

Introduction

The Book of Mormon is not arranged in chronological order. If it were, the book of Ether would be listed first. The Jaredite record begins approximately 2200 B.C. First Nephi begins in 600 B.C. The book of Ether covers over 1,700 years of history from 2200 B.C. down to the time of Coriantumr. We don't know exactly when Coriantumr lived, but it was somewhere between 500 and 250 B.C. The rest of the Book of Mormon from the books of 1 Nephi to Moroni covers approximately 1,000 years of history.

Following the Flood in Noah's day, many descendants of those who had been spared became wicked. One group of people attempted to build a tower "whose top may reach unto heaven" (Genesis 11:4). The story of the Jaredite nation began with the building of the Tower of Babel. The Lord dealt with the widespread wickedness by confounding the common language and by scattering the people across the face of the earth (see Ether 1:33; Genesis 11:5–8).

The brother of Jared pled with the Lord to preserve the language of his worthy friends and family. Demonstrating great faith and led by the hand of God, the brother of Jared was able to lead this group to another land. The story of this migration is filled with important principles that we can apply to our lives today. These principles include the exercise of faith to receive divine assistance and the role of prayer in accomplishing difficult tasks. As you study the life of the brother of Jared, you will learn of the blessings that come when individuals exercise strong faith.

Here is a review of the origins of the book of Ether:

- Jaredite prophets kept the history until the final Jaredite prophet named Ether (see Ether 1:6).
- Limhi's search found part of the Jaredite record—in the form of the 24 gold plates (see Mosiah 8:7–11).
- King Mosiah translated the Jaredite record (see Mosiah 28:10–17).
- Moroni abridged or edited the Jaredite record and included it before his own writings (see Ether 1:1–6).

Commentary

Ether 1:1–2. The 24 Plates Discovered

- While the people of Limhi were in bondage, King Limhi sent out an expedition of 43 men to search for the land of Zarahemla (see Mosiah 8:7; 21:25). Though unsuccessful in finding Zarahemla, the search party found a land covered with the bones and remains of a people who had been destroyed (see Mosiah 8:8). The searchers discovered a record of 24 gold plates, which they took back to King Limhi (see Mosiah 8:9–10). When Limhi's people eventually escaped from bondage (see Mosiah 22), these plates were given to King Mosiah to translate (see Mosiah 28:1–17).

Ether 1:3–4. An Account of the Creation before Moses's Day

- It is significant that the book of Ether informs us that an account of the Creation, Adam, and a history of God's children down to the time of the Tower of Babel existed well before Moses's day. This account may have become lost through apostasy and wickedness, thus necessitating a restoration of this knowledge through revelation to Moses so we might have the record today (see Moses 1:40).

Ether 1:6–32. The Jaredite Genealogy

- Ether 1 gives a genealogy of the prophet Ether. This genealogy is a rare occurrence in the Book of Mormon and is explained by the following commentary:

"Genealogies are common in the Bible. The Hebrew people took great interest in their family histories, and genealogies seem to have been carefully kept; the number in the scriptures is an index to their importance. Notice those in Genesis 5, 11, 46; Numbers 26; 1 Chronicles 1–9; read also the accounts in Ezra 9–10 which give an



indication of the importance of keeping family histories. The Book of Mormon, however, contains only one

example of an extended genealogy, that found in Ether 1:6–32. It gives the genealogy of Ether, the last prophet of the Jaredite people, whose lineage is traced back twenty-nine generations or more to Jared, who left the Tower of Babel with his family at the time of the confounding of the language of the people. Aside from this example, only scattered references of genealogical interest are found” (Sidney B. Sperry, “Types of Literature in the Book of Mormon,” in *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, vol. 21, no. 1 (1995): 117).

Ether 1:34–35. The Brother of Jared’s Name

- Elder George Reynolds (1842–1909) of the Seventy related the following account, which indicates that the brother of Jared’s name (see Ether 2:13) was revealed to the Prophet Joseph Smith (1805–44): “While residing in Kirtland Elder Reynolds Cahoon had a son born to him. One day when President Joseph Smith was passing his door he called the Prophet in and asked him to bless and name the baby. Joseph did so and gave the boy the name of Mahonri Moriancumer. When he had finished the blessing he laid the child on the bed, and turning to Elder Cahoon he said, the name I have given your son is the name of the brother of Jared; the Lord has just shown [or revealed] it to me. Elder William F. Cahoon, who was standing near heard the Prophet make this statement to his father; and this was the first time the name of the brother of Jared was known in the Church in this dispensation” (“The Jaredites,” *Juvenile Instructor*, May 1, 1892, 282).

Ether 1:33–38. The Language of Jared and His Brother

- Ether 1:34–38 records that the Lord did not confound the language of Jared’s family, his brother, and their friends at the time of the Tower of Babel. President Joseph Fielding Smith (1876–1972) taught that the Jaredites likely spoke in the language of Adam: “It is stated in the Book of Ether that Jared and his brother made the request of the Lord that their language be not changed at the time of the confusion of tongues at the Tower of Babel. Their request was granted, and they carried with them the

speech of their fathers, the Adamic language, which was powerful even in its written form, so that the things Mahonri wrote ‘were mighty even . . . unto the overpowering of man to read them.’ That was the kind of language Adam had and this was the language with which Enoch was able to accomplish his mighty work” (*The Way to Perfection* [1970], 69).

Ether 1:38–42. A Chosen Land

- Just as members of the house of Israel are called a chosen people—chosen to do the Lord’s work—the Book of Mormon refers to the Americas as a chosen land—chosen to be the place for the Restoration of the gospel and, eventually, the New Jerusalem. Both the members of the house of Israel and the Americas have been chosen to assist Heavenly Father in spreading the gospel throughout the world.

- President Joseph Fielding Smith explained that all of North and South America is a choice land: “The Book of Mormon informs us that the whole of America, both North and South, is *a choice land above all other lands, in other words—Zion*. The Lord told the Jaredites that he would lead them to a land ‘which is choice above all the lands of the earth’ [Ether 1:42]” (*Doctrines of Salvation*, comp. Bruce R. McConkie, 3 vols. [1954–56], 3:73).



- President Ezra Taft Benson (1899–1994) also spoke of the Americas being chosen lands: “In 1844, the Prophet Joseph Smith made this solemn proclamation: ‘The whole of America is Zion itself from north to south’ (*Teachings [of the Prophet Joseph Smith]*, p. 362). The Lord Himself decreed: ‘This is a land which is choice above all other lands’ (Ether 2:10). This nation is part of the land of Zion. This is a land dedicated by God’s servants. When a Book of Mormon prophet referred to the nations of the world, this hemisphere was designated as ‘good’ (Jacob 5:25–26)” (*The Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson* [1988], 123).

ETHER 1:38–43

As the Jaredites were led to a chosen land, what were they instructed to take, and what was the importance of each item?

Ether 1:43. “This Long Time Ye Have Cried unto Me”

- The Lord explained to the brother of Jared that blessings had come to his people as a result of prayers offered over a long time. Enduring obedience coupled with frequent and persistent prayers is powerful. In an 1839 discourse in Commerce, Illinois, the Prophet Joseph Smith taught: “God is not a respecter of persons, we all have the same privilege. Come to God weary him until he blesses you &c we are entitled to the same blessings” ([recorded in Willard Richards Pocket Companion, 78–79] cited in *The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph*, comp. Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook [1980], 15).

- President Spencer W. Kimball (1895–1985) similarly taught that we must put great effort into our prayers and that we must pray frequently:

“Do you get answers to your prayers? If not, perhaps you did not pay the price. Do you offer a few trite words and worn-out phrases, or do you talk intimately to the Lord? Do you pray occasionally when you should be praying regularly, often, constantly? Do you offer pennies to pay heavy debts when you should give dollars to erase that obligation?”

“When you pray, do you just speak, or do you also listen? Your Savior said, ‘Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.’ (Rev. 3:20.)

“. . . Should we ever fail to get an answer to our prayers, we must look into our lives for a reason” (“Prayer,” *New Era*, Mar. 1978, 17).

Ether 2:7–12. “A Land of Promise”

- Ether 2:8–11 states what Moroni called “the everlasting decree of God” (v. 10) concerning this land of promise. Stated three or four times, this decree is that “whatsoever nation shall possess [this land] shall serve God, or they shall be swept off” (v. 9).

President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008) taught that obedience is essential if the promised land is to keep its promised blessings: “Great are the promises concerning this land of America. We are told unequivocally that it ‘is a choice land, and whatsoever nation shall possess it shall be free from bondage, and from captivity, and from all other nations under heaven, if they will but serve the God of the land, who is Jesus Christ’ (Ether 2:12). This is the crux of the entire matter—obedience to the commandments of God” (in Conference Report, Oct. 2001, 89; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2001, 73).

ETHER 2:7–12

Compare Ether 2:7–12 with 2 Nephi 1:6–10. List the promises and the warnings given to the inhabitants of the Americas.

Ether 2:14. The Lord Chastened the Brother of Jared

- In modern revelation the Lord taught, “Whom I love I also chasten that their sins may be forgiven, for with the chastisement I prepare a way for their deliverance in all things out of temptation, and I have loved you” (D&C 95:1). Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles commented on the strength of character it takes to endure chastening: “It is difficult to imagine what a three-hour rebuke from the Lord might be like, but the brother of Jared endured it. With immediate repentance and prayer, this prophet again sought guidance for the journey they had been assigned and those who were to pursue it. God accepted his repentance and lovingly gave further direction for their crucial mission” (*Christ and the New Covenant* [1997], 15).

- Elder Neal A. Maxwell (1926–2004) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles explained that God loves those whom He chastens: “The Lord is truly there to chastise those whom He loves, including the spiritually preeminent. The Brother of Jared for too long had failed to pray (see Ether 2:14). Even the good can become careless without the Lord’s being there to chasten. Later, the chastened Brother of Jared saw Christ! (see Ether 3:13–16)” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1987, 37; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1987, 31).

Ether 2:19–3:6. Obtaining Light Was a Growing Experience

- Elder Robert D. Hales of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles compared the experience of the brother of Jared to our own experiences:

“These vessels had no light. This concerned the brother of Jared. He did not want his family to make their journey in darkness; and so, rather than waiting to be commanded, he took his concern to the Lord. ‘And the Lord said unto the brother of Jared: What will ye that I should do that ye may have light in your vessels?’ [Ether 2:23].

“The brother of Jared’s answer to this question required diligent effort on his part. He climbed Mount Shelem ‘and did molten out of a rock sixteen small stones’ [Ether 3:1]. He then asked the Lord to touch those stones so that they would bring forth light.



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“As parents and leaders, we must remember that ‘it is not meet that [the Lord] should command in all things’ [D&C 58:26]. Like the brother of Jared, we must

carefully consider the needs of our family members, make a plan to meet those needs, and then take our plan to the Lord in prayer. This will require faith and effort on our part, but He will help us as we seek His assistance and do His will” (in Conference Report, Apr. 2003, 15; or *Ensign*, May 2003, 16).

- The Lord wants us to grow and learn as we make our own decisions. He also wants us to take our conclusions to Him frequently for His confirmation. When the brother of Jared asked the Lord about the matter of light for the vessels, the Lord answered with a question of His own: “What will ye that I should do that ye may have light in your vessels?” (Ether 2:23). According to President Harold B. Lee (1899–1973), the Lord’s question was similar to saying the following:

“‘Well, have you any good ideas? What would you suggest that we should do in order to have light?’ . . .

“Then the Lord went away and left him alone. It was as though the Lord were saying to him, ‘Look, I gave you a mind to think with, and I gave you agency to use it. Now you do all you can to help yourself with this problem; and then, after you’ve done all you can, I’ll step in to help you.’”

After considering the possibilities, the brother of Jared demonstrated his great faith by asking the Lord to touch 16 stones and supply light. The Lord answered this plea and not only provided light for the vessels but gave this faithful man a vision unlike any other.

President Lee concluded: “This is the principle in action. If you want the blessing, don’t just kneel down and pray about it. Prepare yourselves in every conceivable way you can in order to make yourselves worthy to receive the blessing you seek” (*Stand Ye in Holy Places* [1974], 243–44).

Ether 2:22–23. Prayer Requires Effort

- It has often been said that we should pray as if everything depends on the Lord and work as if everything depends on us. Elder Russell M. Nelson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles said that he has often heard President Gordon B. Hinckley say, “I don’t know how to get anything done except getting on my knees and pleading for help and then getting on my

feet and going to work” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1997, 18; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1997, 16).

- Elder Bruce R. McConkie (1915–85) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles explained that the Lord requires us to use our agency as we seek His help. Regarding the brother of Jared’s experience, Elder McConkie said: “The Lord talked to him about it a little and then he said this: ‘What will ye that I should do that ye may have light in your vessels?’ (Ether 2:23.) In effect, ‘What are you asking me for? This is something you should have solved.’ And he talked a little more, and he repeated in essence the question: ‘What will ye that I should prepare for you that ye may have light when ye are swallowed up in the depths of the sea?’ (Ether 2:25.) In other words, ‘Moriantumer, this is your problem. Why are you troubling me? I’ve given you your agency; you are endowed with capacity and ability. Get out and solve the problem.’” (“Agency or Inspiration?” *New Era*, Jan. 1975, 40–41).

Ether 3:1–5. “Behold, O Lord, Thou Canst Do This”

- Elder Jeffrey R. Holland spoke about the childlike, simple faith that the brother of Jared showed when he said, “Behold, O Lord, thou canst do this” (Ether 3:5): “Surely God, as well as the reader, feels something very striking in the childlike innocence and fervor of this man’s faith. *‘Behold, O Lord, thou canst do this.’* Perhaps there is no more powerful, single line of faith spoken by man in scripture. It is almost as if he is encouraging God, emboldening him, reassuring him. Not ‘Behold, O Lord, I am sure that thou canst do this.’ Not ‘Behold, O Lord, thou hast done many greater things than this.’ However uncertain the prophet is about his own ability, he has *no* uncertainty about God’s power. There is nothing here but a single, clear, bold, and assertive declaration with no hint or element of vacillation. It is encouragement to Him who needs no encouragement but who surely must have been touched by it. ‘Behold, O Lord, thou canst do this’” (“Rending the Veil of Unbelief,” in *Nurturing Faith through the Book of Mormon: The 24th Annual Sidney B. Sperry Symposium* [1995], 12).

ETHER 3:6–16

Examine these verses and determine what the brother of Jared learned about the Savior from his vision. List in your notes what you learn.

Ether 3:15. “Never Have I Showed Myself unto Man”

- Elder Jeffrey R. Holland discussed six possible explanations for Jesus’s statement that He had never shown Himself to man prior to showing Himself to the brother of Jared:

“One possibility is that this is simply a comment made in the context of one dispensation and as such applies only to the people of Jared and Jaredite prophets—that Jehovah had never before revealed himself to one of their seers and revelators. . . .

“Another suggestion is that the reference to ‘man’ is the key to this passage, suggesting that the Lord had never revealed himself to the unsanctified, to the nonbeliever, to temporal, earthy, natural man. The implication is that only those who have put off the natural man [and are] sanctified (such as Adam, Enoch, and now the brother of Jared)—are entitled to this privilege [see D&C 67:10–11].

“Some believe that the Lord meant he had never before revealed himself to man in that degree or to that extent. This theory suggests that divine appearances to earlier prophets had not been with the same ‘fulness,’ that never before had the veil been lifted to give such a complete revelation of Christ’s nature and being.



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“A further possibility is that this is the first time Jehovah had appeared and identified himself as Jesus Christ, the Son of God, with the interpretation of the passage being ‘never have I showed myself [as

Jesus Christ] unto man whom I have created.’ That possibility is reinforced by one way of reading Moroni’s later editorial comment: ‘Having this perfect knowledge

of God, he could not be kept from within the veil; therefore he saw *Jesus*.’

“Yet another interpretation of this passage is that the faith of the brother of Jared was so great he saw not only the *spirit* finger and body of the premortal Jesus (which presumably many other prophets had also seen) but also some distinctly more revealing aspect of Christ’s body of flesh, blood, and bone. . . .

“A final explanation—and in terms of the brother of Jared’s faith the most persuasive one—is that Christ was saying to the brother of Jared, ‘Never have I showed myself unto man *in this manner, without my volition, driven solely by the faith of the beholder*.’ As a rule, prophets are *invited* into the presence of the Lord, are bidden to enter his presence by him and only with his sanction. The brother of Jared, on the other hand, seems to have thrust himself through the veil, not as an unwelcome guest but perhaps technically as an uninvited one. Said Jehovah, ‘Never has man come before me with such exceeding faith as thou hast; for were it not so ye could not have seen my finger. . . . Never has man believed in me as thou hast.’ Obviously the Lord himself was linking unprecedented faith with this unprecedented vision. If the vision itself was not unique, then it had to be the faith and how the vision was obtained that was so unparalleled. The only way that faith could be so remarkable was its ability to take the prophet, uninvited, where others had been able to go only with God’s bidding” (*Christ and the New Covenant*, 21–23).

Ether 3:23–24, 28. Two Stones of King Mosiah

- The Prophet Joseph Smith used the same Urim and Thummim that was “given to the brother of Jared upon the mount, when he talked with the Lord face to face” (D&C 17:1). President Joseph Fielding Smith wrote a brief history regarding the Urim and Thummim:

“King Mosiah possessed ‘two stones which were fastened into the two rims of a bow,’ called by the Nephites *Interpreters*, with which he translated the Jaredite record [Mosiah 28:11–14], and these were handed down from generation to generation *for the purposes of interpreting languages*. How Mosiah came into possession of these *two stones* or Urim and

Thummim the record does not tell us, more than to say that it was a ‘gift from God’ [Mosiah 21:28]. Mosiah had this *gift* or Urim and Thummim *before* the people of Limhi discovered the record of Ether. They may have been received when the ‘large stone’ was brought to Mosiah with engravings upon it, which he interpreted by the ‘gift and power of God’ [Omni 1:20–21]. They may have been given to him, or to some other prophet before his day, just as the Brother of Jared received them—from the Lord.

“That the Urim and Thummim, or two stones, given to the Brother of Jared were those in the possession of Mosiah appears evident from Book of Mormon teachings. The Brother of Jared was commanded to seal up his writings of the vision he had when Christ appeared to him, so that they could not be read by his people. . . . The Urim and Thummim were also sealed up so that they could not be used for the purpose of interpreting those sacred writings of this vision, until such time as the Lord should grant to man to interpret them. When they were to be revealed, they were to be interpreted by the aid of the *same* Urim and Thummim [Ether 3:21–28]. . . .

“Joseph Smith received with the *breastplate* and the plates of the Book of Mormon, the Urim and Thummim, which were hid up by Moroni to come forth in the last days as a means by which the ancient record might be translated, which Urim and Thummim were given to the Brother of Jared [D&C 17:1]” (*Doctrines of Salvation*, 3:223–25).

Ether 3:25; 4:1–7. The Sealed Portion of the Book of Mormon

- Moroni wrote that the brother of Jared (Moriancumer) recorded in his vision all the inhabitants of the earth from beginning to end (see Ether 3:25; see also Ether 2:13). This vision reveals “all things from the foundation of the world unto the end thereof” (2 Nephi 27:10). Moroni explained that “there never were greater things made manifest” than what the



brother of Jared saw (Ether 4:4). We know that Moroni sealed a copy of this vision with the plates he delivered to Joseph Smith (see Ether 4:5; 5:1). Moroni further informed us of the conditions the Lord indicated must exist for this sealed portion of the record to come forth. The scriptures indicate we must repent; exercise faith in the Lord, like the brother of Jared did; and become sanctified (see Ether 4:6–7).

Ether 5. Directions to the Prophet Joseph Smith

- Moroni held “the keys of the record of the stick of Ephraim” (D&C 27:5). In Ether 5, Moroni addressed the future translator of the Book of Mormon, even though nearly 14 centuries would elapse before the Prophet Joseph Smith would read his words.

Ether 5. Testimony of the Witnesses

- Ether 5:2 refers to those “that ye [Joseph Smith] may show the plates unto,” specifically the Eight Witnesses. Verses 3–4 refer to “three” who would see the plates “by the power of God,” which is a specific reference to the Three Witnesses of the Book of Mormon. Verse 4 also states that the word “shall stand as a testimony,” showing that the Book of Mormon itself is a witness. This same verse also shows that the Godhead are witnesses of the Book of Mormon.

Ether 5:2–4 specifically refers to the Three Witnesses of the Book of Mormon. In June of 1829 the Prophet Joseph Smith received a revelation “that three special witnesses would be designated. See Ether 5:2–4; also 2 Nephi 11:3 and 27:12. Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, and Martin Harris were moved upon by an inspired desire to be the three special witnesses” (D&C 17 section heading). We have the testimony of the Three Witnesses in the introductory pages of the Book of Mormon. Of these Three Witnesses, Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles stated:

“The solemn written testimony of three witnesses to what they saw and heard—two of them simultaneously and the third almost immediately thereafter—is entitled to great weight. Indeed, we know that upon the testimony of one witness great miracles have been

claimed and accepted by many religious people, and in the secular world the testimony of one witness has been deemed sufficient for weighty penalties and judgments.

“Persons experienced in evaluating testimony commonly consider a witness’s opportunity to observe an event and the possibility of his bias on the subject. Where different witnesses give identical testimony about the same event, skeptics look for evidence of collusion among them or for other witnesses who could contradict them.

“Measured against all of these possible objections, the testimony of the Three Witnesses to the Book of Mormon stands forth in great strength. Each of the three had ample reason and opportunity to renounce his testimony if it had been false or to equivocate on details if any had been inaccurate. As is well known, because of disagreements or jealousies involving other leaders of the Church, each one of these three witnesses was excommunicated from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints by about eight years after the publication of their testimony. All three went their separate ways, with no common interest to support a collusive effort. Yet to the end of their lives—periods ranging from 12 to 50 years after their excommunications—not one of these witnesses deviated from his published testimony or said anything that cast any shadow on its truthfulness.

“Furthermore, their testimony stands uncontradicted by any other witnesses. Reject it one may, but how does one explain three men of good character uniting and persisting in this published testimony to the end of their lives in the face of great ridicule and other personal disadvantage? Like the Book of Mormon itself, there is no better explanation than is given in the testimony itself, the solemn statement of good and honest men who told what they saw. . . .

“. . . Witnesses are important, and the testimony of the Three Witnesses to the Book of Mormon is impressive and reliable” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1999, 46, 49; or *Ensign*, May 1999, 35–37).

ETHER 5

What does this chapter teach about the law of witnesses and the Three Witnesses to the Book of Mormon?

Points to Ponder

- Why do you think Moroni included the abridgment of Ether in the Book of Mormon for us to read?
- Even though the brother of Jared was and is renowned for his faithfulness, why was he still chastised by the Lord? How can we apply this to our lives?
- What lessons did the brother of Jared learn regarding what the Lord expects of us when we ask Him questions?
- How can the testimonies of the Three Witnesses to the Book of Mormon strengthen your own witness?

Suggested Assignments

- Think about a problem you currently struggle with. Using the pattern the brother of Jared used to solve his dilemma, apply the same principles as you work out your own situation. How will you apply these principles to solve your problem?
- Reflect on the strength of your prayers by rating your answers to the following questions. (*Caution:* This scale is personal and should be treated confidentially.)

How Are Your Prayers?

On a scale of 1–10, how do you rate your personal prayers? (1 being the lowest, and 10 being the highest):

Are they sincere enough?	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Are they long enough?	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Are they frequent enough?	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Are they supported by obedience?	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Do I listen for answers after I finish speaking?	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Do I commune with the Lord instead of just talking to Him?	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10