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The Book of Mormon—The Jaredite People

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Lesson Department

Theology and Testimony

(First Week in June)

BOOK OF MORMON—THE JAREDITE PEOPLE

Assignment

Read the "Book of Ether" in the *Book of Mormon*. It will help you to acquire clear ideas on the subject if you read also what is said in the *Dictionary of the Book of Mormon* about Jared, his brother, and Ether; and chapters six and seven in the *Message and Characters of the Book of Mormon*, also the story of the Jaredites as told in this last reference, pages 40-44.

Outline

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- II. Conditions in the New World.
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 2. About the pre-earth life.

3. About political government.
4. About the land of America.

The Story

The story opens in Babylon, about four thousand years ago. It was after the Great Flood, of which the *Bible* tells us, when Noah and his family were saved.

For some reason—maybe fear from another flood—the people in Babylon erected a high tower. The Lord, however, we are informed, confounded their language, so that they were unable to understand one another. This is why it is now called the Tower of Babel—which means confusion.

In Babylon were the families of two brothers—Jared and Moriancumr. At Jared's request Moriancumr prayed for the Lord to allow them to retain their language, and then to permit their friends to retain theirs also; finally he prayed that God would lead them all to another place. All these prayers were granted.

Presently this small colony was led to the land which we now call America. They crossed the great ocean in eight barges, or ships, which they made for the purpose under the guidance of the Lord. On landing here they formed a government—a kingdom it turned out to be before the death of the brothers.

Here the Jaredites lived as a nation for about fourteen hundred years—that is, from around 2000 B. C. to about 600 B. C. They had a great many kings during this period; they cultivated agriculture,

built houses, smelted ore, and even had a process, it seems, of making glass; and they carried on a government and a religion. Also they exercised the same virtues and human weaknesses, privately and publicly, as people have done before them and since. Prophets arose to warn them of impending calamities if they persisted in sin. One of these was Ether, who also made a history of his people from the beginning.

The end of this nation was very dramatic—for they did not heed the warnings of their prophet. Civil war broke out over the question as to who should be king—Coriantumr or Shiz. The whole nation—men, women, and children—was arrayed in battle on one side or the other; and they fought till only the two aspirants for the kingship remained alive to carry on the battle. In the end Coriantumr cut off the head of Shiz, and then wandered about till he ran into the Mulekites, who had not been in the land very long. To them he told the sad tale of the decline and destruction of his people. It is probably the only instance—certainly it is the clearest case—of the suicide of a nation.

Notes

1. *The Pre-earth Life*: In the record of the Jaredite nation we get the clearest view of the pre-earth existence to be found in sacred literature.

While the Jaredite colony was yet in the wilderness of the Old World, Jesus Christ appeared in spirit-form to Moriancumr. This was, of course, before his incarnation in the flesh. The brother of Jared gathered from this vision that the spirit is in the form of the body, that the spirits of all men had a pre-earth life, and that the spirit itself is a spiritual tabernacle. It is one of the greatest revelations ever given

to any mortal. You will find it in chapter 3 of "Ether."

2. *The Land of America*: Another idea of great significance concerns the continent we have come to call America.

To the Jaredites, as to the Nephites after them, it was the Land of Promise, just as Palestine was to the Israelites. It was a place peculiarly blessed of God, dedicated as a land of freedom. Over and over again is this idea stated in the *Book of Mormon*, especially in the "Book of Ether." But it was to be a free country, politically, socially, and religiously, only on certain conditions. These conditions are thus stated by Moroni, and he sets them down mainly for the benefit of those who should read the Nephite record in our time:

"Behold, this is a land which is choice above all other lands; wherefore he that doth possess it shall serve God or be swept off. * * * 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."

Here is a patriotic view of America, the like of which has never been expressed elsewhere in any literature, and it furnishes a splendid background for what Nephi the First says about its discovery in modern times, about God fighting on the side of the "Gentiles who had been separated from the mother country," and also for what our own prophet says concerning the inspiration of the Constitution of the United States.

3. *The Two Brothers*: In Jared and Moriancumr we have two very remarkable characters.

In one respect they are alike—they both have supreme faith in God. But in all other respects they

are different. Jared is a leader in matters that belong to the material world; Moriancumr, in things of the spirit. This is clear from all details we have in that swift narrative, the "Book of Ether."

Jared it is who sees that the small group of believers can do nothing unless they have the same language, that it would be useless for them to remain in the old home, and, after their arrival in the Promised Land, that the people ought to have their say as to the form of government they are to have, even if that is to be an unlimited monarchy. But he has enough faith in God to request his brother to find out from Him just what to do in each of these situations. For generally it is at his request that information comes to the colony through Moriancumr.

Moriancumr, on the other hand, was highly spiritual in his nature. He was what we would call today "psychic." That is, he was more susceptible to spiritual truth than most persons—specifically, than his brother Jared. He therefore became a medium between Jared and God. Indeed, he was one of the most spiritually susceptible men of whom we have any record. Said Jesus to him on the occasion of his visitation to him, "Never have I showed myself unto man whom I have created, for never has man believed in me as thou hast." And Moroni comments—"Because of the knowledge of this man, he could not be kept from beholding within the veil."

4. *Moroni and Ether*: In the reading of the "Book of Ether" extreme care must be exercised to distinguish between what the prophet Ether says and what the translator Moroni adds by way of comment.

Usually a translator sticks to his text; he does not make any comments on what he is translating; and if he deems it necessary to do that,

he puts his notes at the bottom of the page, instead of in with the matter he is translating. That, at least, is what Moroni would do today. But this is not what he does in his rendering of the history of the Jaredites on the plates before him. And sometimes these comments are both long and valuable. It is as if Moroni were translating for a reader who has to have things pointed out to him, so that he will be sure not to miss anything. Or, possibly, it is because he realizes that he is boiling down his narrative to such an extent as to make it hard to follow. At any rate, it becomes necessary to discriminate between the text translated and the notes of the translator.

5. *A Bit of Evidence*: Moroni's part in the composition of the *Book of Mormon* is extremely varied. This is what he gives us—(1) The rest of the history of his people; (2) a translation and abridgment of the record of the Jaredites, in the "Book of Ether;" (3) some letters from his father to himself, while the war between the Nephites and the Lamanites was in progress, thus giving us a first-hand account of events he did not see; and (4) the exact wording of some of the religious forms used in his day—baptism, for instance, and the Lord's supper.

This is exactly as it would be, if we take into consideration the circumstances under which Moroni wrote his part of the book. Had Joseph Smith been imagining all this, it would most likely have been different. There would not, one would think, be so many after-thoughts. As it is, there is what the teachers of English call "verisimilitude" especially striking in this part of the narrative. We get from a reading of this section of the *Book of Mormon*, that is, a sense of reality which we could not get if

Joseph Smith had made it all up instead of giving an actual situation.

If, therefore, the *Book of Mormon* be a work of fiction as unbelievers would have us think, then the Prophet must have had a most vivid imagination to have sensed so clearly a situation so realistic as the one Moroni is supposed to have been in. For, considering the conditions, Moroni does exactly what he must do under the circumstances.

Questions

1. Tell briefly the story of the Jaredites from the time of the tower till the end of the nation.
2. Compare and contrast the

downfall of the Jaredites and that of the Nephites. What appears to have been the cause in each case?

3. Make two lists of famous characters in religion—one that might be headed by Jared and another that might be headed by Moriancumr. One might begin with Joseph Smith and Brigham Young, for instance.

4. Are we in any way influenced in our conduct by the statements in the *Book of Mormon* concerning the Promised Land—its discovery, its colonization, its dedication to freedom? If so, point out this influence specifically. What is the meaning of the phrase “serve the God of the land, who is Jesus Christ”? Is America now serving the God of this land? How?

Work and Business

TEACHER'S TOPIC FOR JUNE

OUR RESPONSIBILITY TO OURSELVES

“Our education should be such as to improve our minds and fit us for increased usefulness, to make us of greater service to the human family, to enable us to improve our methods of living, speaking and thinking.”—*Brigham Young*.

“The one duty of life is to lessen every vice and enlarge every virtue by education.”—*David Swing*.

“Real education is measured by our ability to get along with others and to be interested in others rather than getting others interested in us.”—*Wiggam*.

“All love for others begins by a wise love for self.”—*Dwight Hillis*.

“The Divine Teacher asks each youth to love and make the most of himself that later on he may be

bread to the hungry, medicine to the wounded, shelter to the weak.”—*Dwight Hillis*.

We have an obligation to develop ourselves to the highest possible attainments:

I. Intellectually

By careful and systematic study. (A short time each day devoted to systematic study soon accomplishes much.)

By keeping abreast of the times and what is going on in the world, and discussing it with the family.

By taking an interest in the studies of the husband and children. (How much more interesting a husband's study becomes when he is joined in it by his wife, and how