

Chapter Three

UPON MOUNT SHELEM

The Liminal Experience of the Brother of Jared

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The brother of Jared, one of the greatest prophets in the Book of Mormon, is well known for “molten[ing] out of rock sixteen small stones” that were “white and clear, even as transparent glass,” and carrying them “upon the top of [a] mount,” where he “cried . . . unto the Lord” (Ether 3:1). He had planned to have the Lord touch the stones to cause them to give light for his people during an ocean voyage in small, windowless barges. Yet what soon followed would be not only the light he desired but one of the greatest visions of the Lord ever recorded in scripture. Though we often speak of “the vision of the brother of Jared,” what occurred was much more than a single vision.¹ His experience atop Mount Shelem comprised multiple visions, a dialogue *with* the Lord, a personal ministration *by* the Lord, and a personal transformation in which he grew from a man of *faith in the Lord* into a man of *great faith* and, eventually, into a man with great knowledge of the Lord.

In this essay I will explore the theme of liminality in key experiences of the brother of Jared—a theme that offers the potential for great insight in the study of such transformations.² *Liminal* comes from the Latin *limen*, meaning “threshold,” an image perfectly matching times of transition when a person stands neither in nor out, having left who she once was but not yet becoming the person she will be. Ethnographer and folklorist Arnold van Gennep developed the idea of liminality as a rite of transition over a century ago in his book *The Rites of Passage*.³ He divided the rite of passage into rites of *separation*, *transition*, and *incorporation*. He also called them, respectively, *preliminal*, *liminal*, and *postliminal* rites.⁴

Though others have used these words as anthropological terms, they are now literary terms as well. For my purposes, the lens I will use will be a literary one, much as Richard Dilworth Rust has used in identifying such things as liminal people, places, figures, and actions throughout the Book of Mormon.⁵ While the idea of a rite of passage may seem disconnected from modern Western culture (though it can be argued that the opposite is, in fact, true),⁶ this three-phase construct of separation, transition (or transformation), and incorporation is quite helpful in understanding the experience of the brother of Jared. As noted educator and writer Joan Halifax explains, “Within indigenous cultures, there are rituals that allow for experiential learning. Certainly, learning takes place through a wide variety of forms and styles in indigenous cultures; however, the most important context of learning occurs in the ritual process of initiation, known as rites of passage.”⁷

The following discussion will treat the three narrative stages concerning the brother of Jared, beginning with his preliminal, or separation, experience when the Lord chastises him for failing to call upon his name and engages in a dialogue with him about building the barges. We will analyze how this relationship is depicted leading up to that point and how that preliminary stage prepares the brother of Jared for the next stage. Then we will turn to the most important stage, the liminal, or threshold, experience when the brother of Jared sees the Lord in vision on Mount Shelem. Though this unprecedented vision is truly remarkable, it is not the only element of his liminal experience, so I will discuss the different experiences that constitute his transformation on the mountain. This study will

end with an exploration of the postliminal, or incorporation, experience, when the brother of Jared returns to his people and must become a part of everyday life again. Studying the text through a liminal lens assists us in understanding how his early experiences helped prepare him, how what occurred on the mount transformed him, and how the life he returned to was a natural result of who he had become.

“THERE IS NO LIGHT”: SEPARATION (PRELIMINAL) STAGE

Before a person undergoes a liminal phase of transition, he must first be separated from others. Victor Turner, a cultural anthropologist who explored and developed the work of van Gennep, writes that the “first phase of separation comprises symbolic behavior signifying the detachment of the individual or group either from an earlier fixed point in the social structure or a set of cultural conditions.”⁸ Moroni begins⁹ the story of Jared and his people¹⁰ with language of separation: “Jared came forth with his brother and their families, with some others and their families, from the great tower, at the time the Lord confounded the language of the people, and swore in his wrath that they should be scattered upon all the face of the earth; and according to the word of the Lord the people were scattered” (Ether 1:33). It is a story of the Jaredites *coming forth* from the great tower crowded with other people, and those other people being *scattered upon all the face of the earth*. Just as all those other people were about to begin their rites of passage, being separated from what they knew and entering into liminal periods of their lives that would transition them into new worlds, the Jaredites were about to take their first steps into a new civilization that would eventually grow into an epic story that would, in many ways, foretell the entire narrative of the Book of Mormon itself.¹¹

“THE LORD DID HEAR THE BROTHER OF JARED”

In considering how this preliminary stage prepares the brother of Jared for his transformation in the liminal stage, an important aspect to focus on is how Moroni portrays the development of the relationship between the brother of Jared and the Lord. He does this by recounting the evolution of how they communicate with one another—in other words, *Moroni*

portrays the development of the nature of the revelation that takes place. As suggested in the narrative, the first level of this relationship is quite straightforward. Moroni introduces the brother of Jared as “a large and mighty man, and a man highly favored of the Lord” (Ether 1:34). In that same verse, Jared tells his brother to “cry unto the Lord, that he will not confound us that we may not understand our words,” and the Lord has “compassion upon Jared,” preserving the language of both men (vv. 34–35). Jared then tells his brother to “cry unto the Lord” for the same blessing for their friends, and “the Lord had compassion upon their friends and their families also, that they were not confounded” (vv. 36–37). In this early relationship, Jared tells his brother what to pray for, his brother prays for it, and the Lord blesses the people—the brother of Jared is not asking any questions of the Lord, nor is the Lord providing him with any information.¹² Whereas in the liminal stage, when the brother of Jared actually sees the Lord in vision, there will be a number of questions and answers, this preparatory time is one of simply asking for blessings in faith and receiving them.

The next level of revelation we witness as readers is on a much higher plane. First Jared tells his brother, “Go and inquire of the Lord whether he will drive us out of the land” (Ether 1:38), which is the first time in the narrative that Jared is telling his brother to ask the Lord a question and not to just cry unto the Lord to bestow upon someone a blessing. Jared wants to know if the Lord is going to require that they leave their land or not. The next part of his instructions is especially interesting because of its specificity: “And if he will drive us out of the land, cry unto him whither we shall go.” It is a precise question (the word *whither* means “to what place”).¹³ The last part of what he tells the brother of Jared, regarding a land “choice above all the earth” and how they might “receive it for [their] inheritance,” is not something Jared explicitly tells him to say to the Lord, but the context leads me to believe that his brother could easily understand that he would be expected to convey this desire to the Lord.¹⁴

How the record portrays the response to the brother of Jared is also different, once again in keeping with the idea that we are witnessing a new level of revelation. For the first time, Moroni tells us that “the Lord did hear the brother of Jared” (Ether 1:40). We may have always assumed the

Lord heard him, of course, by the results of the brother of Jared's petitions to him, but here Moroni explicitly states that the Lord heard him. Additionally, Moroni writes for the first time that the Lord "had compassion upon him." Never before have we read that the Lord has had compassion on the brother of Jared. Earlier we were told that "the Lord had compassion *upon Jared*; therefore he did not confound the language of Jared; and Jared and his brother were not confounded" (v. 35). Though the brother of Jared did receive the blessing of not being confounded, Moroni writes about it almost as if he is an afterthought—it is *Jared* for whom the Lord feels compassion, and it is *Jared* whose language the Lord does not confound. And when the brother of Jared, as instructed by Jared, cries unto the Lord to "turn away his anger from them who are [their] friends" so their language will not be confounded (v. 36), "the Lord had *compassion upon their friends and their families also*" (v. 37). This makes sense because it is their friends and their friends' families who are receiving the blessing of not being confounded.

However, there is a change in the brother of Jared's next experience with the Lord. When he prays on behalf of all the Jaredites about whether the Lord will "drive [them] out of the land" and "whither [they] shall go," the "Lord did *hear the brother of Jared, and had compassion upon him*" (vv. 38, 40). The pattern to this point has been to mention who is blessed as recipients of the Lord's compassion and to leave out the brother of Jared, even when he is one of those being blessed, but now the brother of Jared is the *only person* mentioned as the object of the Lord's compassion. Additionally, while Moroni provided a distant account of how the Lord responded by simply stating that the people "were not confounded" (see vv. 35 and 37), this time Moroni offers us the actual words, in detail, of what the Lord tells the brother of Jared:

Go to and gather together thy flocks, both male and female, of every kind; and also of the seed of the earth of every kind; and thy families; and also Jared thy brother and his family; and also thy friends and their families, and the friends of Jared and their families.

And when thou hast done this thou shalt go at the head of them down into the valley which is northward. And there will I

meet thee, and I will go before thee into a land which is choice above all the lands of the earth.

And there will I bless thee and thy seed, and raise up unto me of thy seed, and of the seed of thy brother, and they who shall go with thee, a great nation. And there shall be none greater than the nation which I will raise up unto me of thy seed, upon all the face of the earth. And thus I will do unto thee because this long time ye have cried unto me. (Ether 1:41–43)¹⁵

Although this is still not a dialogue between the Lord and the brother of Jared in the full sense of the two of them conversing with one another, it clearly suggests the development of their relationship. Two important questions are asked, a deep desire is expressed, and the Lord hears the brother of Jared and replies with compassion upon him personally and with an unprecedented, detailed answer that fulfills the deep desire for a choice land above all others, dependent upon the people's faith.

While the early Jaredites are traveling in the wilderness, the revelatory relationship between the Lord and the brother of Jared continues to develop. The Lord's presence is no longer only in the form of a voice but now is within "a cloud, and the brother of Jared saw him not" (Ether 2:4). Even though the brother of Jared cannot see him, the Lord now maintains a close, physical presence with him and even directs the Jaredites "continually" by his "hand" as he guides them through the wilderness (v. 6). Still, however, this revelatory relationship has not reached its full dialogic potential.

THE LORD CHASTENS THE BROTHER OF JARED

The Lord continues to lead the Jaredite group until they eventually make their way to the seashore, where they camp for four years. Significantly, seashores are considered natural liminal places since they are between two worlds, the land and the sea, obvious thresholds where people must make transitions if they are to move forward. For four years the Jaredites remained in that state of in-between.¹⁶ Moroni writes that after those four years had passed,¹⁷ "the Lord came again unto the brother of Jared, and stood in a cloud and talked with him. And for the space of three hours did the Lord talk with the brother of Jared, and chastened him because

he remembered not to call upon the name of the Lord” (Ether 2:14). This verse is of paramount importance to the story of the brother of Jared, particularly his upcoming liminal vision. While others may mark the beginning of Ether 3 as the point where his separation phase begins, mainly because it clearly delineates a physical separation of the brother of Jared from the other members of his party, I consider this verse to be the *beginning* of his separation for three fundamental reasons.

First, this verse serves as the turning point in the revelatory relationship between the Lord and the brother of Jared. As we have discussed, the brother of Jared has progressed from crying unto the Lord for blessings to being heard, to the Lord having compassion upon him, to asking the Lord questions and the Lord providing answers, and to the Lord coming down in a cloud and guiding the brother of Jared and his people. This verse, though, begins a relationship in which there is, for the first time in the account, *dialogue*. It is a dialogue that begins on a basic level of instructions and clarification but rises to the level of an unprecedented divine vision—one in which the brother of Jared, completely and physically separate from his people, engages in an elevated dialogue with the Lord.

Second, this verse is a milestone in their relationship because it is the first time, in the account at least, that the Lord *chastens* the brother of Jared. The Lord’s chastisement literally and symbolically separates the brother of Jared from the others in the group. Though others in the party have likely also failed to call upon the name of the Lord, only the brother of Jared is chastened; in this he is unique.¹⁸ He is not only physically removed from the group but also socially and, most importantly, spiritually removed. Though few people would welcome such a milestone, the scriptures plainly teach that “whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?” (Hebrews 12:6–7).¹⁹ It is not uncommon to read in the scriptures of the Lord chastising his prophets not because they are prone to err but because, being human, they *do* err—and yet the Lord loves them. Thus for the Lord to chasten the brother of Jared at this moment in the story can be interpreted as the beginning of a new phase in the brother of Jared’s development, a point where he is being separated from the others among the Jaredites

both physically and spiritually, as the Lord chastens him out of his love and desire to help him become who he is foreordained to become.

And, third, in this verse the Lord's chastisement of the brother of Jared for not calling upon the name of the Lord leads directly to his repenting and then *calling upon the name of the Lord*. Though simple enough on the surface, the chastisement of the Lord in this verse ultimately initiates the chain of events, so to speak, that leads to the miraculous transformational experience in the next chapter. To understand how this verse is the turning point that begins the preliminal phase and how it ultimately leads to the transformational experience of the brother of Jared, it is essential to better comprehend the meaning of the act that he failed to do for so long and that he finally did do immediately after he was chastised.

CALL UPON THE NAME OF THE LORD

While it may not seem essential to understand the significance of the phrase "call upon the name of the Lord" (Ether 2:14) in the context of this study, it will prove invaluable when we analyze the elements contributing to the transformation of the brother of Jared in his liminal phase. One understanding of the verse is that the Lord chastened him simply because he had not prayed for four years. This interpretation makes sense; in fact, a number of instances throughout scripture use the phrase to denote the act of prayer.²⁰ Following this line of interpretation in their classic commentary on the Book of Mormon, George Reynolds and Janne Sjodahl write that the brother of Jared was "rebuked" by the Lord because he had "neglected his prayers," and of verse 15 they write that "here the important truth is taught that neglect of prayer is a sin."²¹ They understand the chastisement to be about how the brother of Jared "had at one time neglected his prayers habitually."²²

Joseph McConkie, Robert L. Millet, and Brent Top, however, find it difficult to believe that "a man of the spiritual stature of the brother of Jared" would "suddenly cease praying to his Maker." Rather than interpreting the phrase in terms of not praying altogether, they view it as a matter of the *quality* of prayer: "It may be that what this verse is saying to us is that Mahonri Moriancumer²³ was chastened by the Lord because he had not fully followed and implemented the counsels of the Lord previously

received. It may be that in the relative comfort of the seashore he had allowed his prayers to become less fervent, more casual and routine. He may have been calling upon the Lord in word, but not in faith and deed.”²⁴

Brant A. Gardner shares another perspective: The Lord’s chastisement “was probably not about prayer in general but rather because the brother of Jared had not offered a very specific prayer—one regarding the continuing of their journey. They had paused for four years. When Yahweh moves past chastisement to instruction, those instructions deal with continuing to the promised land.”²⁵ For this scholar, “call upon the name of the Lord” was not so much about prayer pure and simple or about the quality of the prayer, but about its specific subject matter: not praying for the instructions needed to get to the choice land.

Scholars D. Kelly Ogden and Andrew C. Skinner, however, take the meaning of Ether 2:14 a step further, suggesting that the concept of calling upon the name of the Lord may mean the brother of Jared is specifically preparing for the vision of the Lord with which he will eventually be blessed.

Imagine being chastised by the Lord for *three hours*. The brother of Jared had failed to call upon the Lord to prepare for a manifestation. Doctrine and Covenants 93:1 notes that “every soul who forsaketh his sins and cometh unto me, and *calleth on my name*, and obeyth my voice, and keepeth my commandments, *shall see my face and know that I am*” (emphasis added). That was about to happen to the brother of Jared, and he had seriously neglected his preparation for it. Neglecting that spiritual preparation, according to the Lord, was a sin.²⁶

There is no question that the brother of Jared’s ultimate experience in Ether 3 matches the description in Doctrine and Covenants 93:1 of seeing the face of the Lord and knowing that he is. The text in Ether presents a question, however, that needs to be considered if we are to understand “call upon the name of the Lord” to mean part of a process that leads to the divine manifestation promised in Doctrine and Covenants 93:1. Moroni tells us that “the brother of Jared repented of the evil which he had done, and did call upon the name of the Lord *for his brethren who were with him*”

(Ether 2:15). It is the brother of Jared who was blessed with the vision promised in Doctrine and Covenants 93:1, yet he calls upon the name of the Lord *for his brethren*. Since there is no account that his brethren received that same manifestation, it seems unlikely that his calling upon the name of the Lord for his brethren is connected to the blessing promised in Doctrine and Covenants 93:1, because his brethren did not receive that blessing. Additionally, the verse in the Doctrine and Covenants appears to describe a process that, if a person follows it, will result in *her* seeing the Lord, not a process that a person can follow for someone else. The brother of Jared cannot call upon the name of the Lord *for his brethren*, in the sense that the Doctrine and Covenants seems to intend it, any more than he could forsake their sins, come unto the Lord, obey his voice, or keep his commandments for his brethren. In my view, further exploration of the phrase “call upon the name of the Lord” is still in order.

In the book of Ether, the phrase “call upon the name of the Lord” (2:14) is first used by the Lord when he chastises the brother of Jared for neglecting the same. The second time we see this phrase is in the very next verse when Moroni tells us that the brother of Jared “did *call upon the name of the Lord* for his brethren who were with him.” Since the brother of Jared appears to perform the act of calling upon the name of the Lord in the middle of speaking with the Lord, it would seem that calling upon the name of the Lord cannot refer here to praying in general, since if praying is fundamentally speaking with the Lord, then that is exactly what the brother of Jared has been doing for the past three hours. One cannot be praying to the Lord and, in the middle of praying, start praying.

The verse begins with repentance (“the brother of Jared repented of the evil which he had done”), the Lord’s forgiveness (“I will forgive thee and thy brethren of their sins”), and his admonition (“but thou shalt not sin any more”). This suggests that when the Lord forgives the people and admonishes the brother of Jared, these are the Lord’s responses to the brother of Jared’s repentance (and quite understandable responses in keeping with the Lord’s promises),²⁷ not to the Lord’s name being called upon. Instead, the Lord’s response to the calling upon of his name comes in the following line, when he speaks to the brother of Jared about the land of their inheritance: “These are my thoughts *upon the land which I*

shall give you for your inheritance; for it shall be a land *choice above all other lands*” (Ether 2:15). The sequence of these events appears to indicate a relationship between calling upon the name of the Lord and receiving something from him—in this instance, the land of inheritance. Next, the Lord begins telling the brother of Jared what needs to be done to actually *receive* that land of inheritance, namely, building the barges (see vv. 16–25). In other words, we can read the Lord’s response to the brother of Jared in terms of what the latter originally said. He spoke in two phases: he repented, then called upon the name of the Lord. And the Lord responded in two phases: he addressed the repentance by forgiving and admonishing, then turned to his name being called upon by speaking of giving the choice land as an inheritance.

It is also useful to investigate other occurrences in the narrative in which the phrase “call upon the name of the Lord” is used. While it is not used during the dialogue about the building of the barges, we will see that the Lord may be using the end of that dialogue to invite the brother of Jared to call upon his name. And the phrase does reoccur in the liminal phase before the Lord blesses the brother of Jared with the vision. As the brother of Jared is about to speak to the Lord about touching the stones, he reminds the Lord of the portended dangers of their journey (“Thou hast said that we must be encompassed about by the floods”) and then talks about his weakness (“O Lord, and do not be angry with thy servant because of his weakness before thee,” Ether 3:2). Though it is possible that the brother of Jared here is referencing a generic kind of human frailty, as indicated by mention of the Fall, it seems more likely that he is specifically speaking of his *one weakness* we have witnessed in the story: he did not remember to call upon the name of the Lord. Indeed, the very next statement in that verse shows how much that particular weakness remains on his mind: “O Lord, thou hast given us a commandment that we must *call upon thee*, that from thee we may receive according to our desires.” In other words, the brother of Jared pleads with the Lord to not be angry with him because of his weakness before him, then reminds him of the commandment he has given them to call upon him so that they will receive from him what they desire. He is about to tell the Lord his desire to have the stones give light. As we will see, the Lord grants that desire. And later,

when the brother of Jared lets the Lord know another one of his desires—to see the Lord—the Lord fulfills that desire as well.

The brother of Jared appears to be reminding the Lord of a particular commandment he has given them that they must specifically “call upon the name of the Lord” so they can *receive from him according to their desires*. Perhaps “call upon the name of the Lord” and “call upon the Lord”²⁸ in the narrative mean to pray to the Lord in such a way as to receive from the Lord according to one’s desires.

In addition to these direct verbal instances of the phrase, Moroni provides us with several other narrative examples of the brother of Jared appearing to call upon the Lord in such a way that the people will receive according to their desires. Because of the prayers of the brother of Jared, Jared and his brother’s desires were granted: (1) they were not confounded (see Ether 1:35), (2) their friends and their families were not confounded (see v. 37), (3) they, their friends, and their families would be led to a choice land (see vv. 39–43). Once the journey actually begins, the Lord comes down in a cloud and offers the brother of Jared continual direction, all with the intent to guide the people to the land that Jared first desired (see v. 38).

Thus *calling upon the name of the Lord*—understood as a particular kind of prayer the Lord had commanded the Jaredites to offer that would result in their being blessed according to their desires—becomes a crucial part of the development of the brother of Jared during his preliminal stage. As we will later discuss in more detail, that prayer becomes an essential component of his liminal stage as well. Essential to both the preliminal and liminal stages is the keeping of the commandment to call upon the name of the Lord; similarly, in both stages, immediately after the brother of Jared calls upon the name of the Lord, the Lord engages him in dialogue.

“WHAT WILL YE THAT I SHOULD PREPARE FOR YOU?”: DIALOGIC REVELATION

Considering the paramount importance of dialogue in the brother of Jared’s liminal vision of the Savior and in his preliminal dialogue about building the barges, it is worthwhile to turn to the eminent scholar and translator of the Hebrew Bible Robert Alter.

Everything in the world of biblical narrative ultimately gravitates toward dialogue—perhaps . . . because to the ancient Hebrew writers speech seemed the essential human faculty: by exercising the capacity of speech man demonstrated, however imperfectly, that he was made in the image of God. This “gravitation” often means that phrases or whole sentences first stated by the narrator do not reveal their full significance until they are repeated, whether faithfully or with distortions, in direct speech by one or more of the characters. It also means that, quantitatively, a remarkably large part of the narrative burden is carried by dialogue, the transactions between characters typically unfolding through the words they exchange, with only the most minimal intervention of the narrator. As a rule, *when a narrative event in the Bible seems important, the writer will render it mainly through dialogue*, so the transitions from narration to dialogue provide in themselves some implicit measure of what is deemed essential, what is conceived to be ancillary or secondary to the main action.²⁹

I believe what Alter writes about the Hebrew Bible applies in many respects to the account at hand.³⁰ By conveying through dialogue the interaction between the Lord and the brother of Jared concerning the barges (and later the liminal experience itself), Moroni draws attention to the scene, emphasizes its importance, and helps the reader to experience what is being said and what is happening.

While the formatting of the text in this chapter may lead the reader to believe that this dialogue between the Lord and the brother of Jared occurs in one continuous moment, the reality is quite the opposite. After the point in the narrative where the Lord tells the brother of Jared, “Go to work and build, after the manner of barges which ye have hitherto built,” Moroni writes that “it came to pass that the brother of Jared did go to work, and also his brethren, and built barges after the manner which they had built, according to the instructions of the Lord” (Ether 2:16). He describes the structural nature of the barges, then continues: “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” (v. 18). The text does

not specify how much time passed, but it must have taken a considerable amount of time for the men to construct eight barges.

Furthermore, later in this same dialogue, after the Lord explains to the brother of Jared where the holes need to be placed in the barges so air will be available, Moroni writes, “It came to pass that the brother of Jared did so, according as the Lord had commanded. And he cried again unto the Lord saying: O Lord, behold I have done even as thou hast commanded me; and I have prepared the vessels for my people” (vv. 21–22). Once again, much time must have passed. These two periods of time, however long they were, suggest that this preliminal phase for the brother of Jared was substantial.³¹ This is a time of training for him, developing his spiritual character in preparation for his communing with the Lord. It is not inconsequential that part of this time is devoted to the Lord’s assigning him arduous tasks to perform and his having to carry them out; though the brother of Jared had already done much physical labor during the trek to the seashore, this work was assigned *after* the Lord chastised him and might be interpreted as further opportunity for him to prove his fidelity and dedication.

After implementing the Lord’s solution for air in the barges, the brother of Jared returns and begins to engage more fully with the Lord in dialogue. He had mentioned the lack of light before, but that concern had quickly given way to the problem of air (see v. 19). With that problem now resolved, the brother of Jared presses his concern once more about the needed light with a straightforward question: “I have prepared the vessels for my people, and behold there is no light in them. Behold, O Lord, wilt thou suffer that we shall cross this great water in darkness?” (v. 22).

We have discussed how the relationship between the brother of Jared and the Lord has been developing throughout this narrative, represented by how the process of revelation has progressed through levels. At this point in the story the brother of Jared and the Lord are engaged in what might be termed *dialogic revelation*. Terryl L. Givens writes of dialogic revelation not only as something that can be found throughout the Book of Mormon, but as a mode of revelation based on a particular concept of deity—a concept, moreover, that will prove to be central to the brother of Jared’s vision and its liminal nature. Givens writes:

Far beyond a forceful spiritual intimation, one finds in the Book of Mormon that prayer frequently and dramatically evokes an answer that is impossible to mistake as anything other than an individualized, dialogic response to a highly particularized question. The conception of revelation as a personalized, dialogic exchange pervades the Book of Mormon . . . like an insistent leitmotif. It is firmly rooted in a radically anthropomorphic theology.³²

After writing about the brother of Jared's discussion with the Lord about the lack of light in the barges, and later asking the Lord to touch the stones to illuminate them, Givens writes, "Having made the guided journey from chastised listener to petitioner and now to interlocutor, the brother of Jared is rewarded with the most spectacular epiphany recorded in the Book of Mormon."³³ There is much more happening in this dialogue than instructions on how to build a boat.

This preliminary dialogue between the Lord and the brother of Jared could be a foundation for the far more significant dialogic revelation he will experience in his upcoming liminal stage. In my view, through this dialogue about barges, the brother of Jared learns a hierarchy of revelation that builds toward his transformational experience in the next chapter. These lessons begin with the instruction to "go to work and build, after the manner of barges which ye have hitherto built" (Ether 2:16). At the most fundamental level, the Lord teaches the brother of Jared the revelatory principle that there are times when there is no need for new direction; enough instruction has been given in the past to provide adequate guidance for the present circumstances.

Second, "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). There are times when the Lord gives explicit instructions about what is to be done. Perhaps because the previous barges were used under drastically different circumstances, they did not have the same requirements as this set of barges did regarding air, so relying solely on past experience would not work. There are times when new instructions are needed for what one

needs to do, and there are times when the Lord sees fit to provide those instructions *in detail*.

Third, the Lord describes to the brother of Jared how he and his people

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 2:24–25)

In other words, there are times when the Lord will directly intervene and provide what is needed. He will not expect us to rely on past experience, or even on his giving us instructions, but he will intervene and do what needs to be done himself.

And fourth, in the final lesson before the liminal phase, the Lord turns to the brother of Jared's question about light.³⁴ The brother of Jared is learning something very different in this moment of instruction. The first two lessons have to do with what is expected of us. The third has to do with what the Lord has decided he will do for us, without any action on our part. This last lesson teaches that there are times when the Lord turns the question, perhaps even the power, over to us and lets us decide what *we* would have *him* do for *us*. It is, in a sense, at the core of dialogic revelation, requiring two people, but going beyond that—requiring the two people to *depend on one another* and *to trust one another*. I would imagine that at this point in the narrative the Lord trusts the brother of Jared not to request anything that would be outside what is good and righteous and what is in the best interest of the brother of Jared and his people;³⁵ in a similar way, because the brother of Jared has faith *in* the Lord, he has faith *that* the Lord will do what he asks of him.

It is also important to properly characterize what the Lord is offering to the brother of Jared. He is *not* telling him to think about the problem and then return to him with a possible solution for his divine approval. Nor is he turning the problem over to the brother of Jared with the charge

that he has to figure it out himself.³⁶ The Lord is offering him something quite different: “What will ye that I should do . . . ?” “What will ye that I should prepare for you . . . ?” He is not telling the brother of Jared to go figure something out; he is *inviting* the brother of Jared to ask *him* to do something for him. In other words, it appears that he is effectively saying to the brother of Jared, “Here is an opportunity for you to call upon my name so you may receive from me according to your desires.” It may be that what the Lord says at the end of this dialogue is what prompts the brother of Jared to remind him of the commandment he has given them (see Ether 3:2).

This final step in the four divine lessons about revelation that the brother of Jared may be learning during this preliminal state of his development directly leads to the liminal experience he will have with the Lord.³⁷ M. Catherine Thomas sees that remarkable personal encounter as the result of a series of progressively qualifying tests with commensurate privileges:

Thus they set out on the quest that is initiated by a period of stringent testing and training (gathering of animals and plants, trekking through wilderness, building two sets of barges, and enduring strong chastening). As their obedience and sacrifice increased, so did their privileges with the Lord, for “the Lord did go before them, and did talk with them as he stood in a cloud, and gave directions whither they should travel” (Ether 2:5). *Successful navigation of their tests brought the brother of Jared to the need for more light and thus to the mount Shelem.*³⁸

The brother of Jared has passed the tests the Lord has given him. He has brought his people to the seashore, repented and called upon the name of the Lord, built the barges, and learned the lessons he needed to learn. Throughout this process he has continually grown, and he has developed his relationship and ability to communicate with the Lord. Now is the time for more light, and that light will be found on Mount Shelem.

“THE VEIL WAS TAKEN”: THE TRANSFORMATIVE (LIMINAL) STAGE

“Many of the characteristics of God’s ways,” Rust writes, “pertain to thresholds,”³⁹ and the brother of Jared’s liminal experience with him is the ultimate threshold. The third chapter of Ether begins with the brother of Jared secluding himself from his people by making his way to Mount Shelem. There he would undergo his threshold, or liminal, experience. Those who are at the liminal stage are “commonly secluded, partially or completely, from the realm of culturally defined and ordered states and statuses.” They are “sometimes said to ‘be in another place.’ They have physical but not social ‘reality.’”⁴⁰ After making sixteen stones, the brother of Jared separates himself, both physically and spiritually, by ascending the mountain to the top where he will pray to the Lord, as though it is his temple.⁴¹ It is during the liminal stage that the participant engages in the actual transitional, or what Halifax calls “transformative,” process.⁴² The liminal experience is why the other elements of the journey exist; it is what the separation phase has been leading up to and what the incorporation phase will help the person return from. It is the time during which the person *becomes*. Rust sees the liminal stage dramatically portrayed in a painting by Michelangelo as a threshold between heaven and earth:

A perfect artistic rendition of liminality is Michelangelo’s painting in the Sistine Chapel of the creation of Adam. The recumbent Adam is partially lying on earth at a slightly lower level than God, who is in a cloud of heaven. The Father is reaching out toward Adam, His forefinger almost touching Adam’s. Though this creation, or birth, of man is liminal in itself, the slight space between the finger of God and the finger of Adam is electrically charged as a threshold between the powers of heaven and the potentials of earth.

In a similar way, the Book of Mormon portrays the connections between heaven and earth.⁴³

Though he may not be fully aware of it, as the brother of Jared molts the stones out of rock, he is creating the setting for an unprecedented connection between heaven and earth.

“SUCH EXCEEDING FAITH”

The decision of the brother of Jared to molten out of rock sixteen small stones to be used for light in the barges (see Ether 3:1) plays an important role in this liminal stage of his progression. As he will soon say, he knows the Lord has “all power, and can do whatsoever [he will] for the benefit of man” (v. 4); so, presumably, there are countless ways in which he could have petitioned the Lord to provide light for the barges. Even if the brother of Jared were aware of legends about lighting Noah’s ark with precious stones and relied on them as inspiration for his decision on how to light the barges,⁴⁴ he could have asked the Lord to create the stones himself and make them glow. The Lord did not say to the brother of Jared, “What will you *do* that will require a tremendous amount of labor on your part, and then have me *touch*, that ye may have light?” Rather, he said, “What will ye that *I should prepare for you* that ye may have light?” (2:25). The brother of Jared himself chose a method for bringing light that required ingenuity, labor, and great faith in the Lord on his part. He did not choose an easy route for his threshold experience, but one that required much from himself from the very beginning.

Moroni uses a familiar verb in this story when he tells us that the brother of Jared “*cried* again unto the Lord,” but the words the latter uses and the tone with which he uses them when he speaks with the Lord are markedly different from what we have seen him use before. Reynolds and Sjordahl describe the prayer as providing “the picture of a servant of the Lord, effacing himself in sincere humility, while extolling the justice, mercy, and power of the Almighty.”⁴⁵ The brother of Jared pleads with the Lord, saying “O Lord” eight times (see Ether 3:2–5) and using such expressions as “Do not be angry with thy servant because of his weakness before thee” and “Look upon me in pity, and turn away thine anger from this thy people, and suffer not that they shall go forth across this raging deep in darkness” (vv. 2, 3). He also praises the Lord, presenting “his request with a rather typical Old Testament-style acknowledgement of the separation between God and man. The brother of Jared approaches God as a subject would a king—with great humility and deference,”⁴⁶ as illustrated by such statements as “We know that thou art holy and dwellest in the heavens, and that we are unworthy before thee,” “Thou hast all power, and can do

whatsoever thou wilt for the benefit of man,” and “O Lord, thou canst do this. We know that thou art able to show forth great power, which looks small unto the understanding of men” (vv. 2, 4, 5).

This change in tone reveals the spiritual growth in the brother of Jared. Though we were introduced to him at a time when he was a “large and mighty man, and a man highly favored of the Lord” (Ether 1:34), the text is not clear as to the meaning of his favored status. Certainly, given his ability to turn to the Lord and have his prayers answered, we saw him as a spiritual and righteous man, but reading this prayer helps us perceive more spiritual depth in him than we had before.

By studying this prayer, we also see that, in keeping with what we have already discussed about the meaning of “call upon the name of the Lord,” the brother of Jared is keeping that commandment here and drawing upon that power (see Ether 3:2). It is noteworthy that the brother of Jared does not *ask* the Lord to touch the stones; after remarking that the Lord has “all power, and can do whatsoever thou wilt for the benefit of man,” he *tells* the Lord to touch them: “Therefore *touch these stones*, O Lord, with thy finger, and *prepare them that they may shine forth in darkness*; and they shall shine forth unto us in the vessels which we have prepared, that we may have light while we shall cross the sea. Behold, O Lord, *thou canst do this*. *We know that thou art able to show forth great power*, which looks small unto the understanding of men” (vv. 4–5). I do not imply that the brother of Jared thinks presumptuously of commanding the Lord, or even that he can tell the Lord what to do in the typical way in which we conceive of that notion. Rather, he has so much faith in the Lord and believes the Lord’s promises so fully that he trusts that, since he has obeyed that commandment, he can now claim that blessing—not because of his own power or goodness, but because of the Lord’s.

At the beginning of the story of the brother of Jared, we knew he was a mighty man whom the Lord favored, and throughout the story we witnessed several examples of him exercising his faith in the Lord as he prayed for specific blessings and received them. In particular, all these examples help us see him developing *as a man of faith in the Lord*. While in the preliminal phase he accepted instructions from the Lord and built barges, showing his faith by his works, in this liminal phase he needs no

instructions from the Lord to choose how to bring light to his people, is willing to labor diligently rather than merely ask the Lord to miraculously shine light into the barges, and now faithfully relies on the promised blessing of the Lord by keeping the commandment to call upon his name yet again. We saw where the brother of Jared came from and are now witnessing the transformation at the moment it begins to occur.

As he has done in the past, the Lord acts according to the righteous desire of the brother of Jared and touches each stone. The brother of Jared falls down, struck not with surprise but with fear. Nothing in the text leads us to believe he is speaking metaphorically when he tells the Lord to touch the stones “with thy finger” (Ether 3:4). It would appear from this request that the brother of Jared expects the Lord to be anthropomorphic—to have fingers and thus the ability to touch the stones. What strikes fear into the brother of Jared is the prospect of being smitten for seeing that the Lord has “flesh and blood” (vv. 6–8).⁴⁷

A most important element of this vision is the very first question the Lord asks, especially given the context of the liminality of the experience. The Lord sees that the brother of Jared has fallen to the earth and says to him, “Arise, why hast thou fallen?” (Ether 3:7).⁴⁸ From his first words, the Lord brings back the dialogic revelation he taught the brother of Jared in the previous chapter when he offered instruction on building the barges. This time, however, much more is at stake than the barges. The Lord teaches the brother of Jared by means of a variety of methods throughout this vision, and one of them is through his questions. When the brother of Jared replies that he was fearful of being smitten, for example, the Lord does not chastise him for this, nor for not recognizing that his was a spirit body and not a body of flesh and blood, nor for any number of other possible reasons. Instead, he *teaches* him that what he saw he was able to see because of his faith. He gently teaches him what he actually did see, he praises him because of his great faith, and *he asks him another question*. The Lord is establishing for the brother of Jared the ground rules, so to speak, of this theophany: This is not a lecture, but we will have a discussion, just as we have in the past. Dialogic revelation.

Central to our concern is not why the brother of Jared is afraid, but why he was able to see the finger of the Lord in the first place. Both Moroni

and the Lord provide us with the answers. Moroni explains to us that “the Lord stretched forth his hand and touched the stones one by one with his finger. And *the veil was taken from off the eyes of the brother of Jared*, and he saw the finger of the Lord” (Ether 3:6). Similarly, the Lord tells the brother of Jared, “*Because of thy faith thou hast seen that I shall take upon me flesh and blood; and 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*” (v. 9).⁴⁹ Note that the veil *was taken* from the eyes of the brother of Jared, an act done on his behalf. This recalls Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery’s vision of the Lord:

The veil was taken from our minds, and the eyes of our understanding were opened. We saw the Lord standing upon the breastwork of the pulpit, before us; and under his feet was a paved work of pure gold, in color like amber. His eyes were as a flame of fire; the hair of his head was white like the pure snow; his countenance shone above the brightness of the sun; and his voice was as the sound of the rushing of great waters, even the voice of Jehovah. (Doctrine and Covenants 110:1–3)

The veil is lifted for the brother of Jared because of his great faith—in fact, the Lord says no man had come before him “with such exceeding faith” as the brother of Jared had (Ether 3:9). When the veil is removed, he is still a man of great faith, but his liminal transformation is progressing quickly.

“THAT THIS MAN KNEW”

When the Lord asks the brother of Jared if he saw more, he replies that he did not and says, “Lord, show thyself unto me” (Ether 3:10). Once again, the brother of Jared does not speak in the form of a request, but in a statement that appears to reflect his faith in the Lord’s promise given in verse 2. Before revealing himself, however, the Lord asks another question, consistent with the nature of their dialogic exchange:

The Lord said unto him: *Believest thou the words which I shall speak?*

And he answered: Yea, Lord, I know that thou speakest the truth, for thou art a God of truth, and canst not lie.

And when he had said these words, behold, the Lord showed himself unto him, and said: Because thou *knowest* these things ye are redeemed from the fall; therefore *ye are brought back into my presence*; therefore *I show myself unto you*. (Ether 3:11–13)⁵⁰

Significantly, the Lord asks the brother of Jared if he believes words that the Lord has not yet spoken—a question of faith. The brother of Jared answers the Lord’s question in the affirmative and goes a step further by proclaiming that he knows that the Lord speaks the truth because he is a God of truth and cannot lie. When he uses the word *know* here, however, the brother of Jared is speaking of a conviction in his heart and mind, not of knowledge gained by sensory experience. Unlike the way he *saw* the Lord’s finger, he has not *seen* that the Lord is a God of truth who cannot lie. The Lord replies by saying that the brother of Jared is redeemed from the fall because he “knows” these things, but once again the context is a dialogue about what the brother of Jared believes; it is a dialogue of faith.

To better understand this relationship between faith and knowledge, it will be helpful to closely analyze two particular verses that appear later in the chapter:

Because of the knowledge of this man he could not be kept from beholding within the veil; and he saw the finger of Jesus, which, when he saw, he fell with fear; for he knew that it was the finger of the Lord; and he had faith no longer, for he knew, nothing doubting.

Wherefore, having this perfect knowledge of God, he could not be kept from within the veil; therefore he saw Jesus; and he did minister unto him. (Ether 3:19–20)

The knowledge Moroni mentions at the beginning of verse 19 is not based on sensory experience, because the brother of Jared had not yet seen the Lord’s finger. It seems that he has in mind the type of knowledge that is a conviction of faith—the kind the brother of Jared refers to in verse 12. In fact, Moroni later writes about this event in terms of faith, not knowledge: “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” (Ether 12:20).⁵¹ In other words, because of what the brother of Jared *knew* about the Lord *owing to*

his faith in the Lord, he could not be kept from beholding within the veil, and he saw the finger of Jesus.

In writing “*he had faith no longer, for he knew, nothing doubting*,” Moroni is now establishing that, in this context, knowing does away with faith; if a person sees something, he no longer requires faith because that sensory experience does away with the necessity of faith. Keep in mind that Moroni earlier used the word *knowledge* to describe what the brother of Jared possessed that prevented him from being kept within the veil *even when he had faith*. In other words, his former use of the word *knowledge* allowed for someone to *also* have faith, but this new use of the word *knowledge* precludes faith.

In the statement “*Wherefore, having this perfect knowledge of God, he could not be kept from within the veil*,” Moroni now uses *knowledge* to refer to the result of a sensory experience: the brother of Jared has seen the finger of the Lord. Having this perfect knowledge of God—having seen his finger—he could not be kept from within the veil. This is important for at least two reasons. First, in my view, what opens the heavens in this story is faith in the Lord, not knowledge.⁵² Later in the book of Ether, when chastising the Gentiles for their wickedness in the latter days, the Lord speaks of their need to “rend that *veil of unbelief*” (Ether 4:15), not a *veil of ignorance*. Similarly, the Lord tells the brother of Jared he is able to see his finger because of his *faith* (see 3:9), not because of his knowledge, and that “never has man *believed* in me as thou hast” (v. 15), not “never has man had knowledge of me as thou hast.” The Lord praises the brother of Jared for his exceeding faith, not for seeing his finger. While Moroni states that the brother of Jared “saw Jesus” because “he could not be kept from within the veil” because of his “perfect knowledge” (v. 20), and that perfect knowledge appears to be that he saw the finger of the Lord (see v. 19), the Lord proclaims that the brother of Jared is “redeemed from the fall” and “brought back into [his] presence” because he “knowest these things” (v. 13). “These things” are apparently the answers the brother of Jared gave when asked by the Lord if he believed his words which he would speak—his *question of faith*. In other words, the Lord appears to be teaching that he showed himself to the brother of Jared not because the latter saw the Lord’s finger, but because he had such great faith in the Lord.

Second, it is precisely in the relationship between faith and knowledge that we arrive at the liminal transformation of the brother of Jared: he is transformed from a man of faith to a man of exceedingly great faith to a man of great knowledge. This, in part, is why we must be so careful to distinguish between the “knowledge” mentioned when the brother of Jared says he knows the Lord speaks the truth (see Ether 3:12) from the “knowledge” Moroni mentions when the brother of Jared could not be kept from beholding within the veil because he had seen the finger of the Lord (see v. 20). If we conflate the two, we risk overlooking, to a significant extent, the transformation that the brother of Jared undergoes in this chapter. This liminal transition consists, in part, of moving from a man of faith—one “hop[ing] for things which *are not seen*, which are true” (Alma 32:21)—to a man of knowledge who “saw Jesus” (Ether 3:20). Or, to describe the transformation another way, the brother of Jared has gone from a fallen man, who is cut off from the presence of the Lord, to a redeemed man, who is brought back into the Lord’s presence. In a similar vein, Grant Hardy sees the brother of Jared in the beginning as man before the Fall: “Several key incidents and phrases seem to indicate that Moroni arranged his abridgment up to [Ether 3:13] as a reversal of the fall of man. . . . Step by step, Moroni’s account takes us back toward creation, reversing the effects of the fall and restoring the close communion between God and man that was present at the beginning.”⁵³

If this transformation to a man of knowledge is so central to the brother of Jared’s liminal experience, it is also worth asking what it is in particular that the brother of Jared has come to know. Fundamentally, of course, whereas before he had *faith* that the Lord exists, he now *knows* because he has seen him. But the knowledge goes beyond that. For example, the Lord proclaims to him:

Behold, I am he who was prepared from the foundation of the world to redeem my people. Behold, *I am Jesus Christ. I am the Father and the Son.* In me shall all mankind have life, and that eternally, even they who shall believe on my name; and they shall become my sons and my daughters.

And never have I showed myself unto man whom I have created, for never has man believed in me as thou hast. Seest thou that ye are

created after mine own image? Yea, even all men were created in the beginning after mine own image.⁵⁴ (Ether 3:14–15)

Therefore, his knowledge is not limited simply to the Lord's existence; it extends to the Lord's particular identity—he now knows that Jehovah was the premortal Jesus Christ and that he is the Father and the Son. Additionally, he knows that all humankind can have eternal life through believing on his name, that they can become his sons and daughters, and that he was prepared from the foundation of the world to be the Redeemer. The brother of Jared learns much from his liminal experience; in fact, Elder Jeffrey R. Holland identifies twenty-five “items” from Ether 3 and 4 “regarding Jehovah and His true characteristics” that are not found in “the Old Testament canon of that period.”⁵⁵

After noting that the Lord ministered to the brother of Jared as he ministered to the Nephites, Moroni writes something that may initially be difficult to understand: “all this, that this man might know that he was God, because of the many great works which the Lord had showed unto him” (Ether 3:18). It is not clear what “all this” refers to, nor is it clear what Moroni means by saying the Lord did “all this” so the brother of Jared “might know that he was God.” Turning to Royal Skousen's Yale edition of the Book of Mormon, which is based on his critical text project, we find assistance in understanding the text:

And he ministered unto him
 even as he ministered unto the Nephites—
 and all this *because* that this man knew that he was God
 because of the many great works which the Lord had shewed unto him.⁵⁶

In other words, the Lord ministers to the brother of Jared (shows himself to him⁵⁷) just as he did to the Nephites *because* the brother of Jared knew he was God. And as readers are by now aware, the brother of Jared knew the Lord was God because of the many great works that the Lord had shown him, including preserving the Jaredites' language, guiding them through the wilderness, instructing them on building the barges, and touching the stones to miraculously make them shine.⁵⁸

“NEVER WERE GREATER THINGS MADE MANIFEST”

After the Lord shows himself to the brother of Jared, he cautions him to keep what he is learning sacred.

Behold, *thou shalt not suffer these things which ye have seen and heard to go forth unto the world*, until the time cometh that I shall glorify my name in the flesh; wherefore, ye shall treasure up the things which ye have seen and heard, and show it to no man.

And behold, when ye shall come unto me, *ye shall write them and shall seal them up*, that no one can interpret them; for ye shall write them in a language that they cannot be read. (Ether 3:21–22)

This requirement—to keep aspects of an experience away from the uninitiated—is common in liminal experiences. Victor Turner observes that during the liminal phase, what is considered the “heart of the liminal matter,” or the *sacra*, will often be communicated in “initiation rites all over the world” in three ways: “(1) exhibitions, ‘what is shown’; (2) actions, ‘what is done’; and (3) instructions, ‘what is said.’”⁵⁹ Turner further notes that “great importance is attached to keeping secret the nature of the *sacra*, the formulas chanted and instructions given about them.”⁶⁰

This brings us to the last, extensive knowledge the brother of Jared receives from the Lord: the great vision of the world. After the Lord requires that the brother of Jared keep what he has seen and heard to himself until the right time and gives him two stones to seal up with the “things which [he] shall write” (Ether 3:23),⁶¹ the Lord gives him yet another vision, this time one especially magnificent in its scope: “He showed unto the brother of Jared all the inhabitants of the earth which had been, and also all that would be; and he withheld them not from his sight, even unto the ends of the earth” (v. 25); “there never were greater things made manifest than those which were made manifest unto the brother of Jared” (4:4). Halifax writes that the liminal phase is “a time when myth and story unfold” and “where love and death become amplified.”⁶² Surely witnessing a vision in which one sees all the inhabitants of the earth and nothing is withheld, “even unto the ends of the earth,” must amplify such powerful themes as love and death. And if we think of myth and story in terms of their power for conveying the meaning of humankind, the brother of Jared’s visions on

Mount Shelem would be clearly liminal in nature. For this liminal experience of a man of faith transforming into a man of knowledge, this last vision is the epitome of spiritual knowledge in many respects, exemplifying the fully achieved transformation of the brother of Jared and reminding us of the visions of prophets such as Moses (see Moses 1:8) and Enoch (see Moses 7:67).

Though a discussion of what could be included within the scope of such a vision is beyond the purpose of this study, it is important to note that Moroni would later record that he had “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). It would seem that this man who the Lord proclaimed was a man of unprecedented faith (see 3:9, 15) has now transformed in this liminal stage to a man of unprecedented knowledge.⁶³

“WHAT THEY WILL DESIRE OF US”: THE INCORPORATION (POSTLIMINAL) STAGE

In this final phase of a rite of passage, or of transition, the rite is “consummated” and the person is in a “stable state once more.” She has “rights and obligations of a clearly defined and ‘structural’ type, and is expected to behave in accordance with certain customary norms and ethical standards.”⁶⁴ This final phase is a time for “the movement back into the everyday world,” Halifax writes, “a time of healing, of making whole again.”⁶⁵ In terms of the story of the brother of Jared, there is remarkably little written about him after his threshold experience with the Lord on Mount Shelem. However, what we do have in the record provides us with enough information to see some of the effects of his liminal experience.

“CAME DOWN OUT OF THE MOUNT”

The Lord commands the brother of Jared to write what he had seen but to keep that record hidden (see Ether 4:1). Moroni next mentions him in what at first glance is a very commonplace manner, much in keeping with the postliminal theme of returning to one’s previous world: “Now I, Moroni, proceed to give the record of Jared and his brother. For it came to pass after the Lord had prepared the stones which the brother of Jared had carried

up into the mount, the brother of Jared came down out of the mount, and he did put forth the stones into the vessels which were prepared, one in each end thereof; and behold, they did give light unto the vessels” (6:1–2). If we ponder the importance of the stones as “an effective symbol of faith”⁶⁶ in providing light for the journey, the image of the brother of Jared coming down from the mount and placing stones in each vessel—giving this light *from* Christ to every man, woman, and child, much as the light *of* Christ is given—may then seem much more significant to us. What follows in the chapter is an important, intense account of the Jaredite journey across the sea, but the only mention of the brother of Jared during the voyage is when those on board sing praises to the Lord: “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” (v. 9). This verse helps to make the brother of Jared appear as just one of the others in the group, doing what they are all doing. He has been fully incorporated back into the life he once had.

The people arrive in the promised land and establish themselves. Many years pass and “the brother of Jared began to be old,” Moroni writes, “and saw that he must soon go down to the grave; wherefore he said unto Jared: Let us gather together our people that we may number them, *that we may know of them what they will desire of us* before we go down to our graves” (Ether 6:19). This moment in the story is significant for at least two reasons. First, it is the first time in the story that we see the brother of Jared exerting any kind of authority relative to Jared. Up until this verse, it has always been Jared who has told his brother to do some act. Second, this incident also alludes to that all-important question the Lord asked the brother of Jared at the end of their dialogue about the barges, the question that was the catalyst for his liminal experience: “What will ye that I should prepare for you that ye may have light . . . ?” (2:25). Here is the brother of Jared, close to another threshold experience, between life and death, wanting to gather his people to ask of them what they desire of him before he dies. Perhaps this is part of what he learned through his liminal experience as the Lord ministered to him: that to become like the Savior is to have the same relationship with his people that the Lord has with them, to

bless people according to their righteous desires. *What will ye that I should prepare for you that ye may have light?*

After they number the people, the two aging brothers are grieved to learn that the people want them to anoint one of the two brothers' sons to be their king. When the brother of Jared tells them that such an act will lead to captivity, Jared says to him, "Suffer them that they may have a king" (Ether 6:24). The people choose one of the brother of Jared's sons, who refuses kingship. When the people want the brother of Jared to constrain his son to be their king, "he *commanded* them that they should constrain no man to be their king" (v. 25). Though the people eventually choose a king from among Jared's sons, the brother of Jared's commanding posture is nevertheless quite noteworthy. In fact, it points to the possibility that it is now the brother of Jared who is the leader of the people. If he is, the fact that Moroni does not include that important information in the narrative may be significant because it would fit with the purpose of the incorporation phase of a rite of transition. This phase should be about returning to the person's previous world, going back to the stable environment, not starting new adventures and facing difficult challenges. Of course, a person does face new challenges after he has completed a rite of passage, but those challenges are part of a different story, part of the new life begun. However, if the brother of Jared is *not* the leader of the people, then Moroni's including these instances of increased assertiveness with his brother may serve to illustrate the effects of the transformation he experienced in the liminal phase.

Moroni closes the story of the brother of Jared by writing that "the people began to prosper; and they became exceedingly rich. And it came to pass that *Jared died, and his brother also*. And it came to pass that Orihah did walk humbly before the Lord, and did remember how great things the Lord had done for his father, and also taught his people how great things the Lord had done for their fathers" (Ether 6:28–30). If we reflect on the tumultuous aspects of the brother of Jared's preliminal phase—the scattering of people and the confounding of their language, his people's various trials and challenges of getting food and making their way through a wilderness, and his personal spiritual ordeal of being chastised by the Lord—and then ponder the liminal phase that includes physical separation from

his people, the labor of melting the rock, the tremendous spiritual growth and accompanying effort involved with the visions, being ministered to by the Lord, and making a record afterward, we may view this postliminal incorporation phase as being written in a very healing, almost pastoral manner. Whether it is the original records of Ether or the choices Moroni is making as the abridger, we cannot tell, but the account we have before us has left out whatever conflict there must have been among the people, whatever challenges they had to face during this time, and the trials that the brother of Jared in particular must have experienced through the years up to this point. Instead we see the brother of Jared back with his people, but as a new man after his transformation, no longer taking instructions from his brother, though listening to his counsel, and his people looking to him for leadership.

CONCLUSION

It is difficult to think of a threshold experience without thinking of standing in a doorway and not being inside or outside. It is a moment of both leaving behind and looking forward. As Turner writes, “Transitional beings . . . are neither one thing nor another; or *may be both*; or neither here nor there; or may even be nowhere . . . and are at the very least ‘betwixt and between.’”⁶⁷ Such was the case for the brother of Jared during his liminal experience. He was a man who stood with confidence but fell from fear. He was a man of exceeding faith who had faith no longer because *he came to know*. His story began with him as a man highly favored of the Lord, one whose remarkable experiences would transform him into a man with exceeding faith, and then into a man redeemed from the Fall and brought back into the Lord’s presence—a man ultimately given expansive knowledge and who saw all that would be, even unto the ends of the earth. Afterward he returned to his people, lived a good life with his family, and died in the promised land, perhaps even as the king of his people, surrounded by those who loved him. What happened on Mount Shelem was a great vision, but it was much more than that: the brother of Jared climbed the mountain a man who had cried unto the Lord, and descended the mountain a man forever changed by the resulting encounter.

NOTES

1. I am not discounting the great blessing such a vision would be by any means. I am only stating that while the brother of Jared had a vision of the Lord, he also experienced more than the vision.
2. John S. Thompson writes of the Jaredite story (Ether 1–3; 6) that “the author, or at least the editor, skillfully chooses his topics and words in order to weave Creation, Christ, and temple imagery into the narrative.” Thompson, “The Jaredite Exodus: A Literary Perspective of a Historical Narrative,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 3 (1994): 104–5. Interestingly, those three themes are liminal at their core.
3. Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, trans. Monika B. Vizedome and Gabrielle L. Caffee (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960). Van Gennep’s book was first published in French as *Les rites de passage* in 1909.
4. Van Gennep, *Rites of Passage*, 10–11.
5. See Richard Dilworth Rust, *Feasting on the Word: The Literary Testimony of the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1997), 221–28. For an earlier version of this discussion on liminality, see Rust, “Liminality in the Book of Mormon,” in *The Association for Mormon Letters Annual, 1994* (Salt Lake City: AML, 1994), 2:207–11. I have also written an essay on liminality in the Book of Mormon, though it concerns what we could learn about teaching and learning through studying Lehi’s dream from a liminal perspective. See Charles Swift, “‘It Filled My Soul with Exceedingly Great Joy’: Lehi’s Vision of Teaching and Learning,” in *The Things Which My Father Saw: Approaches to Lehi’s Dream and Nephi’s Vision*, ed. Daniel L. Belnap, Gaye Strathearn, and Stanley A. Johnson (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2011).
6. “Contemporary Americans,” Joan Halifax writes, “consider rites of passage as something that *other* cultures do. There are universal significant transitions in everyone’s lives which go unmarked—unrecognized by us—but are acknowledged as significant by other societies. For example, the rituals during puberty, or the phase shift from adulthood to old age—becoming a respected elder. Yet perhaps, in another way, rites of passage *are* being acted out by us—albeit in unconscious and chaotic ways—with unfortunate and significant implications for our social and environmental landscapes.” Halifax, “Learning as Initiation: Not-Knowing, Bearing Witness, and Healing,” in *The Heart of Learning: Spirituality in Education*, ed. Steven Glazer (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher / Putnam,

1999), 175. Daniel L. Belnap also points out that “temple-attending Latter-day Saints . . . are quite familiar with the concept [of liminality]. When a Saint speaks of attending the temple as leaving the world temporarily in order to commune with God, and reemerging stronger and more powerful than before, such language reflects the liminal nature of the temple, both in practice and in space.” Belnap, “‘That I May Dwell among Them’: Liminality and Ritual in the Tabernacle,” in *Ascending the Mountain of the Lord: Temple, Praise, and Worship in the Old Testament*, ed. David Rolph Seely, Jeffrey R. Chadwick, and Matthew J. Grey (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2013), 14.

7. Halifax, “Learning as Initiation,” 173–74.
8. Victor Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1969), 94.
9. “And now I, Moroni, proceed to give an account of those ancient inhabitants who were destroyed by the hand of the Lord upon the face of this north country. And I take mine account from the twenty and four plates which were found by the people of Limhi, which is called the Book of Ether” (Ether 1:1–2). Thus begins the book of Ether. It looks straightforward enough, but this text is far from straightforward. If Moroni literally took his account from the twenty-four plates Ether wrote that were found by Limhi’s people, then he translated them himself and we are reading Joseph’s translation of Moroni’s abridgment of his translation. However, since Limhi could not read the twenty-four plates, he gave them to Mosiah₂, who translated them using the Urim and Thummim (see Mosiah 28:13, 19). Therefore, Moroni could have abridged Mosiah’s translation of the twenty-four plates, and we would now be reading Joseph’s translation of Moroni’s abridgment of Mosiah’s translation of the twenty-four plates that Ether wrote. In other words, as John S. Thompson writes, “It is difficult to ascertain which words are direct quotes from the record and thus Ether’s words, and which are paraphrased sentences by Moroni himself.” Thompson, “Jaredite Exodus,” 104n2. Or, for that matter, which words might be Mosiah’s translations of Ether’s words, quoted by Moroni. For a thorough discussion of this issue, see Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon, Fourth Nephi through Moroni* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2007), 6:159–60. For the purposes of this essay, and for the sake of clarity, I will treat this narrative as though Moroni wrote the text, recognizing that it is a complicated issue.

10. At this point in the story, Jared and his people, known as the Jaredites, consist of Jared and “his brother and their families, with some others and their families” (Ether 1:33).
11. The Jaredites also experience a rite of passage as a people: they separate from their people and their land (preliminal), they experience a transition during their archetypal journey across the ocean (liminal), and they must incorporate into the world as they start their society in the promised land (postliminal). However, their liminal experience is beyond the scope of this essay.
12. I am asserting that there are no questions involved because of the way the text is worded, “Cry unto the Lord, that he will not confound us that we may not understand our words” (Ether 1:34), as opposed to later when Jared explicitly tells his brother to ask questions. It is possible, of course, that the brother of Jared did speak to the Lord in the form of a question (e.g., “Lord, will you not confound our language?”); however, the text does not indicate that. Even if such were the case, it would not be a substantive question seeking information so much as one seeking a miracle.
13. Noah Webster, *Noah Webster’s First Edition of an American Dictionary of the English Language*, 1828 facsimile edition (San Francisco: Foundation for American Christian Education, 1995), s.v. “whither.”
14. See my discussion pertaining to “call upon the name of the Lord” below.
15. Jared spoke to his brother of a “land which is choice above all the earth” (Ether 1:38), and the Lord promised the brother of Jared to take them to a “land which is choice above all the lands of the earth” (v. 42). Note the Lord’s reason for giving the promised land to the Jaredites: “because this long time ye have cried unto me” (v. 43). It is because of the brother of Jared’s persistent efforts in prayer that his people will receive this great blessing. We do not know if the Lord is referring to all the times the brother of Jared has cried unto him that have been discussed throughout this chapter, or if the brother of Jared cried unto the Lord for a long time particularly about where they should go (see v. 38). In either case, this statement by the Lord emphasizes how important it is to him that the brother of Jared *cry unto him*.
16. Not to be confusing, but the seashore is a liminal place, and the beginning of the liminal phase, *for the Jaredites as a people*. They are the ones “stuck” in this in-between phase. For the brother of Jared, he is still in his preliminal phase, about to separate from his people.

17. “Here in Ether 2:14, the 1837 edition dropped the definite article *the* before *four years*. The resulting reading is ambiguous: one can’t be sure whether the text is referring to another four years or the original four years. The earliest text has the definite article *the* and thus eliminates any possible confusion over the length of time; the total number of years is four.” Royal Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon, Part 6: 3 Nephi 8–Moroni 10* (Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 2017), 3878–79.
18. Though it is reasonable to surmise this chastening is largely due to his unique relationship with the Lord and his role as spiritual guide to his people, this act of singling him out for criticism still results in further separating him from the group.
19. In the Book of Mormon we read that “the Lord seeth fit to chasten his people; yea, he trieth their patience and their faith” (Mosiah 23:21). Such chastisement, the scriptures teach us, is not a sign of the Lord’s disdain for a person, but it can be a sign of his love, as when he said, “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” (Doctrine and Covenants 95:1). This manner of correction from the Lord can be a sign of a person’s value, progress, and preparation: “My people must be tried in all things, that they may be prepared to receive the glory that I have for them, even the glory of Zion; and he that will not bear chastisement is not worthy of my kingdom” (136:31).
20. Here is an example from each of the standard works: “Then began men to call upon the name of the Lord” (Genesis 4:26); “whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Acts 2:21); “Now when the people saw that they were coming against them they went out to meet them, and prostrated themselves before them . . . and began to call on the name of the Lord” (Alma 24:21); “calling on the name of the Lord for the Comforter, which shall teach them all things that are expedient for them” (Doctrine and Covenants 75:10); and “Adam and Eve, his wife, called upon the name of the Lord” (Moses 5:4). For more examples, see Genesis 13:4; 26:25; Joseph Smith Translation, Genesis 9:6; 1 Kings 18:24; 2 Kings 5:11; Joel 2:32; Isaiah 12:4; Psalms 80:18–19; 99:6; 116:4, 13, 17; Zephaniah 3:9; Zechariah 13:9; Acts 9:14; 22:16; 1 Corinthians 1:2; Romans 10:12–13; 2 Nephi 22:4; Mosiah 4:11; Alma 19:16; Doctrine and Covenants 65:4–5; 93:1; 100:17; 133:6; and Moses 6:4.
21. George Reynolds and Janne M. Sjodahl, *Commentary on the Book of Mormon: The Book of Ether* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1965), 70.

22. Reynolds and Sjodahl, *Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 85.
23. Mahonri Moriancumer is believed to be the name of the brother of Jared. Many consider the source of this belief to be the following: “At this place we record an authoritative statement regarding the name of the Brother of Jared. In the *Juvenile Instructor*, Volume 27, p. 282, one of the authors hereto, President George Reynolds of the First Council of Seventy, furnishes this information: ‘While residing at 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 baby the name of Mahonri Moriancumer. When he had finished the blessing he laid the child on the bed, and turning to the father, 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 nearby, 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.’” Reynolds and Sjodahl, *Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 69. As Grant Hardy puts it, “Despite its late, second-hand nature, this tradition has been accepted by Latter-day Saints.” Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader’s Guide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 319n13.
24. Joseph Fielding McConkie, Robert L. Millet, and Brent L. Top, *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1992), 269.
25. Gardner, *Second Witness*, 6:182. In his commentary, Gardner uses the “more ancient name of God, Yahweh,” in an attempt to “help shift the reader’s mind from a modern context to a more ancient one” (1:3).
26. D. Kelly Ogden and Andrew C. Skinner, *Verses by Verses: The Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2011), 2:261.
27. For example, “Behold, he who has repented of his sins, the same is forgiven, and I, the Lord, remember them no more” (Doctrine and Covenants 58:42).
28. I realize there is a slight variance of phraseology. In Ether 2:14 and 15 the phrase is “call upon the name of the Lord,” whereas in 3:2 it’s “call upon thee,” which would mean the same as “call upon the Lord.” My understanding of the two phrases, and how they are specifically used in this story, leads me to believe they mean the same thing. Also, both phrases appear to often convey the same meaning in the scriptures in general. See these comparable references for “call upon the name of the Lord” (Genesis 4:26; 13:4; 26:25; 2 Kings 5:11; Psalms 99:6; 116:4, 13; Isaiah 12:4; Acts 2:21; 9:14; 22:16; 1 Corinthians 1:2; 2 Nephi

- 22:4; Mosiah 4:11; Alma 19:16; 24:21; Doctrine and Covenants 75:10; 100:17; Moses 5:4; 6:4; Abraham 2:20) and for “call upon the Lord” (2 Samuel 22:7; 1 Chronicles 21:26; Psalms 18:3, 6; 118:5–6; Acts 7:59; Mosiah 16:12; 24:11–12; 26:4; Doctrine and Covenants 53:1; 136:32; Moses 8:26; Joseph Smith—History 1:68). Of special significance is how some passages use both phrases in proximity and with the same meaning. In the Old Testament we find the example “Moses and Aaron among his priests, and Samuel among them that *call upon his name*; they *called upon the Lord*, and he answered them” (Psalm 99:6; emphasis added). In the New Testament, Paul writes, “There is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that *call upon him*. For whosoever shall *call upon the name of the Lord* shall be saved” (Romans 10:12–13; emphasis added). And in this dispensation a modern revelation on prayer includes this guidance: “Pray unto the Lord, *call upon his holy name*, make known his wonderful works among the people. *Call upon the Lord*, that his kingdom may go forth upon the earth, that the inhabitants thereof may receive it, and be prepared for the days to come, in the which the Son of Man shall come down in heaven, clothed in the brightness of his glory, to meet the kingdom of God which is set up on the earth” (Doctrine and Covenants 65:4–5; emphasis added).
29. Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, rev. ed. (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 226; emphasis added.
30. Some might argue that it does not apply in all respects. For example, while Alter writes of “only the most minimal intervention of the narrator,” we observe quite a bit of intervention on the part of Moroni (e.g., Ether 2:7–13). Unlike what we usually find in the Hebrew Bible, “Moroni maintains a more pervasive narrator presence. He has to jump in more frequently, and at greater length, to make his points clear.” Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 223. Some might even consider his editorial style to be “heavy-handed.” See Joseph M. Spencer, “Christ and Krishna: The Visions of Arjuna and the Brother of Jared,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 23 (2014): 69. However, I cannot help but wonder if such tendencies are less an issue of *narration* and more one of *abridgment*. Alter’s observation about narration and biblical storytelling may still hold true for the story of the brother of Jared if we are to separate the narrative from the moments when, perhaps, Moroni the abridger steps in and acts on his felt need to summarize or emphasize what he has read on the original plates.

31. This length of time may also be evidence against the view that “call upon the name of the Lord” refers to Doctrine and Covenants 93:1 and that the manifestation of the Lord was “about to happen to the brother of Jared.” Ogden and Skinner, *Verse by Verse*, 2:261. Of course, time is relative, and perhaps the amount of time required to build eight barges and to later put holes in them is not too long for Doctrine and Covenants 93:1 to still apply. Even so, one would still need to deal with the issue of the brother of Jared’s calling upon the name of the Lord for his brethren, as discussed earlier.
32. Terryl L. Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture That Launched a New World Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 217–18. While Givens discusses a number of examples of dialogic revelation in the Book of Mormon, he writes only a brief paragraph on the brother of Jared. He explains how “neglect of prayerful communication by a Jaredite leader resulted in what must surely be the longest dressing-down in sacred history,” implying an understanding of “call upon the name of the Lord” as prayer in general and supposing, it appears, that the brother of Jared had not prayed at all (see p. 220). Givens recognizes that some would say that the Bible also includes instances of the Lord speaking with prophets the way he does in the Book of Mormon. “Indeed, it is true that ‘The Lord spake’ to Moses dozens of times, engaged in a protracted negotiation with Abraham over the fate of Sodom, and obviously revealed his mind and will to a canon of major and minor prophets. So to some extent, one could consider that Joseph’s personal ministry, as well as the Book of Mormon record, reenacts an Old Testament paradigm. But on closer inspection, the Book of Mormon model of revelation diverges in at least one crucial way. In the Bible, outside of prophets acting in the role of national leadership, personal revelation is almost unheard of. . . . And the concern of these prophets is with the fate of kings, nations, and tribes, with the workings and purposes of God in history, with the spiritual destinies of covenant peoples and fledgling churches. . . . The Book of Mormon here becomes a study in contrast. Through chiasmic form, thematic structure, numerous textual examples, and a final concluding instance of readerly invitation, the scripture hammers home the insistent message that revelation is the province of everyman” (pp. 220–21).
33. Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon*, 220.
34. It is no accident that this last lesson centers on one of the most important symbols in all of scripture: light. Light as a symbol can be found throughout

- scripture and is one of the most powerful symbols. After all, Christ himself is “the light of the world” (John 8:12). “Light is perhaps the most important of religious symbols. It has constantly been used as a symbol of the deity, and in some religions God is identified with light, as in the case of Ra in ancient Egypt, and in Christianity when John came to bear witness to the Light (John I, 4–9). By this association of light with God it has become symbolic of such qualities as knowledge, wisdom, truth and goodness, while darkness is associated with the opposites of these qualities, folly, ignorance and evil.” Arnold Whittick, *Symbols, Signs, and Their Meaning* (London: Leonard Hill, 1960), 310. For an extensive discussion of light as a symbol in the Latter-day Saint context, see Richard Dilworth Rust, “Light: A Masterful Symbol,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 20 (2011): 52–65.
35. Perhaps this is similar to the trust the Lord expressed in Nephi₂: “Blessed art thou, Nephi, for those things which thou hast done; for I have beheld how thou hast with unwearyingness declared the word, which I have given unto thee, unto this people. And thou hast not feared them, and hast not sought thine own life, but hast sought my will, and to keep my commandments. And now, because thou hast done this with such unwearyingness, behold, I will bless thee forever; and I will make thee mighty in word and in deed, in faith and in works; yea, even that all things shall be done unto thee according to thy word, for *thou shalt not ask that which is contrary to my will*” (Helaman 10:4–5).
36. It may appear that I am drawing a fine line. For example, John S. Thompson writes: “In contrast to the air, a necessary component to sustain life which is freely given by God, the brother of Jared must work out for himself the problem of light.” Thompson, “Jaredite Exodus,” 107. He continues by discussing the role Christ plays in making the stones give light, recognizing that the brother of Jared is not alone in this endeavor. Gardner sees this scenario in these terms: the Lord “spells out the parameters of the problem so that Jared’s brother understands them clearly but does not spell out a solution. As with the rest of his children, the Lord wants the brother of Jared to learn to think and work out problems. Of course, he wants us to come to him for advice, but not in such a way that we abdicate our agency and God-given intelligence.” Gardner, *Second Witness*, 6:189–90. However, it seems significant to me to see the difference between, for example, a parent telling a child, “You need to figure that out for yourself” and telling a child, “What would you like me to do to help you with that problem?” I certainly agree with those who point out that there is an element of the Lord

wanting the brother of Jared to come up with something, but what is it exactly that the Lord is asking him to come up with? To put it in the vernacular, the Lord is not saying, “Go work out how to get light in the barges,” which is what some suppose he is saying. He is saying to the brother of Jared, “What do you want me to do so you’ll have light?” Theoretically, the brother of Jared could have said, “I want you to molten stones out of rock and make them shine,” and the Lord would have done *all* the work. Or the brother of Jared could have asked the Lord to do any number of other solutions. My point is this: the Lord was not a woodshop teacher trying to get the brother of Jared to figure out the problem on his own. The Lord, in my view, was teaching him another level of their relationship that helped prepare him for the transformation he was about to experience.

37. I think it is worth noting two important aspects of this hierarchy. First, as implied by the term *hierarchy*, each level is more “advanced”—more of an encounter with the Lord, if you will—than any before it. Second, all four of these lessons of revelation, and I do not pretend that the possible forms of revelation that exist are limited to these four, challenge the idea that the *only way* to receive revelation is to identify a problem, “study it out in your mind,” present the answer you come up with to the Lord, and receive either a “burning in the bosom” if your proposed answer is right or a “stupor of thought” if it is wrong (see Doctrine and Covenants 9:7–10). Even though that process was given by the Lord to Oliver Cowdery as a *method for translating the Book of Mormon*, it can certainly be applied in other situations. However, the Lord did not indicate it is the *only* method to be applied in *all* situations.
38. M. Catherine Thomas, “The Brother of Jared at the Veil,” in *Temples of the Ancient World*, ed. Donald W. Parry (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1994), 390; emphasis added.
39. Rust, *Feasting on the Word*, 221. “The judgment day itself could be called liminal,” he continues, “being on the edge, or threshold, between different places and conditions.”
40. Turner, *Forest of Symbols*, 98. Turner also writes that the person “passes through a realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state” (p. 94). This is completely true of what the brother of Jared is about to experience in the liminal state. His vision of the Lord and his vision afterward are like nothing he experienced before or after, at least insofar as the record provides.

41. “Jared and his brother had left a people who built towers as artificial mountains because mountains were a symbolic connecting point between humankind and deity. Mountains moved the ascender closer to God’s realm. If one were to meet God, it would be there—in the place of nature’s temple. The brother of Jared was therefore going up to his natural temple.” Gardner, *Second Witness*, 6:196.
42. Halifax, “Learning as Initiation,” 174.
43. Rust, *Feasting on the Word*, 221.
44. For an excellent discussion on such legends, see Gardner, *Second Witness*, 6:197–98.
45. Reynolds and Sjodahl, *Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 76.
46. Gardner, *Second Witness*, 6:197. There is an important distinction to be made between what Gardner calls the brother of Jared’s “request” here and what he actually does when he speaks to the Lord, but I will discuss that in detail when we get to that point in the text.
47. Gardner also opines that the brother of Jared would expect to see an anthropomorphic God: “Locating the Jaredites in a pre-Yahwist-redaction environment strongly suggests that they would have shared the Israelite/Canaanite/Mesopotamian cultural tendency to anthropomorphize God. Thus, when the brother of Jared saw the finger of God, he saw what he would have expected to see, at least in terms of the general form of deity.” Gardner, *Second Witness*, 6:194. It is beyond the scope of this essay to explore why the belief that the Lord had flesh and blood (though in error at that time) would cause the brother of Jared to be fearful. For an in-depth discussion of the topic, however, see Gardner, *Second Witness*, 6:191–94.
48. According to Gardner, in asking this question the Lord is not making a “theological point” about “an omniscient God”; rather, the act serves to strengthen the drama of the moment. “This is not to say that the story of the brother of Jared is nothing more than a story. Rather, it is a story told for effect. . . . Asking this question heightens the impact for the brother of Jared’s disclosure.” Gardner, *Second Witness*, 6:202. Presenting another view, Elder Jeffrey R. Holland notes that it “is a basic premise of Latter-day Saint theology that God ‘knoweth all things, and there is not anything save he knows it’ (2 Nephi 9:20). The scriptures, both ancient and modern, are replete with this assertion of omniscience. Nevertheless, God has frequently asked questions of men, usually as a way to test their faith, measure their honesty, or allow their knowledge greater development.” “Rending the Veil of Unbelief,” in *The Voice of My Servants: Apostolic*

Messages on Teaching, Learning, and Scripture, ed. Scott C. Esplin and Richard Neitzel Holzapfel (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2010), 154.

49. Two other verses add another dimension to this marvelous encounter. First, Moroni tells us, “[The Lord] had said unto [the brother of Jared] in times before, that if he would believe in him that he could show unto him all things . . . ; therefore *the Lord could not withhold anything from him*, for he knew that the Lord could show him all things” (Ether 3:26). Just as it appears that the Lord had commanded the Jaredites to call upon his name so they could receive from him according to their desires (see v. 2), it seems that he had told the brother of Jared that if he believed in the Lord, he could be shown all things. Moroni explains that this promise prevented the Lord from withholding anything from the brother of Jared. Second, this interpretation may be supported by Moroni’s statement much later in the book of Ether: “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” (12:21). It is important to note that the idea that the Lord is not “able” to keep the brother of Jared from within the veil may be a figure of speech; it is not because the brother of Jared forced his will upon the Lord, but because the Lord had made him a promise and the Lord, consistent with who he is, honors his promises. The phrase “could not be kept from within the veil” may be no more than the manifestation of the doctrine that the Lord states elsewhere: “I, the Lord, am bound when ye do what I say; but when ye do not what I say, ye have no promise” (Doctrine and Covenants 82:10).
50. Two prominent Latter-day Saint scholars interpret this event as having the greatest personal significance for the brother of Jared: “The prophet’s faith was so perfect that his redemption was secured—that is, his calling and election was made sure.” Ogden and Skinner, *Verse by Verse*, 2:265.
51. In this same chapter of Ether, known as a great discourse on faith, Moroni states that there are many people who could not be kept from within the veil, identifying them all with faith, not knowledge, and including the brother of Jared among them: “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. 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” (Ether 12:19–20).
52. In contrast, Grant Hardy sees the “focus” being “on the power of knowledge to open the heavens,” as evidenced by what Moroni says in 3:17, 19–20 and by the Lord’s reference to what the brother of Jared says he knows when the Lord says he is redeemed from the Fall. Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 243.
 53. Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 241–42.
 54. The Lord’s teaching the brother of Jared that he is created after the image of the Lord and that “even all [people] were created in the beginning after [his] own image” forms a tremendously important connection to what Robert Alter says about dialogue in the Hebrew Bible: “Everything in the world of biblical narrative ultimately gravitates toward dialogue—perhaps . . . because to the ancient Hebrew writers speech seemed the essential human faculty: by exercising the capacity of speech man demonstrated, however imperfectly, that he was made in the image of God.” Alter, *Biblical Narrative*, 226.
 55. Holland, “Rending the Veil,” 159–62. The present essay is concerned with how the vision of the brother of Jared is liminal in nature, which includes his transition from a man of faith to one of knowledge, but it is beyond the essay’s parameters to deal with such issues as whether other prophets before the brother of Jared saw the Lord as Jesus Christ or what the Lord meant by his statement “Never have I showed myself unto man whom I have created.”
 56. Royal Skousen, *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 681; emphasis added.
 57. See Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants*, 3895.
 58. See Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants*, 3897.
 59. Turner, *Forest of Symbols*, 102. Turner credits Jane Harrison for discovering this communication of the *sacra* with these three main components in the Greek Eleusinian and Orphic mysteries.
 60. Turner, *Forest of Symbols*, 103.
 61. The two stones hidden with the plates of Ether will be the Urim and Thummim, called “interpreters” (see Mosiah 8:11–12) and later buried with the gold plates. In a revelation given through Joseph Smith to the Three Witnesses, the Lord said, “Behold, I say unto you, that you must rely upon my word, which if you do with full purpose of heart, you shall have a view of the plates, and also of

- the breastplate, the sword of Laban, the *Urim and Thummim*, which were given to the brother of Jared upon the mount, when he talked with the Lord face to face, and the miraculous directors which were given to Lehi while in the wilderness, on the borders of the Red Sea” (Doctrine and Covenants 17:1; emphasis added).
62. Halifax, “Learning as Initiation,” 174. *Myth* is not to be taken in the commonly understood sense of a story that is not true, but in the more literary sense of a story that captures the essence of a people. “In myth we are brought into contact with the most deeply rooted hopes, fears and emotions of a community concerning the practical and pressing problems of daily life, physical or spiritual.” E. O. James, *Christian Myth and Ritual: A Historical Study* (London: John Murray, 1933), vii.
63. I am basing this statement about the brother of Jared possibly having *unprecedented knowledge* on what Moroni states in Ether 4:4 about no other vision being greater (up to that point, at least) and also on Elder Holland’s analysis of the knowledge the brother of Jared had received that is not in the known Old Testament (see note 55).
64. Turner, *Forest of Symbols*, 94.
65. Halifax, “Learning as Initiation,” 174.
66. Rust, “Light: A Masterful Symbol,” 57. Thompson writes of how the stones in the barges also symbolize Christ: “The stones of light play a significant role in the story, because the writer uses them to carry the imagery of Christ throughout the rest of the narrative. In chapter six, we read that the brother of Jared ‘did put forth the stones into the vessels which were prepared, one in each end thereof; and behold, they did give light unto the vessels’ (Ether 6:2). However, in contrast to ‘the’ stones in this verse, verse three omits any definite article in reference to stones and also ‘men, women, and children.’ The author/editor seems specifically to ignore direct reference to *the* stones which the brother of Jared ‘moltened’ and *the* men, women, and children of the Jaredites: ‘And thus the Lord caused stones to shine in darkness, to give light unto men, women, and children, that they might not cross the great waters in darkness.’ The absence of the definite articles prompts the reader to broaden his view, rather than focusing in on the actual stones and Jaredites of the story, allowing the imagery of Christ—who is the ‘light that shineth in darkness’ (Doctrine and Covenants 11:11), giving light or truth unto *all* men, women, and children—to surface.” Thompson, “Jaredite Exodus,” 108.
67. Turner, *Forest of Symbols*, 97; emphasis added.