

BOOK OF MORMON LESSON #45
“NEVER HAS MAN BELIEVED IN ME AS THOU HAST”

(Ether 1-6)
by Ted L. Gibbons

QUOTE OF THE WEEK: The book of Ether is a fifteen-chapter abridgment of the twenty-four plates found by the people of Limhi in the days of King Mosiah. It gives an outline history of a people who were led to this continent from the Tower of Babel and became a great nation. These people, called Jaredites, had a national history of possibly sixteen centuries or more. The Tower of Babel record is the factual basis of the book of Ether. The Lord did not confound the Jaredite language, but guided his people and made of them a great nation. Ether, the last great prophet and historian of this people, gives his own genealogy, covering twenty-nine generations or more back to Jared, who lived at the time of the Tower of Babel episode. (FARMS, *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, Vol.4, Number 2, p.123)

INTRODUCTION: The positioning and content of the Book of Ether ought to make a student of the Book of Mormon ask some questions. Since the events recorded happened long before Lehi left Jerusalem, why is Ether located at the end of the book, just after the destruction of the Nephite nation? And why include it in the first place? What purpose did the Lord have in mind when he inspired his prophets to abridge the 24 gold plates and include that abridgement here? What are we supposed to learn from it all? As you read and study this record ask yourself these questions and watch for the answers.

1. THE LORD GRANTS THE REQUESTS OF THE BROTHER OF JARED.
(Ether 1)

I wrote a book on prayer several years ago. As I wrote, I reflected on the people in the scriptures that seemed to pray with unusual success. As I noted the names and experiences of several inspired men, I became aware that the Brother of Jared was a remarkable and unique example of a man who knew how to pray and how to get answers. As I thought about him and on the responses of the Lord to his petitions, I began to wonder just how many times prayer was mentioned in his story and in the book of Ether.

I opened my scriptural infobase, specified Ether, and typed in *pray with an*

asterisk in order to have a look at all the related words. I was astonished to discover that a form of the word *pray* appears exactly one time in the entire book of Ether, and it is used by Moroni in an editorial comment in Ether 12:36. No other occurrence of any form of the word appears anywhere else in the book. My first suspicion was that this might be a result of the editor, Moroni, and his inclination to use other words, since I knew that a lot of what I would call “praying” was going on in Ether. So I checked Mormon 8 and 9 and the book of Moroni, the other writings of Moroni. In Mormon 8 and 9, some form of the word *pray* appears 4 times. In Moroni, I found it 13 times.

And so I took a careful look at the early chapters of Ether. I found that the brother of Jared *cried* unto the Lord, and *inquired* of the Lord, and *called* upon the Lord. But he never “prayed.”

What that means I am not sure, except that it suggests to me that this man who got so many spectacular answers wasn’t just *saying prayers*.. *He was communicating. He was conversing:*

“It is the first principle of the Gospel to know for a certainty the Character of God, and to know that we may converse with him as one man converses with another . . .” (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, Section Six 1843–44, p.345*)

The brother of Jared knew how to converse.

At the time of the confounding of language and the dispersion of the people, Jared felt an inclination to seek divine intervention. But he sought it by asking his brother to pray (Ether 1:34). Do you wonder, as I do, what must have happened in this family to cause Jared to have such faith in his brother?

Mahonri prayed that his language and the language of his brother would not be confounded, and the Lord granted that request.

Next he prayed (at his brother’s request again) that the language of their friends would not be confounded, and it was not (Ether 1:36,37).

Next Jared suggested that his brother ask the Lord for a special land in which they might dwell. The Lord gave them America (Ether 1:38).

Why was the Lord willing to respond to the cries of the brother of Jared?
“And thus I will do unto thee because this long time ye have cried unto me”
(Ether 1:43).

2. THE JAREDITES BEGIN THEIR JOURNEY TO THE PROMISED LAND. (Ether2)

I am intrigued by the chastening that the Lord gave the brother of Jared on the seashore, “because he remembered not to call upon the name of the Lord.” (Ether 2:15) The context of the chastening seems to imply that the Jaredites have not pursued their journey to the promised land as they had been commanded. They have been in tents on the seashore for four years (see Ether 2:13) Could it be that the Brother of Jared has stopped seeking direction? That he was content to sit on the beach and enjoy the warm breezes and the good fishing and abundant feed for the livestock? In the absence of great problems did he stop saying great prayers? This is a trap in which the best of us can get caught.

Next, resolve to really pray and not just say prayers. There is a big difference here. Learn to pour out the real in-depth feelings of your heart to your Heavenly Father, rather than merely saying the same trite words and phrases that you have become accustomed to using. Remember President Brigham Young’s counsel that if we don’t feel like praying, that is the time to pray until we do feel like it” (see Discourses of Brigham Young, sel. John A. Widtsoe, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1941, p. 44; cited by Joe J. Christensen, “Resolutions,” *Ensign*, Dec. 1994, 66).

“And the brother of Jared repented of the evil which he had done, and did call upon the name of the Lord . . .” (Ether 2:15).

Mahonri Moriancumer (the brother of Jared), following instructions received from the Lord, built his eight barges—airtight over- and under-water craft. But after a brief inspection he knew he had problems—three of them:

1. No way to steer (2:19)
2. No light (2:19)
3. No air (2-29)

So he took his problems to the Lord.

And it came to pass that the brother of Jared cried unto the Lord, saying: O Lord, I have performed the work which thou hast commanded me, and I have made the barges according as thou hast directed me. And behold, O Lord, in them there is no light; whither shall we steer? And also we shall perish, for in them we cannot breathe, save it is the air which is in them; therefore we shall perish. (Ether 2:18,19)

The Lord solved two of the problems. He promised to do the steering himself:

“For behold, ye shall be as a whale in the midst of the sea; for the mountain waves shall dash upon you. Nevertheless, I will bring you up again out of the depths of the sea; for the winds have gone forth out of my mouth, and also the rains and the floods have I sent forth. And behold, I prepare you against these things; for ye cannot cross this great deep save I prepare you against the waves of the sea, and the winds which have gone forth, and the floods which shall come” (Ether 3:24,25).

And he explained how to solve the air problem:

“And the Lord said unto the brother of Jared: Behold, thou shalt make a hole in the top, and also in the bottom; and when thou shalt suffer for air thou shalt unstop the hole and receive air. And if it be so that the water come in upon thee, behold, ye shall stop the hole, that ye may not perish in the flood” (Ether 2:20).

But something different happened with the question about darkness:

“And the Lord said unto the brother of Jared: What will ye that I should do that ye may have light in your vessels? For behold, ye cannot have windows, for they will be dashed in pieces; neither shall ye take fire with you, for ye shall not go by the light of fire” (Ether 2:23).

The message seems to be this one: *Why don't you work on this one yourself and get back to me.* It is interesting to notice what the brother of Jared does not do. He does not run out on the beach, grab sixteen stones

and ask the Lord to touch them. Instead he goes to Mount Shelem (a very high mountain—see Ether 3:1), finds the proper kind of rock, and molts from it sixteen small white and clear stones. But he does not yet ask for the help of the Lord. Next he climbs with his rocks to the top of this exceedingly high mountain (still Ether 3:1). Then, having done all he can do, he presents himself and his stones before the Lord and asks for him to touch them (Ether 3:2-4).

There is a lesson here. Sometimes as we pray, the Lord will help us—he will reveal unto us workable solutions. But other times he will say (as it were) “I’m going to help you grow. You work on this one yourself.”

“Our challenges may be physical spiritual, economic, or emotional, but if we will treat them as opportunities and stepping-stones in our progress, rather than barriers and stumbling blocks, our lives and growth will be wonderful. I have learned that between challenges it is very restful but that any real growth I have ever enjoyed has always come with a challenge” (“Nobody Said That It Would Be Easy.” Elder John B. Dickson, C.R., October 1992).

3. THE BROTHER OF JARED SEES JESUS CHRIST.

(Ether 3)

When the finger of the Lord reached forth to touch the stones, the brother of Jared saw that finger and fell to the earth with fear. Even the Lord seemed surprised that he saw what he saw. Man had never exhibited faith like that before (see Ether 3:9). The question I have asked is this one: Where did this remarkable faith come from. I suspect that at least in part it came as the brother of Jared labored to solve his own problems.

As we discussed in lesson 10, the Lord now showed the brother of Jared all the inhabitants of the earth, and all things from the beginning to the end of the earth (3:25, 26; see also 4:4).

4. MORONI SEALS UP THE WRITINGS OF THE BROTHER OF JARED.

(Ether 4)

Moroni wrote on the plates the things that the brother of Jared saw.

“Behold, I have written upon these plates the very things which the brother

of Jared saw; and there never were greater things made manifest than those which were made manifest unto the brother of Jared” (Ether 4:4).

He then sealed them up, until the day when men “shall exercise faith in me, saith the Lord, even as the brother of Jared.” (Ether 4:7). I presume that every person who has ever read the Book of Mormon and believed it would love to have access to the sealed portion. Can you imagine anyone who was offered a chance to read saying, “No, thank you, I’m really not interested”? But our right to have that privilege is clearly connected to our willingness to read and apply what we already have. Mormon made that clear when he expressed his reasons for cutting short his commentary on the visit and teachings of Christ in America.

“And these things have I written, which are a lesser part of the things which he taught the people; and I have written them to the intent that they may be brought again unto this people, from the Gentiles, according to the words which Jesus hath spoken. And when they shall have received this, which is expedient that they should have first, to try their faith, and if it shall so be that they shall believe these things then shall the greater things be made manifest unto them. And if it so be that they will not believe these things, then shall the greater things be withheld from them, unto their condemnation. Behold, I was about to write them, all which were engraven upon the plates of Nephi, but the Lord forbade it, saying: I will try the faith of my people” (3 Nephi 26:8-11).

5. THE JAREDITES TRAVEL TO THE PROMISED LAND.

(Ether 6:1-12)

The journey to the promised land required 344 days (6:11). Embarking may have represented one of the great acts of faith in the scriptures.

“And it came to pass that when they had prepared all manner of food, that thereby they might subsist upon the water, and also food for their flocks and herds, and whatsoever beast or animal or fowl that they should carry with them—and it came to pass that when they had done all these things they got aboard of their vessels or barges, and set forth into the sea, commending themselves unto the Lord their God” (Ether 6:4).

Imagine setting forth into the sea in a windowless boat, with nothing to guide you but your faith in God. Imagine closing the doors of those barges and commending yourselves to the care of the Lord.

I know families who are in the “barges” as I write. They cannot see where the Lord is taking them, and having lost the moorings that bind them to familiar lands, they are utterly in his hands, waiting and hoping for him to bring them finally to a land of promise of their own.

During the crossing they were often buried by the waves and tempests of the deep (6:3). How did they spend their time? Giving thanks:

“And they did sing praises unto the Lord; yea, the brother of Jared did sing praises unto the Lord, and he did thank and praise the Lord all the day long; and when the night came, they did not cease to praise the Lord” (Ether 6:9).

They might have done so many other things during that year of sailing. They might have argued over land divisions. They might have speculated on the kind of choice land the Lord was giving to them. They might have passed the days playing shuffleboard or other shipboard games. And perhaps they did some of these things, but the brother of Jared is anxious for us to know that they spent much of their time in gratitude. In the absence of the blessings they sought, they were willing to give thanks for the blessings they had. This is another great lesson for those of us who find ourselves sailing blindly toward an unknown destination in our own barges.

Finally they arrived at the promised land (see Ether 6:12), and then gave thanks again.

CONCLUSION: The combination of faith and prayer can work miracles. No account in the scriptures teaches this principle with more clarity. The brother of Jared knew how to get answers, and he had faith enough to make it happen. Let him teach you what it means to cry unto the Lord.

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