

Chapter Nine

OF CAPTIVITY AND KINGDOMS

Helping Students Find a Place in the Book of Ether

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The first several chapters of the book of Ether describe a story that is compelling both doctrinally and pedagogically. Teachers of the Book of Mormon delight in outlining the Jaredites' journey and then using the text to guide students on their own metaphorical journey from spiritual Babel to the promised land. At the heart of this journey is the theophany experienced by the brother of Jared in which his faith was so great that "he could not be kept from within the veil" (Ether 3:20). Indeed, these chapters are overflowing with doctrines and principles that captivate the minds and hearts of both teachers and students. This story invites a learning experience in which readers are led to commend "themselves unto the Lord their God" (6:4) on their own spiritual journey. When they finally arrive at Ether 6 and watch the Jaredites set foot on the promised land, both teachers and students often feel as if "they were also taught from on high" (v. 17).

While teachers are eager to walk students through that journey, they typically become a bit hesitant when approaching the second half of the book of Ether. When recently asked how they approach that material with their students, a group of teachers answered consistently: they don't. By the time most teachers get to the book of Ether in their classroom teaching, they are rushing to finish the Book of Mormon by the end of the semester. Ether 12, which is at the heart of the message of those later chapters, is put on hold to later be combined with Moroni 7 in a topical lesson on faith, hope, and charity, and then the class moves on to the book of Moroni. This study provides an alternative for teaching the second half of Ether. Specifically, it will show that these often-skimmed or sometimes even skipped chapters can provide a profound theological lesson for teachers, students, and the broader readership of the Book of Mormon.

PARALLEL STORIES

As readers work their way through the book of Ether, it quickly becomes apparent that Moroni offers a new style in narrating the story. Grant Hardy describes Moroni's editorial approach in these terms:

It is easy to see the differences between Mormon's and Moroni's approaches to history in the book of Ether, Moroni's abridgment of the Jaredite record. Where Mormon tended to provide well-integrated, carefully structured accounts with relatively developed characters and brief, sporadic editorial comments, Moroni does just the opposite. Aside from the first and last major figures, the brother of Jared and Coriantumr, his treatment of the . . . intervening kings reads like a lightly edited chronicle, checking off generations one by one in a much more truncated form than we see even in First and Second Kings (or, less charitably, with the sort of dry synopsis that might characterize a middle-school book report).¹

While Moroni certainly moves quickly through the Jaredite history, it is precisely this rapid-fire synopsis that sets up his comments in Ether 12. Rather than getting bogged down in the awful details of idolatry, familial dysfunction, fratricide, secret oaths, and murder, Moroni chooses to summarize this troubling history and, by so doing, underscores the

overarching narrative of seeking, obtaining, losing, and then regaining a kingdom. Like Moroni, teachers can help students sift through this story without dwelling on disturbing details and guide them in seeing why this quest for a kingdom matters to the author (Ether) and the redactor (Moroni), and, by extension, why it can matter to people today. In analyzing why Moroni might have felt a deep connection to this story, consider how students would respond if asked to guess which person in the Book of Mormon fits the following description:

- My father passed away.
- I lived in a time of awful wickedness.
- People attempted to kill me, forcing me into hiding.
- I remained alone to witness the destruction of my people.
- I kept a record of this destruction while in hiding.
- I hid the record so that a future people could discover it.
- After writing and hiding up the record, I determined that what happened to me at that point “mattereth not.”

Most students would likely identify this person as Moroni. If so, they would certainly be correct. What is interesting, however, is that this exact description could also be used to represent the life of Ether. The following table shows the scriptural connections between the two:

| Moroni | Event | Ether |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| Mormon 8:3–5 | Father passed away | Ether 11:23 |
| Mormon 8:1–8; Moroni 9:1–20 | Lived in a time of awful wickedness | Ether 13:14–15:34 |
| Moroni 1:1–2 | People attempted to kill him, forcing him into hiding | Ether 13:13, 22 |
| Mormon 8:1–9 | He remained alone to witness the destruction of his people | Ether 13:14–15:34 |

| | | |
|----------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|
| Mormon 8:1-9; Moroni 1:1-2 | He kept a record of this destruction while in hiding | Ether 13:14 |
| Mormon 8:4, 14 | He hid the record so that a future people could discover it | Ether 15:33 |
| Mormon 8:4 | After writing and hiding up the record, he determined that what happened to him at that point “matter-eth not” | Ether 15:34 |

Moroni seems to approach the Jaredite record as a microcosm of the Nephite record. Perhaps he used this method for his abridgment because his father had made the connection earlier when in a letter to his son he said, “If [the Nephites] perish it will be like unto the Jaredites, because of the wilfulness of their hearts, seeking for blood and revenge” (Moroni 9:23). Hardy suggests that “Moroni was not interested in Jaredite culture from an antiquarian or historicist viewpoint; rather, he was intent on using the record of Ether to reinforce lessons that could be drawn from the experience of his own people, the Nephites. He wanted to provide an example of another covenant people that could universalize the Nephite story.”²² If this is the case, and given the parallel experiences outlined in the table above, Moroni may have seen his own story in the life and experience of the prophet Ether. Consequently, it seems likely that he drew both insights and strengths from Ether’s experience (see, for example, Ether 12). Ironically, even though Ether is the namesake of the book, his story is often overlooked. A closer look at his narrative provides a fresh reading of the second half of his book and underscores this literary connection between the prophets Ether and Moroni.

QUEST FOR A KINGDOM

After opening remarks by Moroni, Ether 1 sets forth Ether’s lengthy genealogical record. While some readers view such lists in scripture as unnecessary intrusions and skip them in their reading or teaching, Ether’s lineage record plays an important structural role in the book. The genealogy begins

with Ether, lists many ancestors, and ends with Jared. A careful reading of the text reveals that Moroni begins his abridgment with the narrative from the life of Jared (beginning in Ether 1:33) and then outlines the experience of each individual in the genealogy in reverse order until he gets to Ether (from 6:1 to 11:23). Thus Moroni's abridgment flows in reverse chronology from the initial genealogy. If the purpose of this reverse chronology was the same as others in antiquity, it would be to establish authority.³ It demonstrates in a very clear way that Ether (the last person mentioned in the genealogical line) was heir to the throne and, by extension, had a right to the kingdom. Consequently, to understand Ether's story, it is important to remember the "great things the Lord had done for [his] fathers" (6:30), but also the times of their disobedience, years of captivity, and perpetual yearning and seeking for a kingdom.

After many years in the promised land, Jared and his brother grew old and inquired among the people "the things which they would that they should do before they went down to their graves" (6:21). When the people responded with a desire for a king, the Jaredite leaders were grieved. In a moment of both warning and prophecy the brother of Jared said simply, "Surely this thing leadeth into captivity" (v. 23). In the next five chapters, Moroni demonstrates the fulfillment of this prophecy, using the word *captivity* or *captive* twenty-two times in recounting the tragic history of the Jaredite kings.

This is not the first time in the book of Ether that Moroni discusses the concept of captivity. In Ether 2 the Lord warned the Jaredites that they must "from that time henceforth and forever . . . serve him, the true and only God, or they should be swept off" the land (v. 8). Moroni interjects with a message for the Gentiles, telling them that "this is a choice land, and whatsoever nation shall possess it shall be free from bondage, and from captivity . . . if they will but serve the God of the land" (v. 12). While this interjection is an overt message to a latter-day audience, it also primes the reader to look for this theme throughout the Jaredite story. Interestingly, in Ether 4:18–19 Moroni again interrupts the narrative. This time he provides, among other things, the Lord's promise that "he that is found faithful unto my name at the last day . . . shall be lifted up to dwell in the kingdom prepared for him" (v. 19). In an almost parallel promise, Moroni

assures his readers that if they “repent and come unto the Father in the name of Jesus, they shall be received into the kingdom of God” (5:5). In Ether 6 the emphasis moves from an eternal kingdom to an earthly kingdom. However, in detailing the theme of the Jaredites seeking an earthly kingdom, chapters 7–11 set up both Ether’s and Moroni’s messages of seeking and obtaining the eternal kingdom of God (see Ether 12).

It does not take long before the brother of Jared’s prophecy begins to be fulfilled with the rebellion of Jared’s great grandson Corihor against his father Kib, the king. Commenting on this period, Brant Gardner insightfully observes that “while Moroni relates that Corihor ‘drew away many people,’ that cannot be the whole story. The establishment of a new city that almost immediately became more powerful than the original suggests omitted history. Those omissions are not surprising. Ether is focused on Jared’s descendants to the exclusion of almost everything else that was happening at the time—hence, his neglect to supply the brother of Jared’s name.”⁴ Gardner suggests that Corihor “took his followers and moved to an already-established city”⁵ to combine their strength in order to attack his father. Whatever his strategy, Corihor successfully obtained the kingdom and ruled on his father’s throne. Corihor’s reign lasted for many years until Shule, his brother, “waxed strong, and became mighty as to the strength of a man” (Ether 7:8). Moroni tells us that after raising up an army of his own, Shule “gave battle unto his brother Corihor, by which means he obtained the kingdom. . . . And now because of the thing which Shule had done, his father bestowed upon him the kingdom” (vv. 9–10).

What follows is an account of people who “gave up the kingdom” (Ether 7:22), “gained . . . the kingdom” (8:2–3), lost the kingdom (8:7), set their “heart[s] upon the kingdom” (8:7), or built “up a righteous kingdom” (10:2). However, the phrase Moroni employs most commonly is “obtain the kingdom.” Consider the following:

| Scripture Passage | Reference to obtaining the kingdom |
|-------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|
| Ether 8:9 | “they by their secret plans did obtain kingdoms ” |
| Ether 10:15 | “he did obtain unto himself the kingdom ” |

| | |
|-------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Ether 11:10 | “Ahah, his son, did obtain the kingdom ” |
| Ether 11:11 | “Ethem, being a descendant of Ahah, did obtain the kingdom ” |
| Ether 11:16 | “Moron did overthrow him, and did obtain the kingdom again ” |
| Ether 11:18 | “he did overthrow Moron and obtain the kingdom ” |
| Ether 13:18 | “that they might obtain the kingdom ” |
| Ether 13:24 | “ did obtain the kingdom again ” |

As prophesied by the brother of Jared, this quest for a kingdom does indeed lead to captivity. Moron, Ether’s grandfather, “did that which was wicked before the Lord. And it came to pass that there arose a rebellion among the people” in which Moron lost half of the kingdom. Over time Moron overthrew the other leader and “did obtain the kingdom again” (Ether 11:14–16). Moron continued his reign until “there arose another mighty man” who brought him into captivity (v. 17). Moron lived out his life in captivity and had a son, Coriantor, who also “dwelt in captivity all his days” (v. 19). The record says, “In the days of Coriantor there also came many prophets, and prophesied of great and marvelous things, and cried repentance unto the people” (v. 20). It is during this time that Coriantor begat Ether and then died in captivity.

The text’s persistent focus on kingdoms helps prepare readers for the story of Ether’s prophetic ministry. Although Ether was raised in captivity, he seems to have defied cultural expectations by not working to restore the kingdom to his father. For example, when Kib was king, his son Corihor rebelled, drew people to his cause, and took the kingdom from his father. In his old age Kib fathered another son, named Shule, who grew in strength and judgment and eventually restored the kingdom to his father (see Ether 7:1–9). Similarly, in the reign of Shule’s son Omer, his son Jared rebelled against him, engaged him in battle, and caused him to serve in captivity. Omer’s younger sons become angry with their brother Jared and restore the kingdom to their father (see 8:1–6). The story does not end there: seeing how sorrowful her father is, the daughter of Jared devises a plan that successfully restores the kingdom to him (see 8:7–19; 9:1).

Curiously, the text mentions nothing of the sort with respect to Ether. Did he feel pressure to try to avenge his father? As a rightful heir, did Ether have an interest in the kingdom for himself? Furthermore, how does one raised by a father who is in captivity—and one whose grandfather, a wicked king, also dwelt in captivity—become a prophet of the Lord? Did Ether meet any of the prophets who had come into the land? If so, did he heed their words when they warned that unless the people repented “the Lord God would execute judgment against them” (11:20)? The absence of this part of the story is intriguing.

Unfortunately, for Ether’s story we have more questions than answers. Yet even without this narrative, teachers can help students to see a literary contrast between the political captivity of Ether’s father and Ether’s own freedom to preach among the people. Consider, for example, Ether 12:1–2: “And it came to pass that the days of Ether were in the days of Coriantumr; and Coriantumr was king over all the land. And Ether was a prophet of the Lord; wherefore Ether came forth in the days of Coriantumr, and began to prophesy unto the people, for he could not be restrained because of the Spirit of the Lord which was in him.” Commenting on these verses, Adam Miller has written:

Moroni immediately pairs Ether (imprisoned heir to a deposed line of kings) with Coriantumr (the reigning monarch). . . . The contrast is starkly drawn. The power of Coriantumr, “king over all the land” and a mighty man with the strength of armies at his disposal, is directly juxtaposed with the power of Ether, “a prophet of the Lord” and political prisoner. In this light, it is important to read Ether’s “coming forth in the days of Coriantumr” as a description with strong political overtones—“coming forth” indicating something like a “coming forth out of captivity.” Likewise, the fact that, as Moroni says, “Ether could not be restrained” bears the same political mark. Though this phrase clearly refers to the way that Ether’s prophetic words cannot be restrained, it also refers to the way that, filled with the Spirit, Ether cannot be confined to captivity like his father and grandfather. God’s prophetic mandate delivers Ether from prison. The “weakness” of a prisoner turned prophet is opposed to the “strength” of a mighty man. God’s word

challenges Coriantumr's sword. Here, God's power is not simply a more "powerful" power than Coriantumr's. Rather, it is a power of an altogether different kind.⁶

Armed with *this* power, Ether pleads with the people to "believe in God unto repentance," crying unto them "from the morning, even until the going down of the sun" (Ether 12:3). In his efforts to help them believe in God, his message is clear: "by faith all things are fulfilled" (v. 3). Commenting on this idea, Moroni writes how the people did not believe in the great and marvelous works Ether prophesied of "because they saw them not" (v. 5). This concept seems to have influenced Moroni, who decides to interject with his own commentary: "And now, I, Moroni, would speak somewhat concerning these things" (v. 6). To read this text exegetically, teachers can help students remember the antecedent for "these things." As will be made clear throughout the rest of his writings in this chapter, Moroni is commenting specifically on the "great and marvelous *things*" (v. 5) taught by Ether. One of Ether's central points is that "by faith all things are fulfilled" (v. 3), with a cautionary note to those who do not believe because they do not see.

When students seek to understand the intent of a scriptural author, it can be helpful to look for a thesis statement. Sometimes an author states a thesis overtly, while other times it is simply implied. In this case, Moroni provides a clear thesis statement for the chapter: "*I would show unto the world*"—note the thesis language—"that faith is things which are hoped for and not seen; wherefore, dispute not because ye see not, for ye receive no witness until after the trial of your faith" (Ether 12:6). Moroni strengthens his argument by outlining how the miracles recorded throughout the Book of Mormon were wrought by faith. He writes that it was by faith that

- Christ showed himself to their fathers (Ether 12:7–9),
- they of old were called after the holy order of God (v. 10),
- the law of Moses was given (v. 11),
- Alma and Amulek caused the prison to tumble (v. 13),
- Nephi and Lehi wrought change upon the Lamanites (v. 14),

- Ammon and his brethren wrought a miracle among Lamoni and his people (v. 15),
- the Three Nephites were promised that they should not taste death (v. 17),
- many—including the brother of Jared—saw the Savior even before he came to earth (vv. 19–21), and
- Moroni’s fathers obtained a promise that the record would come unto their brethren through the Gentiles (v. 22).

It would be helpful here for teachers to remind students of the context for Moroni’s interruption in the narrative of Ether’s story. He is speaking specifically of the “great and marvelous things” spoken of by Ether that some did not believe because they saw them not. His testimony is that miracles are wrought only through faith on the Son of God (see Ether 12:18). Moroni explains, “It is by faith that my fathers have obtained the promise that these things should come unto their brethren through the Gentiles” (v. 22). He finishes this sentence with “therefore, the Lord hath commanded me” (v. 22). One of the most significant analyses Moroni provides from Ether’s writings is that faith is looking forward with hope, even when the outcome is not known (see v. 6). This truth is going to become very significant to Moroni.

THE SUFFICIENCY OF GOD’S GRACE

Though writing about faith specifically in the context of Ether’s prophecy, Moroni personalizes the narrative by locating himself in the story. Specifically, he recognizes that in order for this promised miracle to occur (namely, the preservation and coming forth of the Book of Mormon in the last days), he will need to be a major contributor in concluding and then hiding up the record. Quite naturally, the magnitude of this task leads Moroni to worry about how his audience will respond to his writings. Students can appreciate this quite well. For example, how would they feel if their teacher came to class one day and declared that their most recent writing assignment would be given to the entire student body to read and react to? Moroni’s musings concerning his latter-day readership lead to what Adam Miller calls “the hermeneutic of weakness”:

Writing is an ascetic discipline. It pares us down. Before the word, we experience a powerlessness out of all proportion to the task, a powerlessness that strips pretension, peels vanity, and uncovers in us an essential and original weakness. In writing, we discover the sovereignty of the word. . . . Moroni, while editing the Book of Ether, laments precisely this ascetic dilemma. He finds himself unable to master his words and close the gap between what he intends to present and what his words represent.⁷

Indeed, for Moroni, the magnitude of the task before him and the implications of his words and the rest of the Nephite record going forth to the Gentiles were cause for genuine humility.

Meekly, Moroni cries out to the Lord, exclaiming, “The Gentiles will mock at these things, because of our weakness in writing” (Ether 12:23). Interestingly, Moroni does not actually ask the Lord for *anything* in this prayer. Rather, he acknowledges before the Lord *his* weakness, his fears, and his insecurities. Younger readers might assume here that the Lord in his mercy would reassure this trembling prophet, telling him that he has nothing to worry about and that if he just does his best the Gentiles will respond positively to these consecrated efforts. Yet that is not what happens. The Lord responds with “Fools mock, but they shall mourn; and my grace is sufficient for the meek, that they shall take no advantage of your weakness” (v. 26). The Lord essentially tells Moroni that there *will* be people who mock his writings.

In helping his insecure servant, the Lord does not provide shallow assurances. Rather, he helps redirect Moroni’s attention to two important truths:

1. Moroni’s greatest weakness in this experience is manifestly *not* one of writing. Rather, his weakness is in looking horizontally at the powerful writings of another (that is, the brother of Jared) and comparing that work to his own.

2. The Lord’s grace is sufficient for all—including Moroni, the Nephites, and even the Gentiles. He will show the Gentiles what he had made known unto Moroni’s father, Mormon (see Moroni 7)—namely, “that faith, hope and charity bringeth unto me—the fountain of all righteousness” (Ether 12:28). “In other words,” Grant Hardy has observed, “the solution

to Moroni's conundrum is not more powerful, Spirit-infused writing, but rather a new type of reading characterized by faith and charity.⁸ This principle provides the comfort and assurance Moroni sought and leads him to pray for the Lord to "give unto the Gentiles grace" (v. 36). The Lord takes Moroni's fear and, as he often does, replaces it with a comforting reliance on his divine grace.

MORONI'S EDITORIAL STYLE

The Book of Mormon text comes to us through the lens of three primary narrators: Nephi, Mormon, and Moroni. While Nephi is light on history and spends most of his time on prophecy and interpretation, Mormon is heavy on history but typically uses it as a type of narrative theology to teach important moral lessons (e.g., "and thus we see" or "we shall see that . . ."). Moroni, on the other hand, seems a little less confident than Mormon in his role as editor. One hallmark of his editorial style is to draw on words and ideas from previous authors.⁹ Indeed, in each of Moroni's four attempts to conclude the Book of Mormon record (Mormon 9, Ether 12, Ether 15, and Moroni 10), we find several places where he either quotes directly from other Book of Mormon authors as they concluded their own records¹⁰ or provides enough of an allusion that the perceptive reader can draw certain parallels. Illustrating a few such examples can help students understand the complexity of Moroni's writings in Ether 12 and learn an important theological lesson. The remainder of this section will look at connections between Moroni and Nephi as well as Moroni and the brother of Jared.

NEPHI

Although Nephi experienced tragedy in his own life and saw in vision the destruction of his people, he had the prophetic assurance that his words would eventually come forth in the last days. He knew that they would become instrumental in both the restoration of the house of Israel and the conversion of the Gentiles. While he felt confident that what he had written would be "of great worth" (2 Nephi 33:3), Nephi was also conscious of his own inadequacies because he felt he was not "mighty in writing, like unto speaking" (v. 1). He acknowledged that some future readers may not

have the Spirit with them and thus may “cast many things away which are written and esteem them as things of naught” (v. 2).

Insecurity in writing. Anxiety about a future audience rejecting or mocking the things that are written. Does any of this sound familiar? If the parallel is not yet clear, consider what Nephi says next: “The words which I have written in weakness will be made strong” (2 Nephi 33:4). Given Moroni’s propensity to draw on the words of other writers, it is logical to assume that he looked to earlier prophets for ideas on how to conclude a record. The following table compares Nephi’s concluding remarks (2 Nephi 33) with Moroni’s second attempt at concluding his own record (Ether 12):

| 2 Nephi 33 | Parallel Concept | Ether 12 |
|-------------------|---------------------------------------------|-----------------|
| 1 | Not mighty in writing like unto speaking | 23-24 |
| 4 | Weak made strong | 26-27 |
| 1-2, 5 | Conscious of audience response | 23-25 |
| 7-9 | Faith, hope, and charity | 28, 34-37 |
| 10-11 | Commanded to write notwithstanding weakness | 22 |
| 11 | Judgment bar/seat | 38-39 |
| 12 | Saved in his kingdom | 32-34, 37 |
| 7 | Spotless at judgment | 38 |
| 14 | Bid farewell | 38 |
| 11 | Face to face | 39 |

Even as he felt uneasy about his own abilities in writing, Nephi had great confidence in the Lord and in his ability to provide a witness of his work (see 2 Nephi 33:4, 10–11). Having seen his Redeemer (see 11:2), Nephi knew that even though he had experienced much tragedy and travail throughout his life, he could glory in his own salvation. To this point Nephi said, “I glory in plainness; I glory in truth; I glory in my Jesus, for he hath redeemed my soul from hell” (33:6). His own redemption led

him to have charity for his own people, for the Jews, and also for those future Gentiles who would eventually receive this record. Indeed, his final prayer is “that many of us, if not all, may be saved in [the Lord’s] kingdom at that great and last day” (v. 12). Nephi had confidence in the Lord’s redemptive power as well as hope for a place in his eternal kingdom. Similarly, Moroni receives confidence from the Lord that his “garments shall be made clean” (Ether 12:37) and that he too will have a place in the mansions of God.

BROTHER OF JARED

Of all the miracles mentioned in Ether 12, Moroni gives the most attention to the brother of Jared’s theophany. Indeed, Moroni seems captivated by this experience. The primary emphasis for him is that the faith of the brother of Jared made it so he “*could not be kept from within the veil*, but truly *saw* with [his] eyes the things which [he] had beheld with an eye of faith” (v. 19). Moroni continues to underscore the idea that faith allowed the brother of Jared to see through the veil. For instance,

- “when God put forth his finger he could not hide it from *the sight* of the brother of Jared” (Ether 12:20);
- the brother of Jared “*beheld* the finger of the Lord” (v. 21);
- “the Lord could not withhold anything from his *sight*” (v. 21);
- the Lord “*showed* him all things, for [the brother of Jared] could no longer be *kept without the veil*” (v. 21).

Moroni seems to have systematically prepared the reader for this lesson even as he began recounting the narrative back in Ether 2. There, as the Jaredites begin their journey to a promised land, Moroni writes, “The Lord came down and talked with the brother of Jared; and he was in a cloud, and the brother of Jared saw him not” (v. 4). Note the reference to the Lord being “in a cloud” and, consequently, the brother of Jared’s inability to actually see him as they talked. As they continue their travels, Moroni tells us that “the Lord did go before them, and did talk with them as he stood *in a cloud*, and gave directions whither they should travel” (v. 5). The Jaredite travelers are “directed continually by the hand of the Lord” (v. 6) until they

reach the seashore. After they spend four years surrounded by the relative comforts of a seashore lifestyle, “the Lord came again unto the brother of Jared, and stood *in a cloud* and talked with him” (v. 14).¹¹ In each case the Lord’s presence in a cloud serves as Moroni’s narrative reminder that the Lord was invisible to the people, heightening the drama of the moment when the Lord eventually *will* be seen by the brother of Jared.

After the Lord guides the Jaredites in constructing barges and asks the brother of Jared to propose how to light them, the brother of Jared humbly goes before the Lord with sixteen small stones. He first acknowledges his weakness, saying, “Do not be angry with thy servant because of his weakness before thee,” and then gives praise: “We know that thou art holy and dwellest in the heavens.” He reiterates his and his people’s unworthiness and fallen nature and their reliance on the Lord’s guiding hand. His plea for mercy and his expression of faith and confidence in the Lord allow him to experience a profound theophany. Moroni tells us that as the Lord touches the stones, “*the veil was taken* from off the eyes of the brother of Jared, and *he saw* the finger of the Lord” (3:2–6). Note that the Lord is no longer covered in a cloud. No longer is he kept from the sight of the brother of Jared. Moroni is reemphasizing that this man’s faith enabled him to see the Lord. This theme continues with the brother of Jared saying to the Lord, “*Show thyself* unto me” (v. 10). After an expression of what Elder Jeffrey R. Holland calls “redemptive faith,”¹² we read that “the Lord *showed himself*” (v. 13) unto the brother of Jared. While this experience is clearly between the Lord and the brother of Jared, readers are receiving this account through the lens of Moroni. Indeed, it’s clear that the theme of seeing the Lord continues to be central to Moroni’s purpose, right through the end of the book. We can more fully appreciate Ether 12, for instance, when we notice that Moroni uses language echoing the theophany scene from Ether 3. Note this emphasis in the following passages:

- “I could not make a full account of these things which are written, therefore it sufficeth me to say that Jesus *showed himself* unto this man in the spirit, even after the manner and in the likeness of the same body even as he *showed himself* unto the Nephites” (Ether 3:17).

- “Because of the knowledge of this man he could not be kept from *beholding within the veil*; and he *saw* the finger of Jesus. . . . Wherefore, having this perfect knowledge of God, he could not be kept from *within the veil*; therefore *he saw Jesus*” (3:19–20).

Moroni’s primary emphasis is that the brother of Jared’s humility and faith allowed him to rend the veil and see the Lord. In his conclusion to this portion of the record, Moroni draws from the Lord’s own words and the imagery he himself has developed throughout chapters 2 and 3. The Lord’s plea is that both the Gentiles and the house of Israel will come unto him and rend their own “veil of unbelief” (Ether 4:15).

Against that backdrop students are now better prepared to understand Moroni’s own experience in Ether 12. He explains that the Jaredites did not see the great and marvelous things Ether was prophesying because they did not believe. Conversely, he states, “Christ *showed himself*” (12:7) unto his fathers because of their faith. The Lord promises that his grace is sufficient for Moroni (and all who are meek) and that “weak things” will be made strong in the Lord (vv. 26–27). This transformation, however, would not necessarily come in converting his weakness in writing to a strength. Rather, his central weakness was his fallen nature, and his strength would be the Lord’s redemption in bringing *him* through the veil for his own theophany.

Moroni’s farewell in Ether 12 represents the culmination of his thematic development throughout the book of Ether. He says simply, “*I have seen Jesus*, and . . . he hath talked with me face to face” (12:39). Because of his humility and faith, Moroni (like the brother of Jared) “could not be kept from within the veil” (3:20). He invites his latter-day audience to “seek this Jesus of whom the prophets and apostles have written” so that the grace of God will “be and abide in [them] forever” (12:41). Moroni’s faith enabled him, like others who came before him, to “truly see with [his] eyes the things which [he] had beheld with an eye of faith” (v. 19). His hope and faith would provide an anchor to his soul, giving him comfort, confidence, and, most significantly, a kingdom.

CONCLUSION

The structure of much of the second half of Ether facilitates the theme of seeking, obtaining, losing, and then regaining a kingdom. In his redaction of the book, Moroni shows how this quest for a worldly kingdom ironically led to the destruction of an entire civilization. Moroni tells us that as battles raged among the Jaredites, one of their prophets, Ether, was threatened, hunted, and forced into hiding. Having spent significant time detailing how Ether spent much of his time wandering the land in solitude, Moroni provides a concise summation in his third attempt at concluding the record of the Book of Mormon. In Ether 15, Moroni allows Ether to have the final word. Against the backdrop of the entire Jaredite story, Ether says, “Whether the Lord will that I be translated, or that I suffer the will of the Lord in the flesh, it mattereth not, if it so be that I am saved in the kingdom of God. Amen” (v. 34). Ether sought a kingdom that would last. He knew that true power, lasting freedom, and an eternal place could be found only “at the right hand of God” (12:4) in *his* eternal kingdom.

Like Ether, Moroni was a witness to wickedness and war. His enemies had continually sought his life, causing him to hide in solitude. To help students better understand Moroni’s comments in Ether 12, it can be helpful to remember what he wrote in his first attempt at concluding the Book of Mormon record in Mormon 8–9. Teachers can remind students of the tenderness and concern Moroni felt in the following passages:

And my father also was killed by them, and I even remain alone to write the sad tale of the destruction of my people. But behold, they are gone, and I fulfil the commandment of my father. And whether they will slay me, I know not.

Therefore I will write and hide up the records in the earth; and whither I go it mattereth not.

Behold, my father hath made this record, and he hath written the intent thereof. And behold, I would write it also if I had room upon the plates, but I have not; and ore I have none, for I am alone. My father hath been slain in battle, and all my kinsfolk, and I have not friends nor whither to go; and how long the Lord will suffer that I may live I know not. (Mormon 8:3–5)

Regarding these verses, Grant Hardy's comment is instructive: "There is a note of resignation and passivity here that we have not encountered before in the Book of Mormon. At least four times Moroni confesses that he doesn't know or doesn't care."¹³ He is hurting, perhaps confused at how things seemed to have gone so wrong. Hardy adds, "The overriding emotion is loss—he is alone, with no more space to write, no ore, no family, no friends, and no plan beyond finishing his father's record and burying the plates. Sixteen years after the final battle (though there have apparently been subsequent traumas), Moroni is still in shock. Both the physical and psychological challenges to writing are nearly overwhelming, though he is writing."¹⁴

One of the responsibilities teachers have is to help students remember that individuals in the scriptures are real people who battled real issues. Part of training students to read the Book of Mormon exegetically is helping them understand that the scriptural author, in this case Moroni, is writing in the context of his own struggles and anxieties. Moroni is lonely and perhaps feels abandoned. He seems to be longing for companionship or a place where he can find safety and rest. This is part of the lived experience and worldview Moroni brings to this reading of Ether's text: "Whoso believeth in God might with surety hope for a better world, yea, even a place at the right hand of God" (Ether 12:4).

Like Ether, Moroni sought a place. He remembers the Lord's promise that he has "prepared a house" in "the mansions of [his] Father" (Ether 12:32). Drawing on Ether's words, Moroni recognizes that he must have "hope, or he cannot receive an inheritance in *the place*" that has been prepared (v. 32). He continues with this theme of place as he mentions that the atonement of Christ "prepare[d] *a place*" in the kingdom of God (v. 33) and that charity plays an important role in inheriting "*that place*" in the mansions of the Father (v. 34). The Lord is mindful of his servant. He knows of Moroni's weakness and also of his insecurities. He knows of his desires. After hearing Moroni's petitions, he provides a personalized promise: "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). In recording this exchange, Moroni captures the nature of the Lord and his consciousness of his people. He appears

to Moroni and talks with him face to face. He speaks to him “in plain humility, even as a man telleth another in [his] own language” (v. 39). He condescends to provide reassurance for his mortal servant who has been discouraged by imperfections, and in this process Moroni finds his own place in the kingdom.

A quest for a kingdom. A desire for a place. In Moroni’s redaction of the second half of the book of Ether we find reassurance for our students who might feel lost, rejected, or alone. Moroni provides a glimpse into the Lord’s mercy and his commitment to those who seek him. He also illustrates the power of faith and the miracles that await those who put their trust in Christ. Like Ether and Moroni, our students can learn for themselves the sufficiency of the Lord’s grace. They can learn to have “hope for a better world” (Ether 12:4). Indeed, they too can find a place in the kingdom of God.

NOTES

1. Grant Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader’s Guide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 222.
2. Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 229–30.
3. See K. Lawson Younger Jr., “Ugaritic King List (1.104),” in *The Context of Scripture*, ed. William W. Halo (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 1:356n1; and Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, vol. 6, *Fourth Nephi through Moroni* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2011), 164. For numerous examples of reverse chronologies from antiquity, see Simon Martin and Nikolai Grube, *Chronicle of the Maya Kings and Queens*, 2nd ed. (London: Thames and Hudson, 2008), 26–27, 32–34, 37–40, 48, 52, 70–72, 162, 172–73 passim. For more information on dynastic histories, see Javier Urcid, “Scribal Traditions from Highland Mesoamerica (300–1000 AD),” in *The Oxford Handbook of Mesoamerican Archaeology*, ed. Deborah L. Nichols (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 863–65; and Ruth J. Krochock, “Written Evidence,” in *Handbook to Life in the Ancient Maya World*, ed. Lynn V. Foster (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 286–91. For a thorough discussion of dynastic or lineage histories and the Book of Mormon, see John L. Sorenson, *Mormon Codex: An Ancient American Book* (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2013), 198–218; and

- John L. Sorenson, "The Book of Mormon as a Mesoamerican Record," in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited: The Evidence for Ancient Origins*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1997), 418–29. See also Nehemiah 7:64.
4. Gardner, *Second Witness*, 6:237.
 5. Gardner, *Second Witness*, 6:237.
 6. Adam Miller, *Rube Goldberg Machines: Essays in Mormon Theology* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2012), 101.
 7. Miller, *Rube Goldberg Machines*, 101.
 8. Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 224.
 9. For an extended look at this approach, see Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 248–67.
 10. This is most clearly found in Moroni 10.
 11. The Lord rebukes his servant for failing to call upon his name. Perhaps this rebuke was a call for the Jaredites to remember that the Lord was still intent on guiding them to the land *he* had prepared, not the coastal area where they seemed content to stay. Teachers can help students see their own need to overcome spiritual plateaus in their respective journeys to the promised land.
 12. Jeffrey R. Holland, *Christ and the New Covenant: The Messianic Message of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Desert Book, 1997), 18–19.
 13. Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 219.
 14. Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 219–20.