
ETHER 1-7

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INTRODUCTION

Mormon said that he was going to include the book of Ether in his record (Mosiah 28:11-19) but he didn't get it done in his lifetime. The task thus fell to his son, Moroni, who instead gave us an abridgement of the twenty-four plates discovered by the people of Limhi.

Fascinatingly, if you are Joseph Smith the author of the Book of Mormon (not the translator), what do you have to gain by including yet another story of an ancient civilization that comes to the promised land, grows and gets stronger, rejects God in the end, and is destroyed? But if you're Moroni finishing the record of your father, you are obedient to his desire to include this information, but also want to offer plenty of editorial comments to your audience along the way, which he does—over 94 verses or about 21% of the Book of Ether is Moroni writing to us in the last days. These comments put the addition of the record in its context—a second witness to the reason for destruction, a warning for the readers of the book in the last days not to repeat the mistakes of both of these great peoples.

A simple outline of the chapters in this lesson is:

Topic	Reference	1830 Reference
Leaving the Tower	Ether 1	Ether 1
Building the Barges	Ether 2	
I am Jesus Christ	Ether 3	
The Spirit Teaches	Ether 4	
The Three Witnesses	Ether 5	Ether 2
Arrival at the Promised Land	Ether 6	Ether 3*
Strife and Wickedness	Ether 7	

* Ether 6-8 today equals Ether 3 in 1830.

ETHER 1 LEAVING THE TOWER

1 I, Moroni. Acting under the direction of his father who had promised to include this record (Mosiah 28:11-19), Moroni begins his translation and abridgement of the Jaredite history, which was already an abridgement by Ether (v. 2 below). In this book, Moroni will insert many personal, editorial comments, doctrinal expositions, and even directions to the translator, including the following, for a total of 91.5 verses, or about 21% of the entire book of Ether:

- 1:1-6a
- 2:9-12

- 3:17-20
- 4:1b-19
- 5:1-6
- 6:1
- 8:19-26
- 9:1a
- 12:6-41
- 13:1

those ancient inhabitants. The book of Ether never names the people in the story. In other words, as far as we can tell, they did not call themselves any particular name. Moroni gives them two names. First, he called them “the people of Jared” on both the Title Page of the Book of Mormon and in Moroni 1:1. Another time, he apparently used the Nephite convention and tacked “-ite” onto Jared’s name, calling them “Jaredites” (see Moroni 9:23). This is the name that has stuck in the Church ((Largey 2003, 435).

1 **this north country.** The language seems to indicate that Moroni was living in the land northward when he inscribed this information on the plates of Mormon.

2 **twenty and four plates.** The plates which became known as the “Book of Ether” are first mentioned in Mosiah 8:9, then again in Mosiah 21:27 and 28:11-19. The loop is closed in Ether 15:33 as that prophet concludes his record, which is an abridgement of the history of his people, just as Mormon’s plates were an abridgement of the Nephite history.

3 **the first part of this record.** Moroni understood that in the last days the Gentiles would have the record of the Jews (1 Nephi 13), so he felt safe excluding those things which were in both records and focusing on just what was unique in the Jaredite record.

6-32 **he that wrote this record was Ether.** Ether’s genealogy is the only one given in the Book of Mormon, though there are many in the Bible (*Student Manual*, 361-362). Most of the times it portrays father to son, but in three cases it uses the broader term “descendent,” implying more than one generation (vv. 6, 16, and 23). However, the text makes it clear that two of them are sons. But Morianton is listed as a “descendent” of Riplakish both here and in the story (10:9). That means that the twenty-nine generations listed in verses 6-32 could be a few more. The names listed here are characters in the book’s story, showing that Ether was not only a descendent of Jared but of the line who were kings of his people. For a visual representation of the list and a brief biography of each person, see (Largey 2003, 430-433).

33 **at the time the Lord confounded the language.** This story is found in Genesis 11:1-9.

34 **Cry unto the Lord.** Jared asks his brother not to pray but to “cry unto the Lord.” In the next few verses, that is the language used with one exception: in v. 38 Jared asks his brother to “inquire” of the Lord what would happen to them, but still tells him to “cry unto him” where they should go. In the end, the Lord is clear that the blessings they received came “because this long time ye have cried unto me” (v. 43).

35 **the Lord had compassion upon Jared.** The brother is doing the praying, but the record says that the blessing came “upon Jared.” This probably reflects Jared’s leadership, his later royal line, and Ether’s descent. Later, though, the Lord also has compassion on the brother of Jared.

he did not confound the language. Joseph Fielding Smith stated that he interpreted this to mean that Jared and the others with him spoke the language of Adam (*Student Manual*, 362). But McConkie, Millet, and Top point out that we don't know what language they spoke, since "not confound" could mean either their language didn't change from what it was or it stayed the same among them so they could understand each other (McConkie 1991, 4:263-264).

42 into the valley which is northward. The story in Genesis 11 took place in "Shinar," which is traditionally the area of modern Iraq between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers (see Bible Dictionary, 774, "Shinar, Plain of"). Depending on which direction they went, this could take them north toward the Black Sea or the Caspian Sea or between the two.

43 there shall be none greater. The nation of the Jaredites would be the greatest on the earth in their time.

ETHER 2 BUILDING THE BARGES

1 the valley was Nimrod. The location of this valley is unknown. It was named after the man in Genesis 10:8-10, whose kingdom was in the land of Shinar, from where Jared and his group departed. His fame and impact was very broad, such that this northern valley (lower in altitude than where they started, since they went "down" to it) was even named after him.

1-3 flocks...fowls...fish...bees...seeds. The group used the valley of Nimrod as their staging area, collected birds, fish (kept in ingenious tanks), honey bees, and seeds to add to the flocks they brought already from Shinar.

3 deseret. "Deseret" is a well-known symbol and term in the Church. The term and its meaning come from this verse. This is the only mention of this term in scripture (except for two references to the *Deseret Weekly* in Official Declaration 1:11, 18).

5 gave directions whither they should travel. No Liahona for the Jaredites, the Lord himself was in a cloud and directed them where to go. Compare Exodus 13:21-22.

6 did build barges. The story of crossing the ocean in barges is not the first time they built them, but here as they followed the cloud into the wilderness. The "many waters" they crossed could have been the Black, Caspian, or Aral Seas.

9-12 a land of promise. A Moroni editorial comment, talking about the land of promise. The land the Lord was leading the people to was their own promised land. Presidents Joseph Fielding Smith and Ezra Taft Benson (who quotes Joseph Smith) taught that the promised land referred to here was all of North and South America. See *Student Manual*, 362. The "North America" group that promotes a location within the United States for the Book of Mormon story uses prophetic declarations applying these verses to the United States as one of the main reasons for choosing their geographical setting. And such an application to the Church, which has more members in the United States than any other country, is appropriate and valid. But if the land of promise is the two continents, then that eliminates the need to just focus on the United States as a potential location.

13 Moriancumer. While we are never told directly the name of the brother of Jared, this verse gives his name, at least part of it. The *Student Manual* (p. 362) recounts the story of an early Church

member inviting Joseph Smith to name and bless his child. The prophet gave him the name *Mahonri Moriancumer* and stated it was the name of the brother of Jared.

14 *for the space of three hours did the Lord talk.* The Lord and the brother of Jared had a three hour personal priesthood interview. During the interview, the Lord “chastened him because he remembered not to call upon the name of the Lord.” This doesn’t make sense if we think that Moriancumer and his group quit praying altogether. The context shows that what they did was stop crying unto God to be directed as to what to do next. They paused on the seashore for four years (v. 13) and ceased to cry unto God to know the next step in their progression to the real promised land, even though that was where the Lord desired them to go (2:7). How often do we pause in our own progression because where we are is safe and comfortable, or meets our needs (as we think), or we see the way ahead as such a big challenge that we wait for the right moment? Whereas if we call upon the Lord, he will direct us to that next step and push us to even greater blessings, growth, understanding, and perfection.

16 *build, after the manner of barges which he have hitherto built.* The barges were not a new construction effort, which makes the next interactions with the Lord interesting. They built eight of them (3:1).

16-17 The description of the barges have elicited many depictions but I’m not sure we’ve ever got it right. They were “small” and “light” so they floated like a duck. But they weren’t very small (in fact, they were “the length of a tree,” though there are small and tall trees, so I’m not sure how much that helps) because they could hold many people and animals and supplies. They were “tight...like unto a dish,” an odd phrase that seems to mean they were waterproof, even to the point of being submerged. They were “peaked” on the ends, so there was definitely a top and bottom. And finally, they had a “door” that could be shut tightly.

19 *therefore we shall perish.* Mahonri brings three problems to the Lord that he can’t quite figure out—light, steering, and air. Again, interesting because they’ve already built similar barges before, so why are these difficult problems now? Perhaps because the distance they expected to travel was so much greater than what they had done before, or the seas so much more boisterous? Or perhaps these barges were similar to what was previously done, but different in some important ways because they were following “the instructions of the Lord” (v. 16)?

20 *make a hole in the top, and also in the bottom.* Air was the first problem the Lord solved. This is how submarines work. When they’re on the surface, the hole in the top lets them get fresh air, see what’s happening, etc. When they’re submerged (or at least sealed up), the hole in the bottom gives them access to the water. This could be handy for fishing, for disposing of waste, etc.

22 *there is no light.* Having followed instructions and solved the air problem, the brother of Jared brings up the light problem again.

23 *What will ye that I should do.* Taking a different approach, instead of giving him the answer, the Lord prompts Mahonri to come up with his own. The answer he proposes to the Lord was not an original one. Hugh Nibley (*Approaches to the Book of Mormon*, chapters 25-26) first, and many others later, documented the story of Noah needing light in the ark, so the Lord provided a light-giving stone. This is the old rabbis’ interpretation of the Hebrew word translated ‘window’ in our KJV. So the brother of Jared’s reaction when the Lord said, ‘What do you think should be done’ was

not a new concept, but him following a pattern from a story he already knew. Furthering the tie, the very ships that the group built are compared to the ark, in terms of their tightness (6:7).

24 **winds have gone forth out of my mouth.** Though he doesn't call out the answer specifically, this is the Lord's response to the steering question—"I will steer you with the wind."

ETHER 3 I AM JESUS CHRIST

1 **sixteen small stones.** Though called "stones" here, the description is more like glass balls or something. They were "white and clear."

2-5 Mahonri Moriancumer's humble prayer, recorded in these verses, shows an understanding of the fall, of repentance, and of faith. He is confident in his request, even as he is humble in the asking.

6 **he saw the finger of the Lord.** This fascinating account recounts how this man saw the Lord in stages, as it were; first, just the finger, then his entire body. Mahonri has this experience because of his "exceeding faith" (v. 9).

11 **Believest thou the words which I shall speak?** What a bold question. Not 'Do you believe what I have said,' but 'Do you believe what I will say next?' Such a question would test the faith.

13 **Because thou knowest these things ye are redeemed from the fall.** Mahonri had mentioned the fall in his prayer (v. 2). But the response is intriguing: because he knew that God spoke the truth and could not lie, he was redeemed from the fall. A correct understanding of God is the basis of true faith, and faith is the basis of true repentance and the blessings that flow from that.

14 **I am Jesus Christ.** As with the revelation of the name we call him today in the record of Nephi and other places in the Book of Mormon, we don't know what name he actually used in their language. But whatever it was, the correct translation for our day and our understanding was Jesus Christ.

15 **never have I showed myself unto man.** Elder Holland summarized nicely the many theories that explain this statement here in Ether (*Student Manual*, 365-366). The problem, of course, is that many before Mahonri have seen God. The Pearl of Great Price gives several accounts of this happening. So what does the Lord really mean? To me, the most significant possibility is that Mahonri was beholding Jesus as he would be later as a mortal. The several references to "flesh and blood" (v. 6) and "this body" (v. 16) are instructive, for we know that he was not flesh and blood yet, but that is how he appeared to this prophet. He does explain that he is showing his "spirit," but says that what Mahonri is seeing is how he will "appear unto my people in the flesh." Moroni also emphasizes that the appearance was "in the likeness of the same body even as he showed himself unto the Nephites" (v. 17).

21 **show it to no man.** The brother of Jared was not to share his experience with anyone until after Jesus' mortal ministry. The Book of Mormon records that Mosiah translated the record of Ether (Mosiah 28:11-17) and shared it with his people, but it appears to have been relatively unknown after that until the time of Christ (4:1-2), at which time Jesus commanded them to be made known among the Nephites.

23 **these two stones.** President Joseph Fielding Smith taught that these same stones were the ones that Joseph Smith received and used to translate the Book of Mormon. Likewise, they must have been the ones that Moroni used to translate the Jaredite record in his day, in order to bring us the present book of Ether. It would appear that the stones were two of those that Jared had made for lights and the Lord just singled out two of them to be interpreters.

25 **all the inhabitants of the earth.** Like Moses 1 and other prophetic visions, Jared's brother saw by revelation the great history of the earth, and perceived all the inhabitants of it.

ETHER 4 THE SPIRIT TEACHES

This entire chapter and the next are the words of Moroni, as he pauses from his abridgement to give us some context and editorial commentary.

3 **I should hide them up again.** After translating and abridging them, Moroni was commanded to hide the record of Ether. He doesn't say where he put them, but probably not back in the hill Cumorah since he had been driven out of that land by the Lamanites.

5 **the Lord hath commanded me to write them.** Moroni and his father stated several times that they were not acting of their own volition but under commandment of the Lord to write what they wrote. This is a divinely commissioned and directed work.

7 **will I manifest unto them the things which the brother of Jared saw.** Not only will Mahonri's record become available again (v. 6) but the very visions of this prophet will be had again when we exercise faith like his. Certainly Joseph Smith had this same experience in our day, and likely others as well. What the Lord has promised one, he has promised all.

11 **because of my Spirit he shall know that these things are true.** Harkening ahead to Moroni 10:3-5, the Lord teaches that we can know truth by the Spirit that he gives to all of us.

13-14 **Gentiles...Israel.** The same call goes to both the Gentiles and to Israel—come unto Christ, have faith in him, and God will show you greater things.

16 **written by my servant John.** Many see Revelation as a mystery, but Joseph Smith taught that it is "one of the plainest books God ever caused to be written" (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 290). It is because the Spirit had taught him its meaning, just as we are promised the same understanding.

ETHER 5 THE THREE WITNESSES

1 **touch them not.** Moroni commanded Joseph Smith not to touch the sealed portion, already mentioned in 4:5.

2 **show the plates unto those who shall assist.** In the work of translation, this was the first time that Joseph had encountered the possibility that others could see the plates. Those who assisted him most were Oliver Cowdery, scribe for most of the translation; Martin Harris, scribe for the first 116 pages and ardent supporter; and David Whitmer, who often lent assistance to Joseph during this time.

3 unto three shall they be shown by the power of God. The witness of the three as recorded in the first part of the book testifies of the truth of this prophecy. It is these verses that prompted the Prophet to inquire of the Lord and ask if Oliver, Martin, and David could be the three.

ETHER 6 ARRIVAL AT THE PROMISED LAND

4 flocks and herds. They took animals in the barges with them, which means they needed food and water for themselves and the animals. They probably used the animals for food along the way as well, and perhaps as a source of milk. This again is a striking comparison to Noah's ark, with the people and the animals together in the ships.

commending themselves unto the Lord their God. Pushing away from the shore with no motor and no description of oars or other means of propulsion or steering, they were truly trusting completely in the Lord to take them where they needed to go.

5 a furious wind. What kind of a wind drove them—hurricane, typhoon, etc.? Whatever it was, it generated “mountain waves” (v. 6) that buried them deep in the water (v. 7).

9 they did sing praises unto the Lord. Music played a role in both crossings—the Jaredites and the Nephites. But the music and the outcome was quite different.

11 three hundred and forty and four days. It took them almost a year to reach the promised land. This hints that they made several stops along the way to replenish their food and especially fresh water supplies, for a direct journey across the ocean would not take that long.

12 the multitude of his tender mercies. Arriving in the promised land, they were humbled by the Lord's care, bowed down and “shed tears of joy.”

16 twenty and two souls. The friends they had brought with them were numbered at 22. In v. 20 we learn that Jared's family numbered 12 and Mahonri's 22, though at the end of their lives, so the number of people that came across in the ships was perhaps 50 or less.

22 anoint one of their sons to be a king. People want leadership but especially kings. This was “grievous” to Jared and his brother because they predicted, “Surely this thing leadeth to captivity” (v. 23). This proved to be true.

27 Orihah was anointed to be king. After all the other sons of Jared and Mahonri turned down the position, Orihah finally agreed..

29 Jared died, and his brother also. A simple note of the passing of these two great founders of this civilization.

ETHER 7 STRIFE AND WICKEDNESS

Just as the brothers had predicted, kingship led to contention and strife as people struggled for power and control. The history of the Jaredites is one of near constant struggle for authority over others.

2 **he begat thirty and one.** Polygamy was apparently practiced among the Jaredites, at least their kings, as was a common practice among many ancient peoples.

4 **the land of Nehor.** This name, of course, appears later (speaking chronologically) in the Book of Mormon, in several chapters in Alma.

5 **the land of Moron.** Moroni linked this land to the land called Desolation by the Nephites (v. 6), giving us a geographical tie to the two cultures.

16 **the land of their first inheritance.** Meaning where Jared and their party had first landed.

20 **the country was divided.** Shule and Cohor broke the people into two groups, causing battles. Shule finally won and killed Cohor. Cohor's son surrendered to Shule and the kingdom was reunited (v. 22).

23 **there came prophets.** No prophets are mentioned until this point since the time of Mahonri. They were not well received (v. 24) but had the support of Shule (v. 25), and so enjoyed some success (v. 26). Shule proved to be a righteous king in the end (v. 27).

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