moroni Comment So Much Throughout Ether? \(Ether 8:20\)](#)," *KnoWhy* 242 (November 30, 2016).

Grant Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader's Guide* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010), 223.

George A. Horton Jr., "And Thus We See," in *Book of Mormon Reference Companion*, ed. Dennis L. Largey (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2003), 57–59.

Ether 9

Ether 9 — Study Questions

- Was the use of conspiracies and secret combinations by the daughter of Jared and Akish successful in attaining their goals?
- Why are evil plans often successful in attaining their goals? What does that say about the goals? Did the success last? To what did it lead?
- What influence saved the life of Omer?

- What happens if we ignore the promptings we receive?
- Think through your life, and ask yourself what promptings you have received. Did you listen, or did you neglect to follow them? How did it work out?

Ether 9:3 — Warned in a Dream

Throughout the scriptures, we hear of people being warned by the Lord—either in a dream or otherwise, including the still, small voice. Consider the dreams of Joseph, the son of Jacob (Israel), that led him to become the chief administrator in Egypt. A most outstanding example is Joseph, the step-father of Jesus, who obeyed divine guidance and warnings instantly. Matthew 2:13–14 explains:

[T]he angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him. When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt.

Indeed, the origin of the entire Book of Mormon with Lehi’s journey to the Promised Land with his family was prompted by a warning of the Lord.

Here, Omer was similarly warned, and he “departed out of the land with his family.” Not all of Omer’s family left with him. Omer’s son, Jared, and the posterity of Jared stayed behind. The narrative in Ether 9:2–3 gives us the bare simple facts, but there was probably very strong emotions involved in these activities.

Ether 9:1–9 — The Evil Plot

The conspiracy and use of evil by Akish and his friends, probably with Jared’s consent, came to fruition when Omer was overthrown as king and Jared was installed as ruler. Jared was grateful, no doubt, to Akish, so he allowed Akish to marry his daughter. However, the success of Jared was short-lived. In this book we see early examples of family treachery. Sons and daughters rise up against fathers, brothers against brothers—all to gain power. As Pope John Paul II has said, “As the family goes, so goes the nation and so goes the whole world in which we live.”

Akish used his secret combinations against his father-in-law in order to become the king himself. Akish recruited his fellow conspirators to behead Jared even while he was sitting on the throne giving audience to his people. One wonders if Jared’s daughter may have even been complicit in the wicked plans against her own father. The spread of the “wicked and secret society” had “corrupted the hearts of all the people” (9:6). Later, Akish, jealous of his own son, starved him to death. Nimrah, the victim’s brother and son of Akish, fled to the land where Omer ruled.

Ether 9:10–12 — The Destruction of Akish’s Kingdom

Akish’s nation was destroyed, but what was the cause of this destruction? Who were the main enemies of Akish’s regime? Were Akish and his sons the only parties to blame for the destruction? What part did the regular citizens play in this downfall? In fairly short order, the kingdom of Akish, which he had used treachery to obtain, was utterly destroyed by that same treachery. His own sons began a war that went on for “many years” and resulted in the obliteration of all but thirty people in the kingdom, and those who had previously fled to dwell with Omer.

Thus, we see the “fruits” of evil engendered by one or two people—Akish and the daughter of Jared. For a short period of time, their plans looked successful, but the evil soon cankered an entire nation. Moroni pointed out that “the people of Akish were desirous for gain,” and were as greedy for financial success as Akish was for power. They were bribed by the sons of Akish. These sons began a civil war that caused the end of the kingly line of Jared and Akish.

Ether 9:13–27 — Peace Restored for a Short Time

Omer came out of self-exile and regained control of the nation. Emer, one of Omer’s younger sons, “did fill the steps of his father.” The land began to prosper and “Emer did execute judgement in righteousness all his days.” Coriantum then reigned, followed by his son Com, both of whom reigned righteously. However, the story repeats, and Com’s son, Heth, “began to embrace the secret plans again of old, to destroy his father.” Heth dethroned his father, slays him with his own sword, and then reigns in his stead.

Ether 9:28–35 — Poisonous Serpents upon the Face of the Land

Prophets warned that a “great famine” would come if the people did not repent. However, Heth himself encouraged the people to reject the prophets, instead persecuting them and casting them out. As predicted, “there began to be a great dearth upon the land ... for there was no rain upon the face of the earth.” In the midst of the great famine, an interesting series of events followed. First, the land was infested by “poisonous serpents,” which “did poison many people.” Next, “flocks began to flee” southward, and the serpents followed the flocks (Ether 9:31). The serpents then stopped pursuing the flocks and “hedge[d] up the way,” preventing people from passing into the land southward (Ether 9:33).

As strange as this series of events may seem, the details are ecologically sound. In times of drought, snakes will often migrate to populated areas in search of water or prey. As the population of snakes increases, and if the snakes are venomous, there is greater likelihood that people will be bitten and poisoned by the snakes. If the drought does not subside, the snakes, as well as other animals, will continue to migrate in search of water. In addition,

animals will migrate to escape the infestation of the snakes and also the drought, with some perishing as they flee (Ether 9:32). This could explain what Ether referred to as the flocks “flee[ing] before the poisonous serpents” (Ether 9:31).

Ether’s record states that when the people had eventually suffered enough to repent and the famine ceased, the serpents were no longer a threat. This is likely the result of two things. First, as rain showered on the land (Ether 9:35), snakes and other animals would return to their natural habitats and populations would be more evenly distributed. Second, eventually the bird populations would recover and begin to regulate snake populations, reducing them to normal levels. Thus, the serpents would no longer pose a barrier to the land southward.

Once again, we see that what may, at first glance, appear to be an unbelievable description of events in the Book of Mormon, actually contains truth when investigated further. This narrative can also be used as a parable, showing that real repentance can end a spiritual famine and tear down the barriers that keep us from returning to the Lord. There is no barrier so great that the Atonement cannot overcome.

Further Reading

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Ether 10

Much of the Jaredite history is contained in this chapter. According to Eldin Ricks, “It is likely that over half of Moroni’s thumbnail sketch of Jaredite history is covered by this chapter.” Eldin Ricks, *Book of Mormon Study Guide* (Orem, UT: Orion Publishing, 1963), 102. Fourteen rulers are covered starting with Shez in Ether 10:1 to the end of the chapter. Many of those generations of the ruling family were in captivity from the days of

Hearthom to the end of the chapter. Evidently this family divisiveness played a strong role in the final decay of the Jaredite kingdom.

Ether 10:5–8 — Riplakish Was Like King Noah

The description of king Riplakish's reign was exactly antithetical to the rule of a righteous king. In Israel, the "Paragraph of the King" in Deuteronomy 17:14–20 imposed a remarkable set of limitations on the lawful power, assuring that the king remained as "one from among thy brethren" (Deuteronomy 17:15). But this Hebrew expectation of kingship was not codified until after the time of Moses. Even so, Riplakish is portrayed in Moroni's abridgment in direct contrast to King Benjamin, who came after the laws were codified, and who gave an accounting of his stewardship in his famous speech at the temple. King Benjamin likely had access to passages about righteous kings in the Brass Plates, and Benjamin closely followed the wording of the Paragraph of the King himself as he reported to his people that he had met the standards of a righteous king in Israel. Deuteronomy 17:17 says of a good king, "Neither shall he multiply wives to himself, that his heart turn not away: neither shall he greatly multiply to himself silver and gold."

In contrast, we read of Riplakish's behavior as king in Ether 10:5: "[H]e did have many wives and concubines, and did lay that upon men's shoulders which was grievous to be borne; yea, he did tax them with heavy taxes; and with the taxes he did build many spacious buildings." Then in verse 7: "Wherefore he did obtain all his fine work, yea, even his fine gold he did cause to be refined in prison; and all manner of fine workmanship he did cause to be wrought in prison."

An integral part of the Paragraph of the King was the warning to kings not to use their power to gain wealth and satisfy their own lusts. King Benjamin delineated how he obeyed that requirement. Perhaps there was, long before the publication of the Paragraph of the King, a similar expectation for righteous rule and Ether was expressing that, or perhaps Moroni used the Paragraph of the King as a guide in demonstrating that Riplakish was a bad king. King Mosiah must have noted, and perhaps even accentuated, the contrast between his father Benjamin and the behavior of Riplakish.

Further Reading

John W. Welch, "Democratizing Forces in King Benjamin's Speech," in *Pressing Forward with the Book of Mormon: The FARMS Updates of the 1990s*, ed. John W. Welch and Melvin J. Thorne (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999), 110–126.

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Ether 10:6 — Riplakish Constructs a Beautiful Throne

Scholars identify the first advanced Mesoamerican civilization as the Olmec (ca. 1700–400 BC), which closely corresponds with the time period of the Jaredite civilization. This ancient pre-Columbian American “society began constructing thrones of stone between 1350–1000 BC.” Today, these people are known for their huge and elaborate stone thrones and colossal stone heads that have survived the centuries. The thrones were usually made out of a single, large, altar-like stone, ornamentally carved with three-dimensional depictions of the rulers themselves seated in cave-like openings. The massive stones used to make these thrones and heads could weigh up to 40 tons and were transported from as far as 90 km (about 56 miles). The intensive labor required to produce these stone monuments attests to the power of the rulers who commissioned them.

Mesoamerican scholars have noted that construction of massive thrones and colossal stone heads were one of the ways Olmec kings memorialized themselves. The thrones served as seats of power, which symbolically positioned rulers as sitting between the human and divine realms. The thrones were also carved in ways to legitimize their high status by establishing their relationship to founding ancestors.

In order for Riplakish to construct an “exceedingly beautiful throne,” he had to have possessed sufficient power to harness a massive labor force. Riplakish was the second king following a famine which had decimated the Jaredite kingdom (Ether 9:28–35). His father had begun to rebuild the kingdom (Ether 10:1–4), and by the time Riplakish took over the kingdom he wielded considerable power. The record describes a period of oppressive taxation and building projects during Riplakish’s reign and mentions that he burdened the people with burdens “grievous to be borne” and forced them to “labor continually” (Ether 10:5–6).

Many Olmec stone thrones and heads were intentionally smashed, defaced and mutilated to delegitimize a king and his possible successors—particularly at times of rebellion or civil war. Consistent with Olmec history, Riplakish’s throne may have been defaced and mutilated since the Jaredite record states that “the people did rise up in rebellion against” Riplakish, and he “was killed, and his descendants were driven out of the land” (Ether 10:8).

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Did Riplakish Construct a Beautiful Throne?](#) (Ether 10:6),” *KnoWhy* 244 (December 2, 2016).

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Christopher A. Pool, *Olmec Archaeology and Early Mesoamerica* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

Susan D. Gillespie, "Olmec Thrones as Ancestral Altars: The Two Sides of Power," in *Material Symbols: Culture and Economy in Prehistory*, ed. John E. Robb (Carbondale, IL: Center for Archaeological Investigations, 1999), 224–253.

Ether 10:8, 32 — The Number "Forty-two" in the Book of Ether

The number forty-two is mentioned frequently in the Book of Mormon—some of which are found in the book of Ether (9:24; 10:8, 15, 32). Ether 10:8 states that "[When king Riplakish] had reigned for the space of forty and two years the people did rise up in rebellion." Verse 32 mentions that Com "reigned over the half of the kingdom forty and two years." Many things were recorded as having happened in multiples of forty-two. This may reflect some feature of ancient calendaring patterns and information recorded by ancient astronomers; but as intriguing as this may be, we cannot be sure.

Further Reading

Randall P. Spackman, *Interpreting Forty and Two Years in the Book of Mormon*, (Self-published article online: 2010–2011).

Ether 11

Many final questions arise in this chapter:

- Why was Com blessed "all the remainder of his days," despite the rejection of the prophets by the people?
- Even in very wicked times, is it possible for a person of courage and conviction to stand for the truth?
- What action caused war to keep coming back?
- What characteristics of the people and royal family appear to be at the root of the descent into tragedy and trials?
- What action by the brother of Shiblom appears to have caused the worst destruction again?
- What behavior prevented them from listening to the Lord and his prophets?

- What happened as soon as the people began to repent?
- Can wickedness among the leaders cause decline in a nation?

Ether 11:1–19 — The Beginning of the Fall of the Jaredite Nation

Generally, even the wicked people in a community publicly follow the path of a righteous king. However, in this society, the wickedness became so strong that the king did not have much influence. Com was a righteous king who protected the prophets who were ostracized by the people. The next king was Com's son, Shiblom, whose brother rebelled and drew the kingdom into "exceedingly great war" and "contentions in all the land" (verses 4 and 7). Worst of all, Shiblom's brother killed all the prophets who were warning of impending destruction. Sure enough, severe destruction did follow, and sadly, just as the people began suffering enough that they began to repent, Shiblom was killed. Seth (presumably the heir of kingship and brother of Shiblom) lived as a captive the rest of his life. Seth's wicked son, Aha, took over the kingship. The next few descendants of the kings ruled in great wickedness, until the prophets withdrew from the people. The record states that a succeeding king "did reign in [the previous king's] stead" (11:14). That does not give much confidence that the many monarchical successions mentioned in the Jaredite record were normal and peaceful. After a period of rebellion, the kingdom was split in two between two unrighteous rulers—one of whom was Moron. Subsequently, Moron was overthrown and put in "captivity all the remainder of his days (verse 18). Moron's son, Coriantor, also "dwelt in captivity all his days" (11:19).

Ether 11:20–21 — Warnings of Destruction and the Solution

At the time Moron and his son Coriantor were in captivity, prophets again came among the people warning that "God would execute judgment against them to their utter destruction," and would bring another people to inherit the land of promise. In the Book of Mormon and subsequent history, we see the fulfillment of that warning. The Jaredite nation was destroyed and the succeeding group of people, the Nephites, were also eventually destroyed as a nation because of their unrighteousness.

By telling the stories of both Nephite and Jaredite societies and their destructions, the Book of Mormon drives home its powerful warning for modern readers. As Steven C. Walker observed, "It is because what happened to the Jaredites happens to the Nephites," that "more presciently, we sense its potential for ourselves." The Book of Mormon is a divinely appointed warning for the modern days, twice illustrating the downfall that awaits societies that succumb to wickedness and corruption.

It is worth noting that even though the great empires and nations of the earth tend to disintegrate, and the Book of Mormon demonstrates the fall of two major civilizations, the book also presents a successful solution. Only when the people hear the word of the Lord,

repent, and adhere to the principles taught by Jesus Christ, as found in 3 Nephi and elsewhere in scripture, can the tide of social decay and destruction be staved off.

Further Reading

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Book of Mormon Central, "Why Did the Peace Last So Long in 4 Nephi? (4 Nephi 1:16)," *KnoWhy* 225 (November 7, 2016).

Steven C. Walker, "Last Words" in *The Reader's Book of Mormon*, 7 vols., ed. Robert A. Rees and Eugene England (Salt Lake City, UT: Signature Books, 2008), vii–xxii.