

Comments on Ether 12

Moroni introduces us to Ether (v. 1-5), the author of the plates he is abridging and editorializing, and then gives us a rather lengthy parenthetical discussion on faith (v. 6-41). Moroni is prompted to do so because Ether's contemporaries reject him because they do not believe in things they cannot see (v. 5). He perceives that faith is essential and that if the Gentiles who receive his record choose to find fault with it rather than have charity and faith, then they will be cut off from the Lord. He is warning latter-day Gentile readers to not be like the ancient Jaredites who rejected Ether's testimony.

1 AND it came to pass that the days of Ether were in the days of Coriantumr; and Coriantumr was king over all the land. 2 And Ether was a prophet of the Lord; wherefore Ether came forth in the days of Coriantumr, and began to prophesy unto the people, for he could not be restrained because of the Spirit of the Lord which was in him. 3 For he did cry from the morning, even until the going down of the sun, exhorting the people to believe in God unto repentance lest they should be destroyed, saying unto them that by faith all things are fulfilled-- 4 wherefore, whoso believeth in God might with surety hope for a better world, yea, even a place at the right hand of God, which hope cometh of faith, maketh an anchor to the souls of men, which would make them sure and steadfast, always abounding in good works, being led to glorify God. 5 And it came to pass that Ether did prophesy great and marvelous things unto the people, which they did not believe, because they saw them not.

v1-5 Ether, the rightful heir to the throne, lived during the time that one Coriantumr was king (v. 1). Ether testified to the people with the Spirit with such strength he could not be confined (v. 2). He preached all day long, telling them to repent or be destroyed. He testified that by faith (v. 3) they can hope for a better world, which hope motivates people to good works (v. 4). But, the people do not believe his preaching because they refuse to believe in what they cannot see (v. 5). They cannot see the "better world...at the right hand of God" so they refuse to accept it.

v1 It is not explicitly stated in the text that Coriantumr is a direct descendant of the overthrowing ruler in 11:17. But, the lack of any other comments in the text about there being another overthrow suggests he is the son or grandson of that man (it is unlikely he is the same person, as generations have passed in the interceding verses). Assuming that is the case, that makes Coriantumr a descendant of the brother of Jared while Ether is a descendant of Jared. The irony is the prediction of 6:22-24 is

born out by their own descendants, and ultimately a face off between sons of the two brothers with catastrophic results. However, in this case, Ether is more spiritual than Coriantumr where in the ancient case the brother of Jared was more spiritual than Jared.

v2 "he could not be restrained", we are informed in 11:23 Ether's father Coriantor lived all of his life in captivity. We would have to assume that Ether was therefore born in captivity. But at what point does Ether escape captivity? We would assume the phrase "he could not be restrained" is informing us because of his prophetic calling and considerable faith he was delivered from the captivity that held his father. Or, perhaps it was along the lines of 3 Ne. 28:18-23. Perhaps his role as a prominent prophet made it clear he wasn't interested in the monarchy, so he wasn't held captive as a possible threat.

6 And now, I, Moroni, would speak somewhat concerning these things; I would show unto the world 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.

v6-41 Moroni editorializes on the subject of faith. His springboard is the people's rejection of Ether's testimony on account of them not being able to see this "better world" spoken of in v. 4.

v6 Moroni explicitly states he is now editorializing. He says a person has faith in things they know to be true and believe they will see, but cannot presently see. He then warns people from challenging things they cannot presently see, because the evidence supporting your faith does not come until your faith is tested and shown to be true. Faith necessarily requires the person to be willing to delay empirical evidence and yet still act as though they have it.

The issue of whether you can prove something is true or not isn't really the point. The issue is whether you behave as though something is true in the absence of easily demonstrated and comprehended empirical evidence. People are perfectly able to selectively ignore evidence when it suits their interests, so it doesn't matter if there is evidence or not. What matters is how the person behaves.

If we believe the kingdom of God is real, and behave as though it is real, then when the kingdom of God is revealed to us, probably in the afterlife for most of us, we will be ready for it and see it as the evidence of our faithful good works.

7 For it was by faith that Christ showed himself unto our fathers, after he had risen from the dead; and he showed not himself unto them until after they had faith in him; wherefore, it must needs be that some had faith in him, for he showed himself not unto the world. 8 But because of the faith of men he has shown himself unto the world, and glorified the name of the Father, and prepared a way that thereby others might be partakers of the heavenly gift, that they might hope for those things which they have not seen. 9 wherefore, ye may also have hope, and be partakers of the gift, if ye will but have faith.

v7-9 Moroni then gives the central thesis of his comments, namely that faith has always been used in the past (v. 7) and it will continue to be used in the future (v. 8-9). Note Moroni presents the past as "our fathers" (v. 7), meaning Israel, and the future as "others" (v. 8), meaning Gentiles. The covenant original was with Israel, but is now made available to all nations, whom Moroni is now addressing.

This pattern is then expanded upon considerably with more examples from the past (v. 10-21) and the plan for the Gentiles to have their faith tested in the future (v. 22-35).

10 Behold it was by faith that they of old were called after the holy order of God. 11 wherefore, by faith was the law of Moses given. But in the gift of his Son hath God prepared a more excellent way; and it is by faith that it hath been fulfilled. 12 For if there be no faith among the children of men God can do no miracle among them; wherefore, he showed not himself until after their faith.

13 Behold, it was the faith of Alma and Amulek that caused the prison to tumble to the earth.

14 Behold, it was the faith of Nephi and Lehi that wrought the change upon the Lamanites, that they were baptized with fire and with the Holy Ghost.

15 Behold, it was the faith of Ammon and his brethren which wrought so great a miracle among the Lamanites.

16 Yea, and even all they who wrought miracles wrought them by faith, even those who were before Christ and also those who were after.

17 And it was by faith that the three disciples obtained a promise that they should not taste of death; and they obtained not the promise until after their faith. 18 And neither at any time hath any wrought miracles until after their faith; wherefore they first believed in the Son of God.

19 And there were many whose faith was so exceedingly strong, even before Christ came, who could not be kept from within the veil, but truly saw with their eyes the things which they had beheld with an eye of faith, and they were glad.

20 And behold, we have seen in this record that one of these was the brother of Jared; for so great was his faith in God, that when God put forth his finger he could not hide it from the sight of the brother of Jared, because of his word

which he had spoken unto him, which word he had obtained by faith. 21 And after the brother of Jared had beheld the finger of the Lord, because of the promise which the brother of Jared had obtained by faith, the Lord could not withhold anything from his sight; wherefore he showed him all things, for he could no longer be kept without the veil.

v10-21 Moroni gives a list of various historical characters (v. 10-11) who operated by faith and accomplished a variety of miracles by it. He states that without first having faith there will be no miracle (v. 12) and then lists various people who's faith propelled them into the service of the Lord and they saw great miracles as a result (v. 13-21).

v12 "if there be no faith...God can do no miracle", I would take this to mean "will not do" as opposed to "cannot do". The Lord occasionally does public miracles in the eyes of the faithless (e.g., the plagues on Egypt prior to the Exodus, the night of light among the Leuites, Christ's appearance to Saul-Paul, etc.), so it isn't a matter of Him not being able to do them as though His ability to do things were contingent upon people's faith. It is simply a matter of Him generally not being willing to provide signs to the faithless, because it usually just hardens them more and more (cf. 3 Ne. 2:1).

What Moroni is referring to is miracles that are contingent upon people's faith, or the "witness...of your faith" which he refers to in v. 6. If the various people in v. 13-21 didn't have faith first then they would not have accomplished the great miracles they did. If Alma and Amulek had no faith then they never would have tried to preach repentance to the apostate people of Ammonihah so they never would have experienced the trials and miraculous delivery they did (v. 13). And it is the same with the examples of Nephi and Lehi (v. 14) and the sons of Mosiah (v. 15) and so on. Had these people not had the faith to propel them into the Lord's service they never would have had been tested and subsequently seen the many miracles which resulted.

This is what Moroni is talking about when he says "if there be no faith...God can do no miracle". The underlying premise Moroni is addressing is that if you refuse to believe in anything you cannot see (i.e. God as in v. 5) then you have no faith, and you will end up never doing anything for God, so you never see anything of His works. If you are carnal and reject God, you will not do godly works, so you will never see any miracles. People like this are in a self-imposed condition that verifies their notion that there are no miracles. They do not believe in miracles or in God, so they do not live a godly life, so they never see any miracles. And, even if they do see some

sign or miracle from God they just rationalize it away (cf. 1 Ne. 16:38). It's a self-fulfilling prediction.

22 And it is by faith that my fathers have obtained the promise that these things should come unto their brethren through the Gentiles; therefore the Lord hath commanded me, yea, even Jesus Christ.

23 And I said unto him: Lord, the Gentiles will mock at these things, because of our weakness in writing; for Lord thou hast made us mighty in word by faith, but thou hast not made us mighty in writing; for thou hast made all this people that they could speak much, because of the Holy Ghost which thou hast given them; 24 And thou hast made us that we could write but little, because of the awkwardness of our hands. Behold, thou hast not made us mighty in writing like unto the brother of Jared, for thou madest him that the things which he wrote were mighty even as thou art, unto the overpowering of man to read them. 25 Thou hast also made our words powerful and great, even that we cannot write them; wherefore, when we write we behold our weakness, and stumble because of the placing of our words; and I fear lest the Gentiles shall mock at our words.

26 And when I had said this, the Lord spake unto me, saying: Fools mock, but they shall mourn; and my grace is sufficient for the meek, that they shall take no advantage of your weakness; 27 And if men come unto me I will show unto them their weakness. I give unto men weakness that they may be humble; and my grace is sufficient for all men that humble themselves before me; for if they humble themselves before me, and have faith in me, then will I make weak things become strong unto them. 28 Behold, I will show unto the Gentiles their weakness, and I will show unto them that faith, hope and charity bringeth unto me--the fountain of all righteousness.

29 And I, Moroni, having heard these words, was comforted, and said: O Lord, thy righteous will be done, for I know that thou workest unto the children of men according to their faith; 30 For the brother of Jared said unto the mountain Zerin, Remove--and it was removed. And if he had not had faith it would not have moved; wherefore thou workest after men have faith. 31 For thus didst thou manifest thyself unto thy disciples; for after they had faith, and did speak in thy name, thou didst show thyself unto them in great power.

32 And I also remember that thou hast said that thou hast prepared a house for man, yea, even among the mansions of thy Father, in which man might have a more excellent hope; wherefore man must hope, or he cannot receive an inheritance in the place which thou hast prepared.

33 And again, I remember that thou hast said that thou hast loved the world, even unto the laying down of thy life for the world, that thou mightest take it again to prepare a place for the children of men. 34 And now I know that this love which thou hast had for the children of men is charity; wherefore, except men shall have charity they cannot inherit that place which thou hast prepared in the mansions of thy Father. 35 Wherefore, I

know by this thing which thou hast said, that if the Gentiles have not charity, because of our weakness, that thou wilt prove them, and take away their talent, yea, even that which they have received, and give unto them who shall have more abundantly.

v22-35 Moroni changes the subject from the ancient ones who had great faith to the future recipients of his writings. The Lehite patriarchs, Moroni's own forerunners, obtained a promise from the Lord that these writings would go to their remnants, hence the command from the Lord to write and hide up the plates (v. 22).

But Moroni laments in the weakness of his writings skills. While he can speak with power he cannot write with the same power (v. 23), unlike the brother of Jared. The brother of Jared could write things that would overpower the reader (v. 24). But Moroni fears his writing is weak and flawed, and this weakness will cause the Gentiles to disparage the book (v. 25).

The Lord responds to Moroni by pointing out only a fool would take advantage of superficial flaws to ridicule the text. Therefore, those who accept the book with meekness and do not look for faults in it will receive the Lord's grace and mercy (v. 26). It is the Lord's plan to give men weaknesses, so they will be humble before Him. And, if a man humbles himself before the Lord, He will make him strong (v. 27). The Lord says He will show the Gentiles their own weaknesses and if they pay attention to those instead of finding fault in others, like Moroni, then they will discover that faith and charity is what will lead them to the Lord (v. 28).

Moroni is relieved when the Lord tells him this because he knows the Lord works with people according to their faith (v. 29), even as He worked with the brother of Jared (v. 30) and the disciples (v. 31, cp. 3 Ne. 27:1-2). And, he recalls that the Lord has laid down his life (v. 33) so that he might prepare a heavenly abode (v. 32) for those who are filled with the same kind of selfless love He had (v. 34). So, if the Gentiles do not have any charity in them, then they will deride the words of Moroni and the Lord will take away their allotment because of it (v. 35).

By way of clarification, what this rather long section of text boils down to is Moroni being concerned that his lack of writing skill will have a negative impact on the Gentile readers. But, the Lord points out to him that anyone with faith and charity will not be impacted by such a superficial thing, so he shouldn't worry about it.

v23 Moroni is well aware of the reception the Book of Mormon will receive among the Gentiles, given Nephi's prediction in 2

Ne. 27. He knows they will generally reject the word of the Lord. What Moroni is really doing is lamenting his own weakness at writing and his inability to overpower the reader as did the brother of Jared (v. 24). Moroni thinks if he could do that, then perhaps the outcome might be different as far as the Gentiles are concerned. But, the Lord points out to him that anyone with faith and charity will not be affected by the "weakness" of Moroni's writing as those with faith and charity will not be critical of it.

v27 "I will make weak things become strong", the typical reading on this is if we approach the Lord and confess our personal weaknesses He will change them into personal strengths. However, if we look at v. 37 we can see the Lord is talking about something else. There, Moroni has confessed his weakness to the Lord so the Lord says:

because thou hast seen thy weakness thou shalt be made strong, even unto the sitting down in the place which I have prepared in the mansions of my Father.

When the Lord says "thou shalt be made strong" it is plain he is referring to Moroni inheriting immortality and eternal life (cf. v. 32, 34), and not making him a powerful writer as was the brother of Jared.

Will the Lord sometime change our personal weaknesses into strengths? Yes, or course. But, this passage is not talking about that primarily. And, if the Lord gives men weaknesses so they are humble, then if he takes the weakness away, what happens to the humility? If that goes away too, then it is more expedient to leave the weakness.

v35 "take away their talent", this is phrase we would typically equate with the New Testament. While Jesus quoted the majority of the Sermon on the Mount to the Nephites in 3 Ne. 12-14 there is no explicit reference to the parable of the talents. But, we are informed in 2 Ne. 26:6 that Jesus taught considerably more than what was documented. So, it is safe to assume this parable was taught among the Nephites, even as was the Sermon on the Mount, only the latter was documented.

36 And it came to pass that I prayed unto the Lord that he would give unto the Gentiles grace, that they might have charity. 37 And it came to pass that the Lord said unto me: If they have not charity it mattereth not unto thee, thou hast been faithful; wherefore, thy garments shall be made clean. And because thou hast seen thy weakness thou shalt be made strong, even unto the

sitting down in the place which I have prepared in the mansions of my Father.

38 And now I, Moroni, bid farewell unto the Gentiles, yea, and also unto my brethren whom I love, until we shall meet before the judgment-seat of Christ, where all men shall know that my garments are not spotted with your blood. 39 And then shall ye know that I have seen Jesus, and that he hath talked with me face to face, and that he told me in plain humility, even as a man telleth another in mine own language, concerning these things; 40 And only a few have I written, because of my weakness in writing.

41 And now, I would commend you to seek this Jesus of whom the prophets and apostles have written, that the grace of God the Father, and also the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost, which beareth record of them, may be and abide in you forever. Amen.

v36-41 Moroni concludes his discussion on faith by bidding farewell to the Gentiles. In doing so, Moroni lets the Gentiles know that he had prayed for them that the Lord would grant them His grace that they might have charity (v. 36). But, the Lord does not grant this request. Instead, he tells Moroni that isn't his concern and he has done his job, so his hands are clean of their blood at the Day of Judgement (v. 37).

Moroni then bids both his Lehighite brothers and the Gentiles farewell until they meet at the Judgement (v. 38), where they will then know with certainty that he has been telling them the truth (v. 39).

He informs us he has written only a little bit of what the Lord has said to him, as mentioned in v. 39, because of the difficulty in engraving the plates (v. 40). He then closes the parenthetical discussion on faith with an admonition to the reader that they learn more about Christ so they may have grace (v. 41), as mentioned in v. 26 and 36.

v36-37 Moroni prays for the Lord to give grace to the nations, and the Lord pretty much says, "No". The Gentiles are not covered by the covenant with Israel, so Moroni has no leverage in this request. The result is the Gentiles are left to choose to follow Christ if they choose, but there is no overarching covenant requiring the Lord to anything special or different for them.

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