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A More Exact Jaredite Chronology

Author(s): Jerry D. Grover, Jr.

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Chapter 6

A More Exact Jaredite Chronology

Having established a basic chronology above, we can further refine it by estimating the lengths of the reigns of the various Jaredite kings, based on the information given about them in the Book of Ether. The resulting chronology can then be confirmed and further developed by comparing it with major developments in Olmec settlement, as detailed by the archaeological record.

In the Book of Ether, the passing of kingship from father to son appears to follow the pattern of the last-born son receiving the kingship. This pattern began with the first generation, when Jared₁ and his brother approached old age; none of the sons of the brother of Jared would accept the role, which was also rejected by all of Jared's sons, except the youngest, Orihah (Ether 6:14, 21–27). Further in the record of Ether, there were six older sons who rebelled against their predecessors (Ether 7:4, 14–16; 8:2–3; 10:3, 13–14; 11:4) and 10 sons, who were born in the king's "old age," who replaced their fathers (Ether 7:3, 7, 10, 26; 8:1; 9:14, 23–25; 10:4, 13–16; 11:4).

Another factor affecting the ages of the youngest sons in relation to the father is polygyny (one man with multiple wives). Jared₁ had 12 children, and his brother had 22 children (Ether 6:20). Orihah had 31 children, 23 of whom were sons (Ether 7:2). Many kings are said to have had "many sons and daughters" (Ether 7:12, 14; 9:21; 10:17). King Riplakish had "many wives and concubines" (Ether 10:5), and Jaredite men in general had "wives and children" (Ether 14:2).

Given this information, it is possible to at least estimate the chronology of the two separate Jaredite time periods, with a few assumptions. In order to attempt an estimate, the following assumptions will be made:

1. A descendant king takes the throne at an average age of 15 (if he were much younger than that, he may not have been capable of retaining the throne, given the Jaredite propensity for violent usurpation by older brothers).
2. The death ages of the kings are assumed as follows unless otherwise indicated in the text:
 - a) Unless otherwise indicated, the age of death is 70.
 - b) When the terms "good old age" or "old age" are used, the age of death is 80.
 - c) When the term "exceedingly old" is used, the age of death is 90.
 - d) If an individual was held entirely in captivity (which could cause a shortened lifespan based on poor treatment) or there was reference to a shorter life, then a "reign" of 35 years is assumed. An exception was made for Coriantor, since a variety of events occurred while he was in captivity.
3. On average there are no time elapses between the death of the old king and the ascendancy of the new king.
4. Where any age or reign is listed in the text, the years are adjusted to the 260-day calendar
5. For Seth, since the text indicates his days were short, it is assumed he died at 55.
6. Jared₁ and the brother of Jared were assumed to be 45 years old when they departed; the actual departure date is approximately 2650 BC

These initial date assumptions are not out of line with known ages of Maya kings:

Elites tended to have longer life spans because they had access to better quality food and they didn't wear their lives out with physically taxing work the way non-elites did. We only have data for both the birth dates and death dates of 17 Classic period Maya rulers, and their average age at death is 64.7 years. Some of the longest lived Maya kings were

Itzamnaaj B'alam II of Yaxchilan was between 94.8 and 98.5 years old when he died, Calakmul's king Yukno'om the Great lived to be 85, Chan Imix K'awiil of Copan was about 83 when he died, a ruler of El Cayo named Chak Lakamtuum lived to 82, K'inich Janaab' Pakal from Palenque was 80, Aj Wosal of Naranjo was at least 78, and K'an Joy Chitam (also from Palenque) lived until he was 74. (Wright 2016)

One permutation of these assumptions is that, often, the “kings” listed were in captivity, so it would not be necessary for their offspring to be of sufficient age to defend the throne. This would provide for a longer term for that particular king. That may be offset by the death of a king earlier than the estimate.

With the parameters establishing that the Jaredites departed prior to 2500 BC, and the radiometric dating of the Heth and Shiblom volcanic events and other corollary evidence and events discussed elsewhere, it is possible to establish a reasonable Jaredite chronology. Given these parameters, table 3 identifies the Jaredite calendar timeline, showing the years passed to the end of a particular king's reign.

Table 3. Calculated Jaredite Chronology Framework

<u>King/Ruler</u>	<u>Length of Reign</u>	<u>Calendar Dates</u>	<u>Significant Correlative Event(s) during Reign</u>
<i>First Chronological Period</i>			
Jaredite Departure		2651 BC	
Jared	55 years	2651–2596 BC	Great tower, arrival in the New World
Orihah	65 years	2596–2531 BC	“days were exceedingly many”
Kib	75 years	2531–2456 BC	“exceedingly old”; land of Moron and city of Nehor first mentioned
Shule	55 years	2456–2401 BC	Shule was begat in Kib's old age; land of first inheritance first referred to; idolatry mentioned; swords made by Shule at hill of Ephraim
Omer	65 years	2401–2336 BC	“began to be old”; begat Emer in old age; anointed Emer king and died two years later; secret oaths/combinations first mentioned; population reduced to 30 persons plus the house of Omer
Emer	55 years	2336–2281 BC	In 62 years (44 years adjusted), people prospered; Coriantum anointed and died two years later; elephants, cureloms, and cumoms; saw Son of Righteousness
Coriantum	86 years	2281–2195 BC	“exceedingly old”; lived 142 years (101 years adjusted), did build many mighty cities
Com	35 years	2195–2160 BC	Reigned 49 years (35 years adjusted)
Heth	30 years	2160–2130 BC	Great dearth; serpents died in famine; multiple volcano eruptive events (2070–2130 BC)

Shiblom	35 years	750–715 BC	Calamity in the land; great destruction such a one never had been known in all the land; famines and pestilences; Shiblom slain; multiple volcano eruptive events
Seth	35 years	715–680 BC	In captivity
Ahah	20 years	680–660 BC	“few were his days”
Ethem	55 years	660–605 BC	
Moron	55 years	605–550 BC	
Coriantor	55 years	550–495 BC	In captivity
Ether	55 years	495–440 BC	

Gardner (2015) has argued for a shorter timeframe for the Jaredites—a total of 900 years, with an average reign of 30 years—based on the length of reigns of some known Maya kings, with no gap years between Riplakish and Morionton. Sorenson has indicated a span of 2,000 to 2,300 years (Sorenson 2013). Sorenson did not provide the methodology behind his most recent estimation, so comparisons of his method in that work is not possible. In a previous work, he did identify a Jaredite chronology starting in 3100 BC and extending to 570 BC (Sorenson 1969). In that 1969 work, he included a gap period of 100 years and, of necessity, gave many kings lifespans well beyond 100 years. Palmer (1982) also proposes a Jaredite chronology, extending from 2700 BC to 600 BC, assuming reigns of 70 years and a gap period of 130 years.

It is important to note that the chronology in table 3 is a calculated framework based on known volcanic events as well as a known departure date range.

Discussion of Mesoamerican Archaeological Correlation with the Calculated Jaredite Chronology

The First Jaredite Chronological Period

The first Jaredite chronological period in the New World is 2600–2023 BC. Based on the description given for the founding Jaredite group, consisting of 24 individuals (Ether 6:16), it is not likely that there would be any archaeological evidence found for this initial group. If one assumes a standard annual population growth rate for ancient peoples of 1.25 percent per year, within 200 years, a population of 287 people would be expected. After 200 years (2400 BC), there is mention of a couple of “lands,” one city, and an “army” raised by an individual dissident exile (Ether 8:6). The word “army” is not mentioned again in the Book of Ether until the time of Morionton (Ether 10:9), which was in 1420 BC.

While one should not read too much into this terminology in relation to size (an early city may just be an agricultural village or hamlet, and an army could be only 100 people or so), it does seem very probable that the Jaredite group at this point was involving other native populations, since an “army” was raised by an exiled dissident.

According to our timeline, in 2401–2336 BC, the Jaredite population was reduced through warfare to 30 persons, plus Omer and his family with whom he escaped, so perhaps 50 to 60 people were left. Shortly thereafter, from 2336–2281 BC, the “house of Emer” prospered agriculturally and utilized some domesticated or semi-domesticated animals. From 2281–2195 BC, “many mighty cities” were built as the people began to spread over “all the face of the land.” Again, using average population growth rates, over roughly 120 years, a population that started with 60 people would be expected to grow to 266 people. As indicated previously, the reference made to population

growth and population centers indicates there was an increase in the local indigenous population, over which the Jaredites maybe exerted some political influence. Again, these areas were likely agriculturally based hamlets or villages.

In 2160–2130 BC, there was a severe famine in which the “inhabitants were destroyed exceedingly fast” (Ether 9:30). No mention is made of the surviving population after the famine, however, and from 2130–2055 BC, many cities were built up “on the face of the land,” and people “began to spread all over the face of the land.” The fairly short period of recovery time in which cities were built indicates again that the size of a city from the perspective of the Jaredite record-keeper was quite different from modern perceptions or even later Jaredite perspectives. The text itself is indicative of limited population centers.

From 2055–2023 BC, during Riplakish’s reign, he built an “exceedingly beautiful throne,” levied taxes, and built many tax prisons (Ether 10). The people rebelled and waged war, and Riplakish was killed and his descendants driven “out of the land.” Though there was some higher level of cultural sophistication in the beginning, it appears that the ensuing war was still a tribal family affair. To this point in the Book of Ether, the only lands mentioned were Nehor and Moron, so it can be assumed that the geographic area was still quite limited, probably encompassing or in close proximity to the area of the Tuxtla Mountains.

In Mesoamerican archaeology this period falls into the Archaic Period (ca. 3500–2000 BC). During the Archaic Period agriculture was developed in the region and permanent villages were established. Late in this era, use of pottery and loom weaving became common and class divisions began to appear. Many of the basic technologies of Mesoamerica such as stone-grinding, drilling, pottery making, etc., were established during this period.

In the area of the Olmec, excavations at San Andres (near later La Venta) indicate domestication of manioc in 4600 BC, and in 2500 BC, people were practicing a mixed economy of foraging and farming, with the domestication of maize, sunflowers, and cotton; they presumably used canoes, weapons, digging sticks, net baskets, and ritual objects fashioned from wood or other objects (Diehl 2004, 24). Although this archaeological period is largely ignored, in the Tuxtlas, pollen of plants indicative of agriculture has been dated to 2880 BC. The Mesoamerican archaeological record is generally consistent with the limited description found in the Book of Ether.

Gap Period

The gap in the Jaredite record occurs in the time period encompassing 2023–1420 BC. All that is known about this period is that no primary king was in power (at least none is mentioned) and that at the end of the period there existed “many cities.” The Olmec archaeological record indicates, depending on the archaeologist consulted, that the Olmec culture started between 1450 BC and no later than 1250 BC.

In the Coatzacoalcos River basin, 105 sites have been identified with Ojochi and Bajío ceramic phases (ca. 1750–1450 BC). The earliest occupation identified at San Lorenzo was 1800 BC (Cyphers et al. 2014, 73). More than three-quarters of these sites are clustered within 90 kilometers of San Lorenzo (Pool 2007, 125).

The Second Chronological Period

1420–1065 BC

In the Jaredite chronology, the period of 1420–1065 BC starts with Morionton and an army of outcasts giving battle “unto the people.” Morionton gained power over many cities, and then, over the space of many years, gained power over all the land and made himself king (Ether 10:9). During this period many cities were built, and the people became rich in buildings and other worldly goods, and the people “did prosper in the land” (Ether 10:16). During this period there continued familial vying for political control by force.

The archaeological evidence in the Olmec heartland for this period mirrors the Book of Mormon description. San Lorenzo grew from 1400 BC until its demise in 1000 BC (Cheetham and Blomster 2017, 16), as did the regional settlements, with the total area of permanent settlement increasing 10 fold (Pool 2007, 126). At Laguna de los Cerros and the Upper San Juan Basin, prior to 1400 BC, settlement was sparse. Laguna de los Cerros was founded sometime between 1400 BC and 1200 BC. Settlement densities increased drastically after 1400 BC, reaching 35 settlements by 1200 BC and 153 settlements by 1000 BC (Pool 2007, 128). Some local settlements also existed in the La Venta area as well.

1065–750 BC

In the Jaredite chronology, the period of 1065–750 BC starts with Lib₁ building a “great city” near the narrow neck where the sea divides the land. By some mechanism, poisonous serpents that had infested the area for a thousand years were killed, opening up a hunting area in the adjacent land southward. Initially the whole face of the land northward was covered with inhabitants. There were a variety of products manufactured including “all manner of fine work,” “all manner of cloth,” agricultural tools, and “all manner of work of exceedingly curious workmanship.” During the latter part of this period there was conflict, war, robbers, and changes in kingship.

The archaeological evidence in the Olmec heartland for this period mirrors the Book of Mormon description. The florescence of the city of La Venta is dated from 1000 BC to 400 BC (Pool 2007, 158). The city of Tres Zapotes was founded sometime in the centuries before 1000 BC and emerged as a regional center early in the Middle Formative Period, perhaps 900–800 BC, roughly coinciding with the decline of San Lorenzo Tenochtitlan. San Lorenzo experienced its serious demise around 1000 BC, as did the San Juan River Basin, where Laguna de los Cerros was located, which continued through the end of the Middle Formative Period (1000–400 BC). All that remained of San Lorenzo was a medium-sized village, and the regional population fell by nearly 92%. In the adjacent San Juan River Basin, the number of identified inhabited sites fell by 63% (Pool 2007, 152). Military conflict is one of the suspected causes of the decline of San Lorenzo (Diehl 2004).

750–400 BC

In the Jaredite chronology, for the period of 750–400 BC, the first decades included an “exceedingly great war,” followed by pestilence, famine, and a “great destruction.” The next three centuries included ongoing political and military conflict within and between kingdoms, which resulted in the final great civil war, which led to the destruction of the Jaredite nation. A king named Moron arose during the middle of this period, whose name perhaps makes reference to the early land of Moron.

The archaeological evidence in the Olmec heartland for this period mirrors the Book of Mormon description. San Lorenzo continued its demise, as did the San Juan River Basin. During the middle of the period, the population migrated to the outskirts of Tres Zapotes and La Venta. At the end of the period, La Venta (along with San Lorenzo and the rest of the Olmec heartland area) was also essentially abandoned. Tres Zapotes is not abandoned in 400 BC, but over the next few centuries, cultural changes result in the Olmec remnant Epi-Olmec culture.

The calculated Jaredite chronology outlined in table 3 corresponds well with the Olmec archaeological chronology.