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The Jaredites: A Case Study in Following the Brethren

Douglas E. Brinley

Douglas E. Brinley is professor of Church history and doctrine at Brigham Young University.

A distinguishing feature of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the principle of continuous revelation: God speaks to His children through prophet-servants today as well as in former times (see Amos 3:7). The principle of revelation separates Latter-day Saints from all other religions, for our claim of administering the true gospel is based on this premise: In 1820 God called a young man to the prophetic office and subsequently sent eight angels to restore the gospel and priesthood keys that enable men and women to qualify for exaltation. Moroni restored the gospel in the form of a set of plates that contain the everlasting gospel. John the Baptist; Peter, James, and John; Moses, Elias, and Elijah restored priesthood keys for the salvation and exaltation of God’s children. President John Taylor explained that true religion has a heavenly connection:

“A good many people, and those professing Christians, will sneer at the idea of present revelation. Whoever heard of true religion without communication with God? To me the thing is the most absurd thing that the human mind could conceive of. I do not wonder, when the people generally reject the principle of present revelation, that skepticism and infidelity prevail to such an alarming extent. I do not wonder that so many men treat religion with contempt, and regard it as something not worth the attention of intelligent beings, *for without revelation religion is a mockery and a farce*. If I can not have a religion that will lead me to God, and place me *en rapport* with him, and unfold to my mind the principles of immortality and eternal life, I want nothing to do with it.”^[1]

A Book of Mormon Message

A prominent theme of the Book of Mormon is, however, that people seldom follow the Lord’s servants when they are sent, especially when living conditions are soft, comfortable, and easy and prosperity abounds. During these periods people ignore God, reject His prophets, and become distracted from their goal to obtain “immortality and eternal life” (Moses 1:39).

From the rebellion of Laman and Lemuel against Lehi and against Nephi to the fall of Moroni’s people, the Book of Mormon is replete with examples of people who ignored the counsel of their living prophets. The result was a “ripening in iniquity” until the inhabitants were destroyed by civil war or natural disasters (see 2 Nephi 28:16; Alma 10:19; Helaman 5:2; 6:40; 8:26; 11:37; 13:14; 3 Nephi 8; Ether 2:9; 9:20).

The People of Jared

One of the most poignant examples of the destruction of an entire civilization who failed to follow their prophets is found in the book of Ether. The fall of the people of Jared was especially tragic in light of the numerous times God sent prophets to warn them that they were bringing a curse upon the land that would end in their “utter destruction” if the people did not repent. Eventually the entire nation was engulfed in a civil war that brought about their extinction as a people, leaving only Coriantumr and the prophet-recorder Ether as lone survivors. Moroni warned the latter-day inhabitants of the land to avoid the pattern that destroyed the former occupants of the land: “And this cometh unto you, O ye Gentiles, that ye may know the decrees of God—that ye may repent, and not continue in your iniquities until the fulness come, that ye may not bring down the fulness of the wrath of God upon you as the inhabitants of the land have hitherto done” (Ether 2:11).

The Pattern of Destruction

One way to view the fall of the Jaredites is to observe the four points of sequence that led to their downfall:

1. God sent prophets to call the people to repentance.
2. They warned the people of destruction if they did not repent.
3. The people chose either to repent or reject the prophetic message.
4. They received the consequences of their decision.

This pattern was repeated at least six times in the Jaredite record until the people were destroyed under the reign of Coriantumr, who ignored the counsel of Ether until repentance was no longer possible (see Ether 15:1–2). Moroni

explained that it was the Lord who brought about the destruction of this people: “And now,” wrote the abridger, “I . . . 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” (Ether 1:1; emphasis added). Let us now examine these six episodes that ended in the destruction of an entire nation.

Jaredites in the Land

The Jaredites were led to the land of promise by the Lord at the time of the “great tower” and the confusion of tongues (see Genesis 11; Ether 1:33).^[2] As they multiplied and spread throughout the land, they became a large and prosperous people. They began as a righteous colony, having been “taught to walk humbly before the Lord; and they were also taught from on high” (Ether 6:17).

As they grew in number, the people desired a king over the objections of the brother of Jared, who cautioned them that having a king would be unwise in the long run (see Ether 6:22–23; 7:5). At a much later date, Mosiah, the Nephite seer who first translated the record of this fallen people from twenty-four gold plates, also warned the Nephites of the dangers of a kingship. His counsel came from the antics of king Noah, son of Zeniff, and also from translating the record of the people of Jared. He observed:

“How much iniquity doth one wicked king cause to be committed, yea, and what great destruction! . . .

“Now I say unto you, ye cannot dethrone an iniquitous king save it be through much contention, and the shedding of much blood.

“For behold, he has his friends in iniquity, and he keepeth his guards about him; and he tearth up the laws of those who have reigned in righteousness before him; and he trampleth under his feet the commandments of God;

“And he enacteth laws, and sendeth them forth among his people, yea, laws after the manner of his own wickedness; and whosoever doth not obey his laws he causeth to be destroyed; and whosoever doth rebel against him he will send his armies against them to war, and if he can he will destroy them; and thus an unrighteous king doth pervert the ways of all righteousness.

“And now behold I say unto you, it is not expedient that such abominations should come upon you” (Mosiah 29:17, 21–24).

Episode 1: The Reign of Kings

Like their later Israelite counterparts, the people of Jared wanted a king. After the brother of Jared warned against this form of government, he relented but no one wanted the office until finally one of the sons of Jared, Orihah, consented and was anointed ruler (see Ether 6:22–27). Orihah and his successor-son, Kib, were righteous kings, but Kib’s son, Corihor, rebelled against his father, overthrowing him and taking him captive. While in prison—more likely a house arrest—Kib fathered a son, Shule, who “became mighty as to the strength of a man” (Ether 7:8). This son was sympathetic to his father and succeeded in repelling Corihor and restoring Kib to his throne. Kib passed his office on to Shule. However, one of Corihor’s sons, Noah, in attempting to overthrow Shule, took him captive and would have executed him except the sons of Shule “crept into the house of Noah by night and slew him, and broke down the door of the prison and brought out their father, and placed him upon his throne in his own kingdom” (Ether 7:18). Thus men began to covet the throne, and rebellion and mischief among the people continued. The son of Noah, Cohor, succeeded in dividing the people into two groups: “And there were two kingdoms, the kingdom of Shule, and the kingdom of Cohor” (Ether 7:20). In a subsequent battle, Shule killed Cohor and united the kingdom.

It was in this setting that prophets came forth to warn the people that their wickedness violated their covenant on the land with God and that judgments were imminent unless swift repentance followed. This was the first of six episodes where prophets were sent to warn the Jaredites that their wickedness was offensive to the Lord (see Ether 2:7–12). This first episode follows four steps in the sequence to destruction: (1) prophets are sent, (2) a message of warning is given, (3) the people respond, and on this occasion (4) the outcome is favorable.

Sequence to Destruction

1. *Prophet(s)*: Unnamed, but “sent from the Lord” (Ether 7:23).
2. *Message*: “The wickedness and idolatry of the people was bringing a curse upon the land, and they should be destroyed if they did not repent” (Ether 7:23).
3. *Response of the People*: “The people did revile against the prophets, and did mock them” (Ether 7:24).
4. *Outcome*: Before judgments began, King Shule “did execute a law throughout all the land, which gave power unto the prophets” to “go whithersoever they would; and by this cause the people were brought unto repentance” (Ether

7:25), and “there were no more wars in the days of Shule” (Ether 7:27). In this case, the government supported freedom of religion. Unfortunately, this principle, protected by kingly edict under Shule, was withdrawn by later rulers.

Episode 2: The Days of Jared

Two men, Jared, the son of Omer, and Akish, conspired to the throne and organized a secret combination to kill Omer. But the Lord warned Omer “in a dream that he should depart out of the land,” leaving the throne to Jared (Ether 9:3). Having tasted power, however, Akish decided to kill Jared so that he himself could become king. Internal dissent among his sons led to Akish’s death, restoring Omer to the kingship. His son, Emer, followed him as ruler, and governed in peace for the next sixty-two years. The people multiplied and prospered, insomuch that the Lord “began again to take the curse from off the land” (Ether 9:16). Emer’s sons, Coriantum and Com, also became kings and ruled in righteousness and the people were blessed.

However, after several generations of peace, wickedness returned. “The people had spread again over all the face of the land, and there began again to be an exceedingly great wickedness upon the face of the land, and Heth began to embrace the secret plans again of old, to destroy his father” (Ether 9:26). Heth became king by murdering his father, Com, and prophets were sent forth to warn the people of impending judgments.

Sequence to Destruction

1. *Prophets*: Unnamed, but from the Lord (Ether 9:28).

2. *Message*: “That [the people] must prepare the way of the Lord or there should come a curse upon the face of the land; yea, even there should be a great famine, in which they should be destroyed if they did not repent” (Ether 9:28).

3. *Response of the People*: “But the people believed not the words of the prophets, but they cast them out; and some of them they cast into pits and left them to perish” (Ether 9:29).

4. *Outcome*: This time the government did not protect the prophets to teach repentance freely in the land, but instead threatened the lives of the prophets. “And it came to pass that they did all these things according to the commandment of the king, Heth” (Ether 9:29). Consequently, judgments ensued: “And it came to pass that there began to be a great dearth upon the land, and the inhabitants began to be destroyed exceedingly fast” (Ether 9:30). Upon threat of destruction by poisonous serpents and drought, the people “began to repent of their iniquities and cry unto the Lord. And it came to pass that 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” (Ether 9:34–35).

Episode 3: The Days of Com

Peace and prosperity reigned in the land for another generation before Heth’s grandson Riplakish came to power. Unfortunately, he introduced polygamy, whoredoms, and high taxes and built prisons to house those who would not pay taxes, putting to death those who would not labor. The people rebelled against his policies and killed him. His son Morianton restored a measure of peace again among the people for several generations until the reign of Com.

Sequence to Destruction

1. *Prophets*: “Many prophets” (Ether 11:1).

2. *Message*: “The destruction of that great people except they should repent, and turn unto the Lord, and forsake their murders and wickedness” (Ether 11:1).

3. *Response of the People*: “The prophets were rejected by the people, and they fled unto [Com] for protection, for the people sought to destroy them” (Ether 11:2).

4. *Outcome*: Com protected the prophets, and there was a delay in the judgments of the Lord. Com was “blessed in all the remainder of his days” (Ether 11:3).

Com was a righteous ruler as was his son Shiblom. One of Shiblom’s brothers, however, rebelled against Shiblom and caused that “all the prophets who prophesied of the destruction of the people should be put to death” (Ether 11:5). Thus, “there began to be an exceedingly great war in all the land” (Ether 11:4). Moroni describes the situation:

“There was great calamity in all the land, for [these prophets] had testified that a great curse should come upon the land, and also upon the people, and that there should be a great destruction among them, such an one as never had been upon the face of the earth, and their bones should become as heaps of earth upon the face of the land except they should repent of their wickedness.

“And they hearkened not unto the voice of the Lord, because of their wicked combinations; wherefore, there began to be wars and contentions in all the land, and also many famines and pestilences, insomuch that there was a great

destruction, *such an one as never had been known upon the face of the earth*; and all this came to pass in the days of Shiblom” (Ether 11:6–7; emphasis added).

This great destruction resulted in “heaps” of bodies upon the earth which eventually caused the people to repent, and “inasmuch as they did [repent] the Lord did have mercy on them” (Ether 11:8).

Episode 4: The Days of Ethem

Three generations later, Ethem ascended to the throne and did “execute judgment in wickedness all his days” (Ether 11:14). Prophets renewed their cry for repentance.

Sequence to Destruction

1. *Prophets*: “In the days of Ethem there came many prophets, and prophesied again unto the people” (Ether 11:12).
2. *Message*: “They did prophesy that the Lord would utterly destroy them from off the face of the earth except they repented of their iniquities” (Ether 11:12).
3. *Response of the People*: “The people hardened their hearts, and would not hearken unto their words; and the prophets mourned and withdrew from among the people” (Ether 11:13).
4. *Outcome*: The prophets were silenced and the Lord withdrew His spirit from the people. A series of wars began to decimate the people. The Lord provided numerous opportunities for the people to repent and change their ways, but they would not.

Episode 5: The Days of Coriantor

A series of political power struggles resulted in further war, and the Lord sent prophets to warn the people to repent (see Ether 11:20). Moron was taken captive and fathered a son named Coriantor who spent his days in captivity also. Coriantor was the father of the prophet Ether (see Ether 11:23).

Sequence to Destruction

1. *Prophets*: “In the days of Coriantor there also came many prophets” (Ether 11:20).
2. *Message*: “[These prophets] prophesied of great and marvelous things, and cried repentance unto the people, and [said that] 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” (Ether 11:20–21; emphasis added).
3. *Response of the People*: “And they did reject all the words of the prophets, because of their secret society and wicked abominations” (Ether 11:22).
4. *Outcome*: Civil war began to destroy the inhabitants of the land.

Though Coriantor fathered Ether in captivity, it appears that the prophet-writer of the Jaredite record should rightfully have been the king. But his grandfather, Moron, had been deposed by an unnamed “descendant of the brother of Jared” (Ether 11:17–18). We do not know who this man was. The record is not clear if this person is Coriantumr’s father or even his grandfather. If it was, it makes the relationship between Ether and Coriantumr more delicate and may account for Coriantumr’s rejection of Ether’s message to him. He may have seen Ether as trying to bring his kingdom down so that he could assume the mantle of leadership.

Ether cried “from the morning, even until the going down of the sun, exhorting the people to believe in God unto repentance lest they should be destroyed” (Ether 12:3).

“He truly told them of all things, from the beginning of man; and that after the waters [of the flood] had receded from off the face of this land it became a choice land above all other lands, a chosen land of the Lord; wherefore the Lord would have that all men should serve him who dwell upon the face thereof;

“And that it was the place of the New Jerusalem, which should come down out of heaven, and the holy sanctuary of the Lord.

“Behold, Ether saw the days of Christ, and he spake concerning a New Jerusalem upon this land” (Ether 13:2–4).

But the people rejected Ether’s message and “esteemed him as naught, and cast him out; and he hid himself in the cavity of a rock by day, and by night he went forth viewing the things which should come upon the people” (Ether 13:13).

Episode 6: the Reign of Coriantumr

Many sought to wrest the kingdom from Coriantumr. Although there was constant warfare, the people refused to

humble themselves, even when Ether explained to Coriantumr how he could save his life and the lives of his family and subjects as well.

Sequence to Destruction

1. *Prophet*: Ether, son of Coriantor.

2. *Message*: “Prophecy unto Coriantumr that, if he would repent, and all his household, the Lord would give unto him his kingdom and spare the people—otherwise they should be destroyed, and all his household save it were himself. And he should only live to see the fulfilling of the prophecies which had been spoken concerning another people receiving the land for their inheritance; and Coriantumr should receive a burial by them; and every soul should be destroyed save it were Coriantumr” (Ether 13:20–21).

3. *Response of Coriantumr*: “Coriantumr repented not, neither his household, neither the people; and the wars ceased not; and they sought to kill Ether, but he fled from before them and hid again in the cavity of the rock” (Ether 13:22).

4. *Outcome*: The destruction of the Jaredite civilization—Coriantumr and Ether were the only survivors.

Ether’s Prophecy

Ether’s prophecy becomes a remarkable example of how prophets are able to see the end from the beginning and give inspired and detailed utterances long before such particulars could be known rationally. The extent of this prophecy by Ether becomes evident as we follow Coriantumr to the end of his reign and view how improbable Ether’s prediction was at the time he first confronted the king.

To illustrate how implausible Ether’s prophecy must have seemed to Coriantumr, the record shows that numerous times the king should have died from wounds and loss of blood, if not infection. But Ether had told him that he alone of all of his subjects would survive and be buried by another people who would inhabit the land (see Ether 13:20–21; Omni 1:14–22).

The magnitude of Ether’s prediction deepened as Coriantumr confronted his antagonist, Shiz. After an especially fierce battle, Moroni wrote:

“When Coriantumr had recovered of his wounds, he began to remember the words which Ether had spoken unto him.

“He saw that there had been slain by the sword already nearly two millions of his people, and he began to sorrow in his heart; yea, there had been slain two millions of mighty men, and also their wives and their children.

“He began to repent of the evil which he had done; he began to remember the words which had been spoken by the mouth of all the prophets, and he saw them that they were fulfilled thus far, every whit; and his soul mourned and refused to be comforted” (Ether 15:1–3).

Battle Casualties

Millions of people died before Coriantumr admitted that Ether had spoken the truth to him, but by then it was too late. To provide some perspective of the magnitude of the slaughter among Coriantumr’s people, we note that at the time Ether approached him with a solution to save people, Coriantumr presided over a kingdom numbering millions of inhabitants. The record says that “there had been slain two millions of mighty men, and also their wives and their children” (Ether 15:2). If even half of these men were married and the average family size included a wife and only two to three children, there would have been six to eight million people in his kingdom. From the American Revolutionary War through the Vietnam conflict (including the Civil War)—wars that introduced weapons of mass destruction—“only” 652,769 Americans died on the battlefield^[3] compared to the millions killed in these final Jaredite struggles where the people died in hand-to-hand combat.

The Fulfillment of Ether’s Prophecy

The magnitude of Ether’s prophecy deepens. At the time he approached Coriantumr and delivered his inspired ultimatum, Coriantumr could have reasonably scoffed at Ether’s prediction because of the vast numbers of inhabitants comprising his kingdom. To believe that all of his subjects could be killed before he was—given the fact that he apparently *led* his troops into battle and would be one of the first to engage the enemy—would no doubt seem preposterous. Surely Ether’s prophecy could not be fulfilled. For example, the record states: “Shared . . . also gave battle unto Coriantumr; and he did . . . bring him into captivity” (Ether 13:23); yet Coriantumr was not killed. Coriantumr’s sons retook the kingdom by beating Shared and restoring the kingdom to their father. He and Shared later fought again,

and before Coriantumr finally killed Shared, “Shared wounded Coriantumr in his thigh, that he did not go to battle again for the space of two years” (Ether 13:31).

On another occasion Coriantumr fought against Lib, who wounded him. When he recovered from that wound, he killed Lib. However, Lib’s brother Shiz swore that he would avenge his brother’s blood, and “pursued after Coriantumr, and he did overthrow many cities, and he did slay both women and children, and he did burn the cities. And there went a fear of Shiz throughout all the land” (Ether 14:12, 17–18). He was so barbaric that many people fled to his camp, thinking that he surely would conquer Coriantumr—for Shiz had “sworn to avenge himself upon Coriantumr of the blood of [Lib]” (Ether 14:24), determined that Ether’s prophecy that Coriantumr would not fall by the sword would never be fulfilled. “Shiz smote upon Coriantumr that he gave him many deep wounds; and Coriantumr, having lost his blood, fainted, and was carried away [by his people] as though he were dead” (Ether 14:30). Shiz must have thought he had killed Coriantumr at that time, but Coriantumr recovered to fight another day.

The ensuing battles became so fierce that Coriantumr offered to give up the kingdom if they would only spare his people (Ether 15:4–5). But Shiz’s condition that Coriantumr “give himself up, that [Shiz] might slay him with his own sword,” was not acceptable, and more battles ensued (Ether 15:5, 7).

The Final Battle

As Coriantumr saw his people being decimated, he again offered Shiz the kingdom if he would simply cease fighting, but Shiz would not relent. They fought again “and when the night came they had all fallen by the sword save it were fifty and two of the people of Coriantumr, and sixty and nine of the people of Shiz” (Ether 15:23). The next day’s battle reduced those numbers to twenty-seven and thirty-two (see Ether 15:25), and the last battle left only Shiz and Coriantumr facing each other.

“When they had all fallen by the sword, save it were Coriantumr and Shiz, behold Shiz had fainted with the loss of blood.

“And it came to pass that when Coriantumr had leaned upon his sword, that he rested a little, he smote off the head of Shiz.

“And it came to pass that after he had smitten off the head of Shiz, that Shiz raised up on his hands and fell; and after that he had struggled for breath, he died.

“And it came to pass that Coriantumr fell to the earth, and became as if he had no life” (Ether 15:29–33).

Ether “went forth, and beheld that the words of the Lord had all been fulfilled” (Ether 15:33). Now his remarkable prophecy, uttered in detail many years earlier, was almost complete. “Coriantumr was discovered by the people of Zarahemla; and he dwelt with them for the space of nine moons” before he died (Omni 1:21).

The Jaredites had had many opportunities to turn their civilization around and avoid the judgments that eventually destroyed them. From the beginning they had been warned that “this is a land which is choice above all other lands; wherefore he that doth possess it shall serve God or shall be swept off; for it is the everlasting decree of God. And it is not until the fulness of iniquity among the children of the land, that they are swept off” (Ether 2:10). Many prophets had warned that their doom would come when they refused to repent and “serve the God of the land, who is Jesus Christ” (Ether 2:12). Thus a great people destroyed themselves because they refused to follow the counsel of the Lord’s prophets.

A Message for Our Day

Moroni saw our day in vision when his people, much like Ether’s, were gone (see Mormon 8:34–35). He felt impressed to point out parallels between his own people, the Jaredites, and us as latter-day inhabitants of the promised land. He pleaded for us to “repent, and not continue in [our] iniquities until the fulness come, that [we] may not bring down the fulness of the wrath of God upon [us] as the *inhabitants of the land have hitherto done*” (Ether 2:11; emphasis added). Will we follow the counsel of God’s prophets any better than the former inhabitants did? If we are not wiser than they were, we will suffer their same fate.

We must heed the prophets of our day. The Lord has organized His Church and kingdom on the earth with a First Presidency and a Quorum of Twelve Apostles, each member sustained as a prophet, seer, and revelator. Every six months we have the opportunity to listen to their counsel and warnings on how we should improve our lives so we can avoid the tragedies that destroyed this land’s former inhabitants.

Conclusion

The principle of following God’s prophets has always been a test for the children of God. It continues to be the principle that will determine whether or not Zion will be established on the earth in the latter days. Zion can be built up

only as individuals who are pure in heart accept counsel and direction from living prophets. In a day of relative ease and prosperity, that is not an easy task. The Prophet Joseph Smith acknowledged that even the Saints wrestle with this principle: “There are those who profess to be Saints who are too apt to murmur and find fault, when any advice is given, which comes in opposition to their feelings, even when they, themselves, ask for counsel; much more so when counsel is given unasked for, which does not agree with their notion of things; but brethren, we hope for better things from the most of you; we trust that you desire counsel, from time to time, and that you will cheerfully conform to it, whenever you receive it from a proper source.”^[4]

Our destiny in this dispensation, as it was for the Nephites and Jaredites, will be determined by our willingness to heed the counsel of the living prophets. President Wilford Woodruff warned the Latter-day Saints of going against prophetic counsel: “We, as a people, should not treat lightly this counsel, for I will tell you in the name of the Lord—and I have watched it from the time I became a member of this Church—there is no man who undertakes to run counter to the counsel of the legally authorized leader of this people that ever prospers, and no such man ever will prosper. . . . You will find that all persons who take a stand against this counsel will never prosper. . . . When counsel comes we should not treat it lightly, no matter to what subject it pertains, for if we do it will work evil unto us.”^[5]

Only when people are willing to follow God’s prophets can Zion be established. They must be pure in heart, willing, and anxious to receive and implement inspired counsel, and thereby carry out the will of God, or they must face the judgments of the Almighty.

^[1] John Taylor, in *Journal of Discourses* (London: Latter-day Saints’ Book Depot, 1854–86), 6:371; emphasis added.

^[2] The tower of Babel incident is thought to have occurred in approximately 2200 B.C. (see Bible Dictionary, “Chronology,” 635). Later editions of the dictionary delete the years of specific events from Adam to King Saul. Also, the term “tower of Babel” is not used in the Book of Mormon record.

^[3] When other war-related deaths are included—sickness and infections from wounds—a total of 1,178,066 deaths are attributable to all wars that the United States has fought as a nation (see Mark S. Hoffman, ed., *The World Almanac and Book of Facts* [New York: Pharos Books, 1993], 698).

^[4] Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1962), 4:45.

^[5] Wilford Woodruff, in *Journal of Discourses*, 14:33.