

Chapter Six

POWER IN THE BOOK OF ETHER

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The book of Ether in the Book of Mormon is a tale of a mighty people from a long time ago. As Moroni summarizes their lengthy history, he demonstrates both the amazing spiritual power they held as well as their bloody contests over political power. They were meant to be a great nation, the Lord promising that they would be greater than any other upon all the face of the earth (see Ether 1:43), but because of their political struggles and pride, Satan ultimately gained power over them and they became yet one more example of a past destroyed civilization. This essay is a thematic study of power in the book of Ether and how the Jaredites were both blessed by spiritual power and undone by struggles for political power. In both cases, Moroni mediates his narrative through the lens of gaining God's power through faith or rejecting God's great acts and invitations and succumbing to Satan's power. Thus he provides models for how all God's children can gain greater access to the power God is willing to share

through faith and righteousness while warning us against evil power and using it for selfish purposes.

BACKGROUND

In simple terms, power is the ability, possibility, and capacity to do or make something. Some distinguish between the *power to* bring about action versus the *power over* someone or something, the ability to exert control or influence. An *actor* is an entity that possesses power (God, Satan, humans, spirits, animals, etc.). The greater the power an actor has, the more that actor can accomplish. In terms of spiritual power, the greater the spiritual power one possesses, the greater the ability one has to use spiritual gifts, overcome temptation, and remain on God's path. A person's spirit gains control and dominion over the "natural man" as he or she is sanctified through the Holy Spirit and other spiritual experiences. If God blesses a person with spiritual power, a vertical sharing of power, that person is able to do more in his or her own life while also blessing the lives of others. However, the natural tendency for mortals is to seek power for one's own benefit. When power is sought *over* others, rather than *with* or *for* them, it usually includes force and violence and remains on the horizontal plane between mortals devoid of heavenly help. Unfortunately, the Book of Mormon is replete with examples of this negative power and its effects on others. Yet thankfully the Book of Mormon shows even more examples of positive power and how, as God demonstrates his power to and through human instruments, they can overcome the evil power competing in this world.

Often in Book of Mormon narrative, two figures are presented directly against each other, such as Jacob versus Sherem or Alma versus Korihor, in order to show their true source of power: God or the devil. The book of Ether differs somewhat in that it does not focus on spiritual confrontations between two people and their battle of thoughts or dogmas, but rather emphasizes two experiences of people gaining access to God's power—the brother of Jared and Moroni—through their interactions with Jehovah. On the political side, while there are confrontations between those who accept God's prophets and those who do not, the narrative focus is not on contrasting the competing ideologies as much as on depicting the

pernicious danger of secret combinations that use Satan's power to dominate others. Although these wicked tales may not seem as relevant to our spiritual growth as they were to that of the brother of Jared and Moroni, they fulfill a key purpose of the Book of Mormon: to expose the enemies of Christ. President Ezra Taft Benson taught:

The Book of Mormon exposes the enemies of Christ. It confounds false doctrines and lays down contention. (See 2 Nephi 3:12.) It fortifies the humble followers of Christ against the evil designs, strategies, and doctrines of the devil in our day. The type of apostates in the Book of Mormon are similar to the type we have today. God, with his infinite foreknowledge, so molded the Book of Mormon that we might see the error and know how to combat false educational, political, religious, and philosophical concepts of our time.¹

The power of Satan, who tries to dominate mortals, is commonly manifested in mortals' political and military efforts to overpower and control others.

The story of the Jaredites begins with their journey from the Tower of Babel to a new promised land. Although the book of Ether does not go into detail about the tower, it frames the story with an example of mortals' efforts to illegitimately access power. A common interpretation of this story is that the people wanted to somehow access heaven and God's power without God's approval, "a symbol of humanity's arrogant pursuit of fame and power—ideas closely linked in the ancient Near East. . . . The tower, then, is a symbol of humanity's ability and propensity to cross boundaries and of God's endeavor to check such behavior."² Joseph Smith apparently taught a concept (recorded in George Laub's personal journal)³ that those building the tower hoped to gain admittance to the translated city of Enoch. Orson Pratt later reiterated a similar teaching, claiming that those at the tower "thought that the City of Enoch was caught up a little ways from the earth, and that the city was within the first sphere above the earth; and that if they could get a tower high enough, they might get to heaven, where the City of Enoch and the inhabitants thereof were located. They went to work and built a tower. They had this tradition, that there had been a translation of people from the earth, and they were anxious to become acquainted

with them.”⁴ Either way, whether those people were trying to access heaven or the translated city of Enoch, the story of the Jaredites begins with their own small group’s effort to distance themselves from those illegitimately seeking spiritual power and access to heavenly realms. As a result of their desires to legitimately seek God’s guidance and power through prayer and petitioning God’s help, the Lord granted blessings, directly guided them, and led them into favorable spiritual conditions. It will be instructive to consider in detail how the Jaredites achieved this spiritual power.

SPIRITUAL POWER

Along their journey, the Jaredites, and especially the brother of Jared, experienced some of the most powerful encounters with Deity recorded in scripture. In fact, they were so powerful that they are not even fully contained in the Book of Mormon.⁵ Thousands of years later when Moroni read these experiences, he felt that the brother of Jared was so mighty in writing that his words “overpower[ed] man” (Ether 12:24). In comparison, as we will explore later, Moroni felt weak and worried that those who read his record would mock at his writings (see vv. 23–24).

The manifestation of God’s power to the brother of Jared, which serves as a model of how our faith can be used to initially approach God and subsequently be strengthened through the spiritual interaction we have with Deity, begins with simple stones turning into magnificent illuminations.⁶ As a demonstration of his faith, the brother of Jared not only came up with the idea to present the stones to the Lord but expressed his certainty that the Lord could truly transform them. “I know, O Lord, that thou hast all power, and can do whatsoever thou wilt for the benefit of man; 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” (Ether 3:4–5).⁷ Elder Jeffrey R. Holland has insightfully pointed out that

for all of his self-abasement, the faith of the brother of Jared is apparent. In fact, we might better say *transparent* in light of the purpose for which these stones will be used. Surely God, as well as the reader, feels something very striking in the childlike innocence

and fervor of this man's faith. "*Behold, O Lord, thou canst do this.*" Perhaps there is no more powerful single line of faith spoken by man in scripture. It is almost as if he is encouraging God, emboldening Him, reassuring Him. Not "Behold, O Lord, I am sure that thou canst do this." Not "Behold, O Lord, thou hast done many greater things than this." However uncertain the prophet is about his own ability, he has *no* uncertainty about God's power. There is nothing here but a single, clear, bold, and assertive declaration with no hint or element of vacillation. It is encouragement to Him who needs no encouragement but who surely must have been touched by it. "Behold, O Lord, thou canst do this."⁸

The text proceeds to share an important paradoxical attitude common to mortals: "We know that thou art able to show forth great power, which looks small unto the understanding of men" (Ether 3:5). Why does God's great power often look small to the understanding of men?⁹ We are repeatedly taught in scripture that God's ways are not our ways, and too often we expect greater and grander things before we will believe or act, but usually God's effects are line upon line and precept upon precept. By small means great things can come to pass if we do not reject them because of their perceived simplicity. God's power is shared with us in the minute details, the consistent steadfastness, the almost imperceptible growth, but which in time forges a spiritual strength like none other. The brother of Jared recognized that God was powerful enough to turn simple stones into instruments of light that would make it possible to cross the vast ocean.

Of course, the intense spiritual experience of the brother of Jared did not end with illuminated rocks. When he saw the finger of the Lord touching the stones, he fell back in fear. Eventually the brother of Jared uttered another faith-filled request, "Lord, show thyself unto me." The Lord queried, "Believest thou the words which I shall speak?"¹⁰ The brother of Jared affirmed, "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" (Ether 3:10–13). While at the beginning of their encounter the brother of Jared was not immediately invited through the veil by the Lord, his climactic spiritual experience was possible because he first manifested such strong faith that he could not be

kept outside the veil and was thus invited to behold and experience more.¹¹ Unlike those at the Tower of Babel who seemed to desire illegitimate access to God's presence and power, the brother of Jared demonstrated faith, drew closer to God, and gained further knowledge and insight at God's invitation. The brother of Jared ascended the mount in faith but came down with an even greater witness and understanding, having been transformed through experiencing God's power. When we seek the source of all spiritual power—God—and have experiences with him, our spirits strengthen and we in a sense charge our spiritual batteries with his power. We then move forward with greater faith, enlightenment, and knowledge to accomplish more with his power and assistance.

Moroni refers to the gospel principles related to the brother of Jared's experience in his own later reflections. He emphasizes the preliminary need for faith before the powerful witness, a witness that provides strengthening power because it increases our trust in God that just as he has now fulfilled what we placed our faith in, so will he continue to fulfill his words as we act in faith in the future.¹² Faith is part of the cause that will lead to an effect that is another way of looking at power—the ability to effect change. For the brother of Jared and others, they came to see with their physical eyes what they had previously beheld with an eye of faith. Moroni further testifies:

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.

And after the brother of Jared had beheld the finger of the Lord, because of the promise which the brother of Jared had obtained by faith, the Lord could not withhold anything from his sight; wherefore he showed him all things, for he could no longer be kept without the veil. (Ether 12:19–21)

Elder Holland highlighted the unique power of the brother of Jared's faith in this experience:

This may be one of those very provocative examples (except that it is real life and not hypothetical) about God's power. Schoolboy philosophers sometimes ask, "Can God make a rock so heavy that He cannot lift it?" or "Can God hide an item so skillfully that He cannot find it?" Far more movingly and importantly we may ask here, "Could God have stopped the brother of Jared from seeing through the veil?" At first blush one is inclined to say, "Surely God could block such an experience if He wished to." But think again. Or, more precisely, read again. "This man . . . *could not be kept from beholding within the veil; . . . he could not be kept from within the veil*" (Ether 3:19–20; emphasis added).

No, this may be an absolutely unprecedented case of a prophet's will and faith and purity so closely approaching that of heaven's that the man moves from understanding God to being actually like Him, with His same thrust of will and faith, at least in this one instance. What a remarkable doctrinal statement about the power of a mortal man's faith!¹³

Thus the brother of Jared's faith led to dramatic experiences with God's power, including piercing the veil. With this story, Moroni teaches readers that gaining spiritual power is a matter of first having faith and then being bold enough to express that faith in our requests to God. We then can receive a witness of the fulfillment of our faith that emboldens our future faithful requests.

Moroni's own experience with Jesus Christ, now the risen Lord, also revolved around power, power to make weak things become strong. Moroni knew that previous record keepers had enough faith to obtain a promise that their writings would come forth in the future through the Gentiles, but Moroni was worried that the Gentiles would then mock at the accounts because of their weakness in writing. Moroni identified five difficulties with the record keepers' writing (see Ether 12:23–25):

1. They could speak mightily (thanks to the Holy Ghost) but could not always write as mightily.

2. They were limited in their writing because it was a challenge to engrave on plates (“the awkwardness of our hands”).
3. They were not as powerful in writing as the brother of Jared was (“Thou madest him that the things which he wrote were mighty even as thou art, unto the overpowering of man to read them”).
4. They had a difficult time putting spiritual experiences into words (“Thou hast also made our words powerful and great, even that we cannot write them”).
5. They stumbled at the placing of their words (i.e., grammar and syntax).

The Lord’s reply was direct but ultimately comforting. “Fools mock, but they shall mourn; and my grace is sufficient for the meek, that they shall take no advantage of your weakness” (Ether 12:26). In reassuring Moroni, the Lord then said that his grace was sufficient for those who come unto him and humble themselves,¹⁴ and that he could make weak things become strong—an incredible manifestation and sharing of spiritual power. God’s power can bring about great things, not only through small and simple means but even through weak things. The Lord specifically verified this possibility to Moroni later on in their dialogue when he stated, “And because thou hast seen thy weakness *thou shalt be made strong*, even unto the sitting down in the place which I have prepared in the mansions of my Father” (v. 37).

Moroni was comforted and shared two confirming examples from the past that showed he knew the Lord’s words were true. First, the brother of Jared moved the mountain Zerin through faith,¹⁵ and, second, Jesus appeared to his disciples after his resurrection. Moroni testified, “I know that thou workest unto the children of men *according to their faith*; for the brother of Jared said unto the mountain Zerin, Remove—and it was removed. And if he *had not had faith* it would not have moved; wherefore thou workest *after men have faith*. For thus didst thou manifest thyself unto thy disciples; for *after they had faith*, and did speak in thy name, thou didst show thyself unto them in great power” (Ether 12:29–31). Thus Moroni’s dialogue with the Lord revolved around coming unto him in

faith, and then through that faith great things could be done such as had been done in the past. Moroni, like the brother of Jared, could testify, “I have seen Jesus, and . . . he hath talked with me face to face” (v. 39). Even Moroni’s self-perceived weakness in writing could become a strength, which seems to have been fulfilled with the tremendous converting power of his words, particularly in Moroni 10, which countless readers have felt while coming to know the truth of the Book of Mormon.

The brother of Jared and Moroni are the two principal examples of figures in the book of Ether who experienced God’s spiritual power through sacred encounters with the Lord that then subsequently strengthened them to remain faithful and accomplish great things like crossing the great ocean or completing a scriptural record. However, other figures in the book of Ether also experienced powerful miracles, spiritual growth, and prosperity, although we do not have the same details about their experiences.¹⁶ One common denominator among them is that they accepted the prophets and tried to heed their counsel, especially their calls to repentance. For example, “Emer did execute judgment in righteousness all his days,”¹⁷ resulting in peace and prosperity, and even more importantly in an experience seeing the Son of Righteousness (see Ether 9:21–22). In the days of Heth, great wickedness led to a terrible famine and poisonous serpents. At the point of perishing, the people repented, and “when they had humbled themselves sufficiently before the Lord he did send rain upon the face of the earth; and the people began to revive again, and there began to be fruit in the north countries, and in all the countries round about. And *the Lord did show forth his power* unto them in preserving them from famine” (v. 35). The prophets tried to warn the wicked people that if they did not change, God’s justice would fall upon them and they would be swept out of the land and replaced by another people brought by God’s power to the land. “There also came many prophets, and prophesied of great and marvelous things, and cried repentance unto the people, and except they should repent the Lord God would execute judgment against them to their utter destruction; and that the Lord God would send or bring forth another people to possess the land, by his power, after the manner by which he brought their fathers” (11:20–21). These last

blessings include both spiritual manifestations of God's power and temporal deliverance to a new promised land.

The spiritual lessons the righteous figures in the book of Ether learned included realizing who the source of all power is—God—and doing what they could to draw closer to him. Through their demonstrations of faith in God, they experienced miracles in their lives, which became blessings to themselves as well as to others around them. Without accessing and experiencing God's power, they would have fallen short and would have been unable to accomplish what they needed to do. God's power enables mortals to do more, and while his power is not usually physically tangible, its effects are nonetheless discernible and real: sanctification, greater abilities, miracles, and myriad other blessings.

POLITICAL POWER

Struggles for political power are found throughout the book of Ether.¹⁸ It begins with the debate about whether the Jaredites should even have a king, and if so, which son of Jared or son of the brother of Jared should be that king. Similar to the Israelite debate over kingship in the time of Samuel, there was a sense that kingship could lead to conflict and subjugation, and in both the Israelite and Jaredite communities these opinions were prescient, resulting in tremendous suffering for the common people and in murder and intrigue in the royal sphere.

Despite starting off with a righteous king, Orihah, it did not take long for Jaredite society to turn downward, particularly as the people began forgetting the great things God had done for them. Orihah had been grateful for God's power in bringing them to a new promised land, and so he walked humbly before God, remembered the great things the Lord had done for his father (Jared), and taught the people these things (see Ether 6:30). But his grandson Corihor was the first to rebel and take captive the king (his father Kib), thus fulfilling the saying of the brother of Jared that they would be brought into captivity (see 7:5). When another of the king's sons, Shule, regained the kingdom for his father, to Corihor's credit he repented of his evil and Shule gave him power in his kingdom (see v. 13). But this was only the beginning of the cycle of rebellion, captivity, division, liberation, and so on, for one of Corihor's sons, Noah, rebelled

against King Shule and his father, which led to a divided kingdom. Shule continued to seek for righteousness and vigorously defended the prophets and their right to teach the people. As a result, many people repented and prospered. Shule and a later king, Shez, led their society to greater righteousness by remembering the great things God had done for their people. Shule is said to have “remembered the great things that the Lord had done for his fathers in bringing them across the great deep into the promised land” (v. 27). “Shez did remember the destruction of his fathers, and he did build up a righteous kingdom; for he remembered what the Lord had done in bringing Jared and his brother across the deep; and he did walk in the ways of the Lord” (10:2).

As the Jaredite narrative progressed, access to political power was linked to secret combinations. These secret combinations sought for political power and gain at any cost, all the while trying to cloak their nefarious actions in secrecy and darkness. Moroni warned not only of their destructive effects among the Jaredites and Nephites (the first he had read about; the other he had seen extinguished) but also of how they could destroy far-off future Gentile societies as well:

[The secret combinations] have caused the destruction of this people of whom I am now speaking, and also the destruction of the people of Nephi.

And whatsoever nation shall uphold such secret combinations, to get power and gain, until they shall spread over the nation, behold, they shall be destroyed; for the Lord will not suffer that the blood of his saints, which shall be shed by them, shall always cry unto him from the ground for vengeance upon them and yet he avenge them not.

Wherefore, O ye Gentiles, it is wisdom in God that these things should be shown unto you, that thereby ye may repent of your sins, and suffer not that these murderous combinations shall get above you, which are built up to get power and gain—and the work, yea, even the work of destruction come upon you, yea, even the sword of the justice of the Eternal God shall fall upon you, to your overthrow and destruction if ye shall suffer these things to be. (Ether 8:21–23)

Note how twice in this passage Moroni asserts that the primary purposes of secret combinations are to get power and gain.¹⁹ The natural man's root desires for power and gain are pride and selfishness. President Benson declared, "Pride results in secret combinations which are built up to get power, gain, and glory of the world. (See Hel. 7:5; Ether 8:9, 16, 22–23; Moses 5:31.) This fruit of the sin of pride, namely secret combinations, brought down both the Jaredite and the Nephite civilizations and has been and will yet be the cause of the fall of many nations. (See Ether 8:18–25.)"²⁰

Moroni continues his warning against these perverse forms of power by asserting that the Lord commands us to be vigilant against them because they will result in loss of freedom and destruction and the author behind them is Satan—the figure responsible for beguiling Adam and Eve, causing man to commit murder, and hardening people's hearts to reject and murder the prophets:

Wherefore, the Lord commandeth you, when ye shall see these things come among you that ye shall awake to a sense of your awful situation, because of this secret combination which shall be among you; or wo be unto it, because of the blood of them who have been slain; for they cry from the dust for vengeance upon it, and also upon those who built it up.

For it cometh to pass that whoso buildeth it up seeketh to overthrow the freedom of all lands, nations, and countries; and it bringeth to pass the destruction of all people, for it is built up by the devil, who is the father of all lies; even that same liar who beguiled our first parents, yea, even that same liar who hath caused man to commit murder from the beginning; who hath hardened the hearts of men that they have murdered the prophets, and stoned them, and cast them out from the beginning. (Ether 8:24–25)

The secret combinations among the Jaredites began when the daughter of a later Jared tried to console her father, who had lost his short-lived kingdom gained by rebellion against his father, Omer. She remembered the ancient accounts of those who had gained kingdoms and great glory by their secret plans. A plan was formed to have one Akish kill the king

while the other conspirators maintained the secrecy of the plot. To ensure this secrecy, Akish administered “the oaths which were given by them of old who also sought power, which had been handed down even from Cain, who was a murderer from the beginning. And they were kept up by the power of the devil to administer these oaths unto the people, to keep them in darkness, to help such as sought power to gain power, and to murder, and to plunder, and to lie, and to commit all manner of wickedness and whoredoms” (Ether 8:15–16). According to these verses, the desire to gain power began with Cain and continued among the people because Satan fueled their desires for power, making them willing to gain it at any cost (murder, lying, and all manner of wickedness). Ironically, as they gained more power over others, they fell under Satan’s power, thereby losing righteous spiritual power as well as their own independence.

Secret combinations are themselves manifestations of Satan’s power over the people and the efforts of those combinations to control others. Rather than supporting God’s plan to share his power *with* others, Satan’s intention is to gain power *over* others, who in turn attempt to dominate others. Thus when talking about God’s power, it is almost always in spiritual terms—his spiritual power to share with and bless the lives of others. In contrast, Satan’s power is almost always connected with political power—to seek for power and gain over others. Moroni’s ultimate purpose and desire is the same as the gospel of Jesus Christ’s ultimate purpose—that God’s children avoid or come out from under Satan’s power and instead receive God’s power, which leads to doing good continually and eventually to obtaining salvation: “Wherefore, I, Moroni, am commanded to write these things that evil may be done away, and that the time may come that Satan may have no power upon the hearts of the children of men, but that they may be persuaded to do good continually, that they may come unto the fountain of all righteousness and be saved” (Ether 8:26).

As related throughout most of the book of Ether, wicked and secret societies corrupted the hearts of the people, thereby giving Satan power over them (see Ether 9:6).²¹ The secret combinations led them to ignore God’s word and his prophets, as testified by Moroni in two cause-and-effect statements: “They hearkened not unto the voice of the Lord, because of their wicked combinations” (11:7); and “They did reject all the words

of the prophets, because of their secret society and wicked abominations” (11:22). Murder and intrigue led to a revolving door of king after king. The people’s desire for gain led them to support these evil leaders. For example, “the people of Akish were desirous for gain, even as Akish was desirous for power; wherefore, the sons of Akish did offer them money, by which means they drew away the more part of the people after them” (9:11), leading to a civil war. Some kings, like Coriantum, administered “that which was good unto his people in all his days” (9:23), while others administered their secret oaths (e.g., 10:33).

The end of the book of Ether closes the sad tale of the Jaredites’ destruction. Even though Coriantumr showed signs of wanting to repent, it was too late to convince others and stem the tide of anger and revenge. Moroni attributed their final state to Satan’s deep grip on their hearts, hardening them and blinding their minds. “Behold, the Spirit of the Lord had ceased striving with them, and Satan had *full power* over the hearts of the people; for they were given up unto the hardness of their hearts, and the blindness of their minds that they might be destroyed” (Ether 15:19). Somewhat like the people at the tower at the beginning of the book of Ether, Shiz and Coriantumr put their trust in their own strength rather than seeking God’s power by legitimate means. Yet pride in their supposed military strength ultimately brought about their demise, demonstrating how Satan had won the battle for their hearts as they experienced defeat on the battlefield.

CONCLUSION

A primary message found throughout the Book of Mormon is the need for every person to choose between two ways: God or Satan. Based on one’s choices, one will either share in God’s power or come under Satan’s power. Moroni, as abridger and narrator of the book of Ether, mediates the presentation of the rise and fall of the Jaredite civilization beginning with a small group of people seeking God’s help and assistance, but ending with a society in Satan’s grasp bent on power and gain. Coming from his perspective at the end of the Nephite civilization, Moroni sees parallels in the spiritual downfall of both groups, which ultimately led to their military ruin as well. Thus Moroni’s account is not simply a historical chronicle but is given through a spiritual lens to highlight how those who were

righteous, walked humbly before God, and remembered his great doings received great spiritual power, while those who ignored these things and the prophets sent to remind them lost God's spiritual power and ultimately surrendered their hearts to Satan's power. The desire for power and gain seems natural but has completely different effects based on one's motivation. Those who desired riches and power over others opened themselves up to Satan's evil ways through secret oaths and combinations passed down through the ages. The driving ambition was having more power and riches than others, or in other words, pride. On the other hand, those who sought to access God's power to share with others were often blessed with prosperity and thus in a sense were seeking partnership with God and receiving his power to bless the lives of others.

Moroni shared the details of two powerful examples of godly men who came to experience God's power firsthand in direct dialogue and communion with Jehovah: his own experience and the brother of Jared's. In both cases, faith was the essential first step that led them to Jesus Christ, who could then share powerful experiences with them. Through their experiences, they were strengthened and accomplished great things like crossing the ocean and finishing the scripture record that not only blessed their respective communities but inspires us still today. Some righteous kings in the book of Ether also had powerful spiritual experiences, but their accounts were not given the same detail in Moroni's abridgment as the two examples mentioned above. Regardless, Moroni was trying to share the end results of the power manifested by righteous versus wicked kings, both for themselves individually and for their respective societies at large.

Since Moroni was not writing for the Jaredites or for the Nephites, but for his future readers—us—his message is a relevant warning to us today. We may desire power and gain, but are we doing it with the right motivation? Is it to gain more and have power *over* others, or is it to share *with* others? Will we avoid the temptation to amass these things for ourselves, which is turning our hearts over to Satan, or will we seek them in legitimate ways? Moroni emphasizes the need for faith and then being bold enough to express that faith in our petitions to God, in righteousness, and in heeding the prophets to properly access spiritual power. It is our choice to follow the examples of Moroni, the brother of Jared, and other righteous

figures in the book of Ether in order to partake of the power God has offered to share with those who come unto him. Among Moroni's closing exhortations in his later book is a very apt one for this discussion on the power of God: "I would exhort you that ye deny not the power of God; for he worketh by power, according to the faith of the children of men, the same today and tomorrow, and forever" (Moroni 10:7). God manifests his power with his children according to their faith. In this regard, he is the same today, tomorrow, and forever, so just as these scriptural figures had God's power manifested in their lives, we can too. It is a grand expression of God's eternal love for his children that he desires to share his power with us. May we heed Moroni's efforts and invitation "to do good continually" and "come unto the fountain of all righteousness and be saved" (Ether 8:26).

NOTES

1. Ezra Taft Benson, "The Book of Mormon Is the Word of God," *Ensign*, May 1975.
2. Jan Christian Gertz, "The Tower of Babel (Gen 11:1-9)," <https://www.bibleodyssey.org/passages/main-articles/tower-of-babel>. Another scholar interpreted the people's sin as hubris. "The story of Babel has most often been read as a caution against hubris of various sorts. Babel and its tower point to humanity's ever-present desire to reach beyond its grasp. Such a reading was encouraged by the image of the tower with its 'top in the heavens' (Gen 11:4). This lone detail was read as indicating that the builders were trying to encroach upon the realm of the divine. One early Jewish commentary even suggested that the builders hoped to use the tower as a platform to wage war against God. The rabbis (circa fifth century C.E.) imagine the builders claiming, 'It is not up to Him to select the heavens for himself and to give us the lower realm. But let us go and make a tower for ourselves and we will put an idol on its summit and we will place a sword in the idol's hand so as to give the impression that it is waging war against God' (*Genesis Rabbah* 38.6.5). Humanity was not content with staying in its proper place." Phillip Michael Sherman, "Reception History of the Tower of Babel," <https://www.bibleodyssey.org/passages/related-articles/reception-history-of-the-tower-of-babel>.

3. See “Discourse, 12 May 1844, as Reported by George Laub,” p. 25, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed 10 May 2019, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-12-may-1844-as-reported-by-george-laub/7>.
4. Orson Pratt, “Meeting of Adam with His Posterity, etc.,” in *Journal of Discourses* (London: Latter-day Saints’ Book Depot, 1873), 16:47.
5. According to Ether 4:6–7, the brother of Jared’s experiences will remain sealed until we exhibit the same faith and purity he did: “They shall not go forth unto the Gentiles until the day that they shall repent of their iniquity, and become clean before the Lord. And in that day that they shall exercise faith in me, saith the Lord, even as the brother of Jared did, that they may become sanctified in me, then will I manifest unto them the things which the brother of Jared saw, even to the unfolding unto them all my revelations, saith Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Father of the heavens and of the earth, and all things that in them are.” Some of Ether’s “great and marvelous” prophecies were also held back from the people (and consequently from us) by God’s command: “I [Moroni] was about to write more, but I am forbidden; but great and marvelous were the prophecies of Ether; but they esteemed him as naught, and cast him out” (Ether 13:13).
6. Jeffrey R. Holland makes this note about the brother of Jared’s request: “Things—the brother of Jared hardly knows what to call them. *Rocks* probably doesn’t sound any more inspiring. Here, standing next to the Lord’s magnificent handiwork, these *ne plus ultra*, impeccably designed, and marvelously unique seagoing barges, the brother of Jared offers for his contribution: *rocks*. As he eyes the sleek ships the Lord has provided, it is a moment of genuine humility.” Holland, “Rending the Veil of Unbelief,” in *A Book of Mormon Treasury: Gospel Insights from General Authorities and Religious Educators* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2003), 56.
7. H. Dean Garrett had an insightful application of this request. “Like the brother of Jared, each of us faces challenges in life. At times we may plead with the Lord: ‘Will ye have me go through this life without light to understand why things are the way they are?’ His answer to us might be the same question he asked the brother of Jared: ‘What would ye that I should do to put light into your spiritual vessels?’ The brother of Jared provided stones and asked the Lord to touch them with his fingers to produce light for their vessels. We, too, must provide stones that the Lord can touch to give light to our spiritual vessels. The Book of Mormon teaches that the foundation stones for our spiritual growth are faith, hope, and charity.” Garrett, “Light in Our Vessels: Faith, Hope, and Charity,”

- in *The Book of Mormon: Fourth Nephi through Moroni, From Zion to Destruction*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1995), 81.
8. Holland, "Rending the Veil of Unbelief," 56.
 9. On this concept, Robert J. Matthews noted, "Natural, fallen man is so far beneath the level of God, and understands so infinitesimally little about the works of the Lord, that even when the Lord shows forth great power they often fail to see the significance, and it 'looks small' to them." He goes on to quote Nephi's and Jacob's feelings on this matter. Nephi emphasized that men will not search for knowledge even when it can be given to them in plainness (see 2 Nephi 32:7). Jacob warned how when we are learned we think we are wise and we can set aside the counsel of God, supposing that we know of ourselves (see 2 Nephi 9:28). "Paul likewise was acquainted with this condition that is so prevalent among mankind, and he correctly stated that the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, neither *can* he know them, for they are discerned only by the Spirit. And being without the Spirit, the natural man sees the wisdom of God as foolishness (1 Cor 2:14)." Matthews, "The Mission of Jesus Christ—Ether 3 and 4," in Nyman and Tate, *From Zion to Destruction*, 22–23.
 10. In response to the question of why Jehovah would ask the brother of Jared particular questions if he is already omniscient, Elder Holland stated, "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. . . . These kinds of rhetorical questions are frequently used by God, particularly in assessing faith, honesty, and the full measure of agency, allowing the 'students' the freedom and opportunity to express themselves as revealingly as they wish, even though God knows the answer to His own and all other questions." Holland, "Rending the Veil of Unbelief," 58.
 11. Elder Holland stated this principle this way: "As a rule, prophets are invited into the presence of the Lord, are bidden to enter His presence by Him and only with His sanction. The brother of Jared, on the other hand, stands alone then (and we assume now) in having thrust himself through the veil, not as an unwelcome guest but perhaps technically an uninvited one. . . . Obviously the Lord Himself

- is linking unprecedented faith with this unprecedented vision. If the vision is not unique, then it has to be the faith—and how the vision is obtained—that is so remarkable. The only way this faith could be so remarkable would be in its ability to take this prophet, uninvited, where others had only been able to go by invitation.” Holland, “Rending the Veil of Unbelief,” 61.
12. Kenneth W. Anderson refers to this kind of faith as *causal belief* (different from *casual belief*). “*Causal belief* is the belief that leads to action. The scriptures equate it with faith. It is the substance of hope, the mental assurance of things hoped for but not seen (JST Hebrews 11:1). Faith and causal belief are a gift of God given to men and women who live the laws which entitle them to this endowment of power, for it is a power (D&C 130:20–21). There is an uncommon dimension of faith in a few men and women that, when exercised in a true belief of Jesus Christ, causes the elements to react both physically and spiritually. This uncommon faith has a catalytic power to direct all matter and make earthly energy sources submissive. In the gospel sense this causal belief or faith generates salvation and eternal life. The promise is absolute that the correct faith in Jesus Christ is the power base that leads to salvation and exaltation.” Anderson, “The Knowledge Hid Up Because of Unbelief,” in Nyman and Tate, *From Zion to Destruction*, 31–32. Paul Nolan Hyde also discussed the impact of faith on one’s spiritual life: “Faith is one of the most potent of powers that affect the inward man. When the inward man is motivated by true faith, the outward man follows suit, exhibiting conduct which may seem to be without justifiable motives. The greater the faith one has, the greater one’s justifiable expectations, the greater the power one has over the spiritual realm.” Hyde, *A Comprehensive Commentary of the Book of Ether* (Orem, UT: Parrish Press, 2015), 102.
 13. Holland, “Rending the Veil of Unbelief,” 61–62.
 14. Carolyn J. Rasmus pointed out, “[The Lord] teaches that he ‘give[s] unto men weakness that they may be humble’ (Ether 12:27), and then, as if to make sure the point is well made, he repeats the word *humble* two more times in the same sentence. Both times it is used as a verb, suggesting action on our part. No doubt this was not the help Moroni sought. Instead of giving him an answer to specific concerns, God teaches him a principle far greater than if he had simply made him mighty in writing.” Rasmus, “Weak Things Made Strong,” in Nyman and Tate, *From Zion to Destruction*, 253.
 15. See Ether 12:30. Nothing more is said of this incredible feat.

16. For a brief overview of these other righteous examples, see Frank F. Judd Jr., “Jaredite Zion Societies: Hope for a Better World,” in Nyman and Tate, *From Zion to Destruction*, 147–52.
17. A later king, Ethem, is said to have done the exact opposite: “Ethem did execute judgment *in wickedness* all his days” (Ether 11:14).
18. Hugh Nibley taught, “You read your book of Ether and you’ll find the whole history is a tale of fierce and unrelenting struggle for power. It’s dark with intrigue and violence, particularly of the Asiatic brand. When the rival for the kingdom is bested, he goes off by himself in the wilderness, bides his time, and gathers an army of outcasts. This is done by drawing off men to himself, by bestowing lavish gifts and bribes.” Nibley, *Teachings of the Book of Mormon: Semester 4* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1993), 256.
19. See also Ether 11:15. “There arose a rebellion among the people, because of that secret combination which was built up to get power and gain.”
20. Ezra Taft Benson, “Beware of Pride,” *Ensign*, May 1989.
21. 3 Nephi 6:15–16 also highlights the role of Satan in tempting people to seek for power and gain, leading them to great iniquity: “Satan had great power, unto the stirring up of the people to do all manner of iniquity, and to the puffing them up with pride, tempting them to seek for power, and authority, and riches, and the vain things of the world. And thus Satan did lead away the hearts of the people to do all manner of iniquity.”